

What's in a Name?

The Way. The Truth. The Life.

Our theme comes from the Gospel of John, where Jesus speaks to his disciples about the many rooms of His Father's house, and about the place he is preparing for them in heaven. He assures them that they know the way where he is going. But Thomas asks, "How can we know the path when we don't know the destination?" And with his reply, Jesus makes it clear that the journey isn't as much about finding heaven as it is about knowing God:

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." John 14:6-7

To see one is to see the other. To know Jesus is to know the Father. What he says about preparing a place in His Father's house is rooted in Jewish wedding customs. Typically, the man would add on to his father's home and make a life there with his bride. Like a bridegroom, then, promising his beloved that their life together will be a good one, Jesus says, "I'm going to prepare it—plenty of rooms—you'll love it."

But the promise isn't of a mansion just over the hilltop or of an acre lot and a pool key. It's a life together, with the Father, whose house comes to the bride by virtue of her marriage to the groom. There's only one way to live there—she has to marry the Son. He is assuring them that they all will be happy ever after, together in a relationship. A new home is a metaphor for a new life with Him, an eternal life that is eternal because it is His life that he shares with His beloved.

Jesus declares that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life—the only way to the Father, the truth we are meant to know, the eternal life we are intended to share.

The Way

"For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost."

For who needs to know the Way more than those who are lost? But our Way isn't something we navigate like a series of clues and signs or like a set of instructions. We don't find a way—the Way finds us. After all, we were lost and now we're found—by Him. We didn't locate him—he searched for us.

The Way is more than the method by which we arrive somewhere—He's the somewhere we've never been but have always wanted to be.

Jesus is no mere guide. He's more than just some trusted sherpa with the most experience and the best advice for making it to the top of the mountain. He's more than just some knowledgeable local who believes all the legends about a long lost treasure. He is the unimaginable height. He is the treasure.

He is the only way to God.

- He is where we begin and where we end—Alpha and Omega, Author and Finisher of our faith.
- He is the pathway we take, the guide we follow, the journey that changes us, and the goal that completes us.
- He is how we find what we seek, and what we're hoping to find.

This exclusive statement isn't about pride or elitism, as though Christ is boastfully declaring Himself the best thing going. It's not about surpassing all others or leaving people behind. He is stating a fact—to know God, you must know me. If that's what you want, then I'm who you need. If we really want to know God, then we've got to go down the path that He has taken to be known. There isn't another way to know Him as He really is.

No other direction to go or path to take.

- No better beginning than the manger. [We surrender everything and claim nothing.]
- No greater work than the basin and towel. [We come to serve, not to be served.]
- No higher calling than the cross. [We sacrifice our lives and forgive everything.]

The incarnation of Christ shows us the Way. The Way to God is the Way of God. We won't find Him or know Him if we live a life that is not His life.

We cannot begin to know the God of the manger if we refuse to surrender our rights and privileges. Or if we don't know what it's like to choose to be made small. Preferring power and position to love and generosity, living with grasping hands and clinched fists—this is not the way of the Incarnate Christ.

We cannot begin to know the God of the basin and the towel if we refuse to show others the full extent of our love. If we hold back and withhold kindness. If we don't risk what it takes to be humble. That is not the way of the Lord who is among us as One who serves.

We cannot begin to know the God of the cross if we refuse to sacrifice for those we love—not for those who love us (even the godless do that), but for those who are killing us. We won't know Him if we deny forgiveness to those who don't know what they are doing. That is not the way of the Crucified Christ.

To save us, he emptied Himself and took on flesh. He came as a servant and became obedient to death. And so salvation is revelation—the Way He has saved us reveals who He is. This is the Way by which he has made God known.

He is the Way of God.

- The Way of Self-Emptying Surrender.
- The Way of Humble Service.
- The Way of Redemptive Sacrifice.

To know this Way is to live this Way. To give up what we cannot keep to gain what we cannot lose. How can we claim to follow Christ if we spend our lives resisting surrender, disdain service, or shunning sacrifice? Who can walk in two different directions? Either we follow him or we don't. To know the Way, we must walk as Jesus did.

Matthew 16:24-26

“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”

Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but we reach out to fill our hands and lives with so much less than equality with God. As we walk in His Way, we learn that more is found in giving than in grasping, and more is gained by self-denial than by self-indulgence. Ironically, we take up the cross to live. That is the Way of God.

The Truth

“You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

We're surrounded by lies—without and within—lies we hear and lies we tell. We deceive others, we deceive ourselves. We believe the worst and ignore the obvious. We pass on unfounded accusations, rumours, and gossip. We don't let not knowing for sure stop us. These lies bind us and shape us, they hold us back and keep us weak. Wherever there is deception, there is oppression, darkness, and confusion. The Truth releases us, frees us, brings us out into the light.

To know Jesus is to know the Truth—about God, about ourselves, about the world, about others. Wherever Jesus is more fully known, there is more clarity, understanding, and peace that passes all understanding. But to know Him is to know more than just the right answer to life's questions or to have everything make better sense. To know the Truth of Jesus Christ is to possess more than just philosophical or theological certainty.

He's not a set of propositions to which we assent or which we argue to prove. He is not a means to an end—He's the beginning and the end.

He is the only truth about everything.

- He is wisdom and righteousness.
- He is the image of the invisible God.
- He is the truth that reveals every lie.

He isn't just correct all the time. He is wisdom. He isn't just right and faultless. He is the Truth itself—more than just not wrong. It's not that he's simply never mistaken—as though he's the best at not being false. He's always and completely true. So far beyond our notions of brilliant or intelligent, so much more than our understanding of understanding.

For he is the exact representation of God's being, in Him lives all the fullness of God, who cannot lie, and in whom there is no darkness.

The Truth exposes all of the lies of our lives.

- Lies that hide, justify, and pretend.
- Lies that distort, deceive, and destroy.
- Lies that coerce, manipulate, and control.

We lie to ourselves about what is hidden in us—first of all, that it's all that hidden; second, that it's not really all that bad; third, that it can't ever be redeemed. Our lies about ourselves fail to convince others, fail to tell the truth about sin, and fail to tell the truth about Christ. It isn't a secret that affects no one but us. It is, in fact, that bad. But, it can be redeemed. Our lies keep others from knowing us as we really are, and they keep us from knowing Christ as He really is.

Sometimes, our deceit is a tool we use to control and influence others—bending them to a way of thinking that benefits us. We see this in small ways (when people try not to hurt someone's feelings, try not to let what they really think be too obvious). We see it in big ways (when people try to avoid trouble, consequences, and responsibility). Sometimes, we see it in awful ways (when friends or spouses manipulate and dominate or betray and blame).

The Truth reveals such deception and redeems it. He fully exposes and fully restores—knowing us completely but loving us absolutely. That's the Truth of God in Jesus Christ.

He is the Truth of God.

- The Truth about Holiness.
- The Truth about Grace.
- The Truth about Redemption.

Sometimes the reality of His holiness makes us want to hide and avoid responsibility—we've been doing it since Eden. Our sinfulness tempts us to believe another lie—that our sin has diminished God's love for us and made him as fickle towards us as we have been towards him.

Don't believe it. It was a broken world that God loved so much that He gave His one and only Son to save it. We underestimate the grace of God when we overestimate the power of our sin—it changes our hearts but it does not change the heart of God.

Our Redeemer reveals all at once the holiness of God and the grace of God: that all have sinned and fallen short, but are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that comes by Christ Jesus. We have no knowledge of such Truth but through the Living Word of God who has made it known.

John 1:14, 17-18

“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

Since the law reflected in part the perfect holiness of God, it revealed human sin, but it was not full of grace and truth. By merely showing how we all fall short, the law brought death. And so the law itself fell far short of making the Living God himself known.

Only in Christ, the One and Only Truth, is the fullness of grace and truth made known. The Word took on flesh and lived the life of God among us— giving us His life, not a law code. In Him is life, and that life is the light of men.

The Life

“I am the Resurrection and the Life.”

He who believes in Christ will live, even though he dies. And whoever lives and believes in the Life, never dies. Do you believe this?

When Jesus said this to Martha upon the death of Lazarus, she wasn't being asked the more narrow and specific question, “Do you believe that I can raise your brother from the dead?” She was being asked more broadly and more fundamentally, “Do you believe that I am Life itself, that death has no power over me, that faith in Life beats fear of death every time?”

Jesus Christ is not just a wonder-worker who did amazing things in his day. He is the Eternal Lord of Un-killable Life, Resurrection itself. He is not the delayer of mortality or the preventer of death; he's the destroyer of death, the conqueror of hell.

He is the only life greater than death.

- As Creator, He calls light from the darkness.
- As Savior, He gives life that is truly life.
- As Redeemer, He makes all things new.

Christ did not come to steal, kill, or destroy—except to rob the grave of its prey, to put sinful natures to death, and to annihilate all that has kept his creation from experiencing Life that is truly life. Our Maker wants to save us from what threatens life, to redeem our lives from what takes our life away.

We have no life in us apart from Him.

- No life in fear and self-pity.
- No life in guilt and self-condemnation.
- No life in pride and self-indulgence.

The Life of God contains no cowardice or weakness. It doesn't make us feel sorry for ourselves.

The Life of God contains no crippling embarrassment or senseless shame. It doesn't make us feel only the burden of blame.

The Life of God contains no arrogance or hard-heartedness. It doesn't make us want to serve only ourselves.

When we are afraid, holding back and doubting, when we allow self-pity to excuse and justify our terrible choices, we are not telling ourselves the truth about faith, and we're not on the way towards life.

When we are mired in guilt and accusing ourselves mercilessly, we are not telling the truth about those who are in Christ Jesus, and we're far off course from the restoration that the joy of our salvation should bring.

When we are prideful and dismissive of those words that would warn us or encourage us, too confident in ourselves and too spoiled to have anyone tell us how to live, we are not telling the truth about the Lordship of Christ, and we're a long way away from the self-denying humility of Jesus.

His is the life that we find when we lose ours. Whatever we try to salvage by hanging on to what should have been thrown out long ago, and by storing up what should have been given up, it is not life—and it does not lead to God.

We won't find Life in sin. Sin doesn't pay its employees and volunteers in anything but death—sometimes doling out its wages in a weekly paycheck of sorrow and pain, sometimes in the lump sum, annual bonus of devastation and despair.

Now we can make our own choices and go our own way, but life doesn't live at the end of any road that does not belong to God—if we're lucky, our detour may lead to nowhere, but it likely leads to someplace worse than where we already are. Any choice that does not lead to Christ does not bring us to life. There is no other life to be found than that which is in Christ.

He is the Life of God.

- The Life of Creation.
- The Life of Incarnation.
- The Life of Resurrection.

The God who spoke light into the depths of chaos brought life from a cross and eternity from a tomb. He has always been the Lord of Life.

The One through whom all things were made chose to be made like us. The One whose life was the light of men surrendered himself to the darkness of the grave and took with him his indestructible life.

For us, then, the promise of eternal life is not just a guarantee that death is not the end of us. And it's not just a deal that secures us a neverending happiness apart from and away from this world. To imagine it only as escape rather than as a renewal and re-creation cheapens the promise of a New Heavens and a New Earth.

To see it only as an evasion of hell or as a do-over on death is to dishonor the Life of God, whose life in us will be made perfect, complete, and entire, as we know him as he is, time without end.

John 17:3, 26

“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. . . . I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life to those who are Lost, Deceived, and Dead—revealing himself, making himself known to those who can't see and don't know. Giving love, not just showing it, but making it a gift to those who do not have it in them.

The Love of the Father for the Son is to be in us, Christ himself in us, that we may know the only true God. We cannot claim to know God if His love is not in us, if we don't have love for each other. Eternal Life is to know this love that surpasses all knowledge, living even now in the Life of Christ as Christ lives in us.

He is the Way.

- To know Him, we have to stop walking away from a self-emptying, humble, sacrificial life.
- Turn and follow the Way of surrender, service, and forgiveness.

He is the Truth.

- To know Him, we have to stop fooling ourselves, pretending for others, and believing lies about God.
- Believe the Truth about the fullness of Grace in Christ our Redeemer.

He is the Life.

- To know Him, we have to stop searching for Life in sin—it's not there.
- Find His Life by losing yours—eternal life is to know Him forever.

The Words of Life

- To Nicodemus, Jesus says, "I tell you truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."
- To the Samaritan woman, Jesus says, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst."
- To the woman accused of adultery, Jesus says, "I don't condemn you. Go and sin no more."

Your old life is no life at all. Start over.

- To the woman who had been crippled for 18 years, Jesus says, "You are set free." Immediately she straightens up and praises God.
- To the man who had been an invalid for 38 years, Jesus says, "Do you want to get well? Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."
- To his friend Lazarus, dead 3 days, Jesus says, "Lazarus, come out." When the dead man comes out, Jesus tells them to take off his grave clothes.

It's not too late, but it has gone on too long. Stand up and live again.

- To the widow's son, Jesus says, "Young man, I say to you, get up!" The dead man sits up and begins to talk. And Jesus gives him back to his mother.
- To Jairus's daughter, Jesus says, "My child, get up." Her spirit returns and at once she stands up. He tells her family to feed her.
- To the father whose boy who is being destroyed by an evil spirit, Jesus says, "Bring your son here." He drives out the spirit and gives the boy back to his father.

Be free from what takes life away. Rejoin your family and live.