

INTRODUCTION

Step into my time machine and let's go back 2,000 years ago to the Roman world of the 1st Century. The pagan Roman world was very religious. There were literally hundreds of gods and religions. There were religions for every taste and style. Luke records in Acts that Paul when he was in Athens noticed their abundance of idols and commented on their religious smorgasbord saying, "*Men of Athens, I see that in every way you are very religious.*" They were so sincere in their religion that they even put up an altar to any unknown god there might be. They didn't want to leave anyone out.

In the midst of this pluralism, freedom was prized. Coexistence was the hallmark of pagan culture. With such spiritual diversity, there was little effort to evangelize. People didn't try to convert others to worship their god. The thinking was, "You have your god, and I have mine. Yours works for you, and mine works for me. Yours is just as good as mine, so I won't bother you if you won't bother me." All religions were considered equal. There was no concept of heresy. In fact, you could combine aspect of differing faith, and make your own personalized, custom religion. Tolerance was the rule of the day.

Many of these pagan religions professed no real creed or doctrine. Rather, they had certain rites and spiritual practices. They were like spiritual good luck charms designed to make your life better without demanding too much from you terms of ethics and morals.

Does any of this sound familiar? Although what I'm describing is almost 2,000 years old, it is like looking into a mirror of our own culture. In very significant ways the 21st Century has recreated the religious environment of the 1st Century.

We live in a pluralistic culture where many believe that all religions basically teach the same thing, and that all roads lead to the same place. What matters is that you're spiritual, not that you follow any particular religion. Spiritual is whatever you want it to be. Truth can be however you define it.

Author and poet Charles de Lint says it this way, "When all's said and done, all roads lead to the same end. So it's not so much which road you take, as how you take it."

Or, as the great philosopher of our age, Katy Perry, says, "I'm not Buddhist, I'm not Hindu, I'm not Christian, but I still feel like I have a deep connection with God. I pray all the time."

Every spiritual claim is viewed as equal unless you view your own faith as the only true faith, or even consider it better than others. Attempts to evangelize or convert others to your own belief is a scandalous violation of polite social ethics. We are intolerant in our tolerance. We will not accept anything that does accept everything. We are intolerant of any belief that doesn't bow at the altar of tolerance. To evangelize others is to break this one cardinal rule. You can have a crystal on your desk,

but you can't have a Bible in school. You can decorate your cubicle with a Native American dreamcatcher, but don't you dare hang a cross or post a picture with a Bible verse. If you do, then you're a bigot. You're intolerant. You are trying to force your beliefs on others.

We live in a day of choosing your own, customized spirituality. All religions are considered equal. If you find what works for you, that's fine, but it might not work for me. Ours is a post-Christian culture, much like the 1st Century, is a pagan culture, where many faiths and expressions mingle and mix together. However, we do not call it paganism. We call it pluralism. We call it multiculturalism. We call it being spiritual.

As you can imagine, this kind of environment can be very confusing. We believe in everything and we believe in nothing. The only absolute truth is that there is no absolute truth. One cannot really be sure of anything. Life becomes one big maze and we're all given different maps, but we're told every map leads to the same place.

Many people are wandering around in this maze of life today just looking for some answers. They long for something more solid than a mushy, moldy potato. However, they are scared of Christianity, because they fear being branded a bigot or intolerant. Christians themselves often cower in the shadows, not daring to share their faith. Faith today is a personal thing and should have no bearing on public life. Meanwhile, real life becomes more and more confusing. It's like driving in traffic where everyone is using a different set of road signs and signals. You get to the intersection and you have a red light and a green light at the same time. What do you do? Just one example of this. Look at what's going on in Hollywood right now. Every day there's a new director, a new producer, a new actor who is rightfully being publically shamed on our modern social media stockade. Yet the very people who are dragging them out to be spat upon by the public continue to fill our screens with nearly pornographic bilge in which there is no right or wrong, there are no sexual boundaries. In other words, they create the very environment which allows such monsters to flourish.

Should we Christians keep to ourselves? Is it time for us to go in the closet? How far does our tolerance of other religions go? Are they equally valid and true with Christianity? Or should we speak up? Should we try to share Jesus with others, even if they already have a personal faith? What would Jesus say to all this?

Jesus gave us his answer in John 14:6, "*I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.*" Jesus is not politically correct. He doesn't sound very tolerant. However unpopular, Jesus claims to be the one and only. His apostles agreed with him. Peter, speaking on behalf of all the apostles, stands before the Jewish leaders, after having been commanded not to preach

anymore in Jesus' name, here's what he said, "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" No, not all roads lead to heaven. No, they don't all basically teach the same thing. Jesus is the only way.

Critics and skeptics say this isn't right. It's too exclusive. It's not loving. It's not understanding. We should be more inclusive. Jesus' statement to modern ears seems offensively intolerant and discriminatory. So, before we dig deep into this I am statement of Jesus I want to respond to this question. Isn't Christianity inherently intolerant?

And my answer is that God has done everything He can to make salvation as universal as possible. Jesus is a universal Savior.

The Universality of Jesus.

First of all, He's given His word to everyone. From the very beginning, his word was spread as far and as wide as possible. From the earliest days of Christianity, the letters of the New Testament were written to far flung regions of the Roman world. They were repeatedly copied, read and distributed so that today, we have thousands upon thousands of ancient manuscripts and parchments of the New Testament. The Bible is the most translated and most distributed piece of literature in history. As of September 2016 the New Testament has been translated into 1442 languages and portions have been rendered into 1145 other languages and dialects.

God's word is a universal word. It is available to all. No one is excluded from hearing God's word. Moreover, he has given us his word in two forms: first the written word in the scriptures and second, the living word, Jesus Christ. Peter tells us that God is being patient in sending Jesus back, because he wants everyone to be saved (2 Pt. 3:9). God's desire for salvation is universal. He is giving everyone as many chances as possible.

Secondly, Jesus died for all people. He went to the cross for everyone who will ever live. 2 Corinthians 5:15 says, "He died for all." Moreover Jesus paid the price for every person's sin. He bore guilt for every sin ever committed. 1 John 2:2 declares, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." The cross is universal in its reach. No one is excluded from its power. All are welcome at the foot of the cross. Anyone can repent. Anyone can believe. "For God so loved the world that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life." Whoever! Anyone! Everyone!

The terms of salvation are freely available to anyone who would respond: both princes and peasants can receive Jesus. Rhodes Scholar and high school dropout can both place their faith in Jesus. Black and white stand on equal ground at the foot of the cross. Both gay and straight can repent of their

sins. Liberal and conservative can equally receive the grace of God. Native American and Australian aboriginal are equally loved by our heavenly Father. God is as inclusive as can be.

However, God is a righteous and holy God, and it is impossible for him to include within himself unrighteousness. God can no more include sin than water can include dryness, than light can include darkness, than truth can include lies, than life can include death. They are mutually exclusive. It is an either or situation. God has gone to the greatest extent possible to erase our own sin and to make us righteous, to the point of dying on the cross himself to suffer our punishment.

We are the ones who exclude ourselves from God with our sin and rebellion. We exclude ourselves with our pride, greed, lies, lust, anger, and, on and on. And while we work so hard to exclude ourselves, God is working even harder to include us. This is grace. God gives us freely what we could not earn ourselves, salvation. What could be more inclusive than the grace of God? Jesus is God's universal answer to our universal problem. But Jesus is his only answer.

Let's take a closer look at our text. In chapter 13, Jesus tells the disciples he will be betrayed by one of them. He tells them he is leaving, and they cannot come. He tells Peter, one of the leading and boldest disciple that he would deny Jesus. Their hopes and dreams, even their whole lives seem to be coming apart apart. Then comes chapter 14.

¹⁴ *"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."*

⁵ *Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"*

⁶ *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."*

Jesus tells them, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled."* The word for "troubled" means confused and shaken. Not only does this describe the disciples at this point in time, it also describes many today who's hearts are troubled by our confusing world. But Jesus offers a sure and certain hope.

He tells us that in his father's house he has many rooms, and that he is preparing them for us, and that when he comes back, he will take us there. The old King James says mansions. The newer translations say "rooms." Why the downgrade. Are we going to a heavenly estate or a heavenly hostel? The size and style of the accommodations aren't the point here. The word for "rooms" literally means "a

place to stay.” Jesus is telling us we will always have a home. A place where we belong. A place where we are loved– a home forever.

How do we have this forever home? Well, Jesus answers this question with his “I am” statement.

BODY

The way, the truth, and the life were common themes for the Jews. They would sit drinking coffee at the Jerusalem Starbucks discussing and debating the latest ideas about the way, or the truth, or the life. Jesus drew upon these common themes and applied them all to himself. Jesus doesn’t randomly squeeze them together. Rather, each one naturally leads to the next, and is built upon the one before it. Let us look at each separately.

I. The Way

The way of God and the ways of men were frequently mentioned in the O.T. God asks that our way be his way. God said to Moses, *“So be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or the left. Walk in all **the way** that the Lord your God has commanded you (Dt. 5: 32,33).”* Isaiah said, *“Whether you turn to the right or the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, “this is **the way**; walk in it (30:21).”* David beseeched God, *“Teach me your **way**, O Lord (Ps. 27:11).”* So, the disciples already knew they were to walk in “the way” of God, and now Jesus says, “I am THE WAY!”

Notice he says, “I am THE way.” not “I am A way” No other path leads to God. No other path leads to salvation. No other path leads to eternal life. Only Jesus Christ.

Jesus is different from all other religious leaders. You see Christianity is the only faith that is based on a person. Even other religions that are named after their founders are not based on them as a person. They are based on their teachings and their writings, but not them as a person. You can remove Buddha from Buddhism and the essence of the religion remains. You can remove Confucius from Confucianism without removing any key ingredient. You can also remove Mohammad from Islam without affecting their basic doctrine, but if you try to remove Jesus Christ from Christianity the whole faith collapses.

You see Jesus himself is our pathway to God, not the Bible, not the church, not even Christ's teachings are our way to God, but Jesus himself. Jesus did not just merely show us the way, he is the way!

Suppose you are in a strange town and ask for directions. The person says, “Well, take the first right, and then the second left, cross the square, go past the brick church, not the wood one, but the

brick one, take a right, then the third left, the place you are looking for is there by the big oak tree.” Chances are you would be lost before you got halfway there. But suppose the person had said,

“Come, follow me, I'll take you there myself.” That is exactly what Jesus does for us. He does not tell us about the way, he is the way. All other religions only attempt to tell us about the way.

II. THE TRUTH

The reason that only Jesus can be the way is that only he has the whole and unadulterated truth. He has this because he is the truth himself. Other religions at best only have pieces of the truth, but they are also weighed down by a lot of non-truth. Again this connection is apparent in the O.T. David sang, “*Teach me your **way**, O Lord, and I will walk in your **truth*** (Ps. 86:11).” and again in Psalm 26:3, “*I **walk continually in your truth.***” and again in 119:30, “*I have chosen the **way of truth.***”

If you don't walk in the way of God, you can't have the truth of God. Jesus Christ is that truth. Is that not what people are looking for today, truth? something certain, something dependable, something to hold on to.

Many have claimed to tell us about the truth; to know truth; to have discovered the truth; to be looking for the truth, but only Jesus is the truth. This is a most important asset for one who teaches moral truth. One's character does not matter if they are teaching geometry or grammar, or electrical engineering, but for one who teaches moral truth, character is of utmost importance. An adulterer who teaches purity, a greedy person who teaches generosity, a liar who teaches truth, a short-tempered person who teaches gentleness is bound to be ineffective. Moral truth cannot be taught solely in words, it must be taught by example. This is exactly where even the best of human teachers fail. Only Jesus has perfectly embodied the truth in everything he did.

However, the world rejects his truth and searches elsewhere. But when they can find no truth elsewhere they shyly and reluctantly admit to what Christ has affirmed from the beginning.

III. THE LIFE

The culmination of Jesus being the way and the truth naturally leads to his having and giving life. We know that Jesus played a key role in creating life. Hebrews 1:2-3 says that God created the universe through Jesus, and that Jesus sustains creation with his power. Throughout his Gospel, John connects Jesus to life. 5:26 - Jesus is life within himself. 3:16; 6:33; 10:28; 11:25 - Jesus is the source and the giver of life for us. 8:12 - Jesus is the light of life. 6:68 - Jesus gives the words of life. 10:10 - Jesus gives us abundant life.

In the O.T. the way and the truth led to life as well. Solomon said, “*For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life* (Pr. 6:23).” and again,

“He who heeds discipline shows the way to life (Pr. 10:17).” David says, “You have made known to me the way of life (Ps. 16:11).”

Humanity is on a constant search to make life worth living. We search for the right career. We search for the right love, the right relationship. We search for the right hobby. We search for the right look. We search for the right religion. These things promise a lot, but provide little. The more we look, the less we know we have found, and the more we add to our confusion. Meanwhile, the problems and pressures of life work against us. But Christ comes to calm our troubled hearts and to give us life.

The word life here refers to spiritual and inner life, not physical life. We know people who are alive on the outside, but feel dead on the inside. Maybe that’s you this morning. Your heart beats. Your lungs fill with air, but you are dead inside. You don’t have life. What you need is the way of Jesus. The truth of Jesus. If you find those things, you will have life indeed.

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ is indeed the way, and the truth, and the life. But let us not forget the second part of this statement, “No one comes to the father except through me.” No one means NO ONE. What Jesus says, Jesus means. What Jesus means, Jesus says, and what Jesus said was that he was the only way to eternal life.

No matter how unpopular this idea is, no matter what professor writes in a book, or no matter what celebrity or so-called expert ridicules the notion we must not forget that only Jesus has provided a way, that only Jesus Christ has told us the whole truth and nothing but the truth, and that only Jesus Christ gives us the life that our troubled hearts long for.

Without Christ there can be no redemptive truth, no everlasting life, therefore, no way to the father. Without Christ men and women will remain lost in confusion.

I would like to leave you with the deep insight of a 500 year old saint, Thomas A' Kempis.

“Follow me. I am the way and the truth and the life. Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which you must follow; the truth which you must believe; the life for which you must hope. I am the inviolable way; the infallible truth; the never-ending life. I am the straightest way; the sovereign truth; life true, life blessed, life uncreated. If you remain in my way you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free, and you shall take hold of eternal life.”