

The Way, the Truth, and the Life

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Preacher: Edward Lobb

[0 : 00] Let's turn to our Bible, shall we? And Edward is continuing a series through John's Gospel, looking at some of the key I Am sayings. And so we're in John this morning, and chapter 14 in particular.

But I'll be reading from chapter 13, verse 31. Now we've got lots of visitor Bibles at the sides at the back, so do please grab a Bible if you don't have one.

But turn your Bibles to John 13. And we're reading there from verse 31. John 13, verse 31.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him.

If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. Little children, yet a little while I am with you.

[1 : 13] You will seek me. And just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, Where I am going, you cannot come. A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.

Peter said to them, Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Jesus answered, Will you lay down your life for me?

Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times. Let not your hearts be troubled.

[2 : 20] Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going.

Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How come we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us. Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?

[3 : 27] Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his work.

Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father.

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

Amen. Amen. And may God bless his word to us. Well, good morning, friends, and good morning, friends, at Queen's Park and Bath Street as well.

Let's turn to John's Gospel, chapter 14. John, chapter 14. And we're continuing in a short series in some of the I am sayings of the Lord Jesus.

[4 : 52] And the key verse I want us to head for this morning is verse 6, famous verse. Jesus says to Thomas, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Now, how can you characterize John's Gospel? Is it a peaceful and serene meditation?

Or is it more like a white-knuckle ride? Well, the answer is it's a white-knuckle ride. It's full on every page with tension and conflict and violent emotions.

And it heads relentlessly to the death of Jesus, which is preceded by hatred and viciousness and comes to its dreadful climax with Jesus being mocked and flogged and crucified.

John's Gospel is not an easy read. Now, of course, it has a glorious ending with Jesus being raised from the dead. But before we get to that point, we, the readers, are subjected to great tensions as we see Jesus facing horrible opposition.

[6 : 02] We feel there must be something profoundly wrong with the world for this glorious, wonderful human being, Jesus, to be strung up on a cross after only three years of public teaching.

But this story, so full of tension and conflict, is good news. In fact, it is the only good news ultimately.

The things in our everyday world that make people smile and feel a bit better about themselves are not really good news. They're just like little sticking plasters that make life seem less painful.

A day at Largs, for example, in the sunshine to paddle in the sea. A pub lunch. An afternoon watching Partick Thistle play Motherwell. Nil-nil.

An evening concert at the concert hall. Now, these are pleasant things to do, but they can't sort out our basic problem, which is our alienation from God.

[7 : 04] Only the good news of Jesus Christ can bring us to heaven and to eternal life. Only the Gospel can bring us forgiveness. And that is why we need to engage with the tensions and conflicts of the Gospel story.

John the Evangelist does not spare us. But he knows that when we've understood his message, our hearts will be filled with joy. A joy and a peace that nothing in this world can bring us and nothing in this world can take away from us.

And that is the joy of knowing that our alienation from God is ended and our eternal life is secured. So let's begin this morning at John 14, chapter 1, where Jesus says, Let not your hearts be troubled.

Now, to understand that comforting reassurance, we need to know who Jesus is speaking to and where the Gospel story has got to at this point in John's narrative.

At this stage in the story, Jesus is sitting at table with his 11 apostles. 11. It's the evening before Good Friday, and it's the occasion that we know as the Last Supper.

[8 : 17] And while they've been eating together, chapter 13 tells the story, Jesus has spoken about his betrayer, Judas Iscariot. He says at chapter 13, verse 18, The scripture will be fulfilled.

He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me. In other words, he has designed violence and murder against me. Then a moment later, chapter 13, verse 21, we see that Jesus was troubled in his spirit.

And that's a powerful word speaking of deep emotional pain. And he says, Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me. Then there's a whispered conversation involving Peter and John.

And then John asks Jesus, Who is it? And Jesus says, It's the one to whom I give this morsel of bread when I've dipped it. So he dips the morsel of bread in the sauce.

He hands it to Judas. At which point, John says, Satan entered into Judas. And Jesus says to Judas, What you are going to do, do quickly.

[9 : 23] And then moments later, Judas leaves the table, and he goes out. And John says in verse 30, It was night. Yes, it was the darkest hour.

It almost seemed as if Satan was an irresistible force. Then a few verses later, Jesus speaks to Simon Peter. In verse 37, Peter has boldly and confidently said that he's willing to lay down his life for Jesus.

But Jesus answers him in verse 38, Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow till you've denied me three times.

So was this a happy little evening meal with a few friends? It was anything but. Judas has gone out to meet the enemies of Jesus so as to betray him into their hands.

And Peter has just been told that he's going to deny Jesus. That dinner table was a place of almost unbearable tension. And it's then that Jesus says to the apostles, Let not your hearts be troubled.

[10 : 30] His own heart is deeply troubled. We know that from chapter 13, verse 21. But he now tells them that their own hearts must not be troubled.

Now they've had good reason to be deeply troubled well before we get to chapter 13. It's been a white knuckle ride from the start. In chapter 8, as we saw last Sunday morning, Jesus has been arguing with a group of Jewish leaders.

He's been testifying to the truth. He says to them, I am the light of the world. And they immediately tell him that he's lying. He then tells them that they're the slaves of sin and will die in their sins unforgiven.

Well, they can't bear this. They claim that they're Abraham's children, that God is their father. They've never been enslaved to anybody. To which Jesus replies that they are children of the devil, who is the father of all lies and all murder, which is why they can't bear the truth about Jesus and actually want to kill him.

He then says at the end of John chapter 8, I am, taking the name of almighty God on his lips, applying it to himself. And this makes them pick up stones to stone him.

[11 : 44] Now we can assume that the 12 apostles were with Jesus during this fierce interchange. Their understanding of Jesus was still very limited, as we'll see in a moment.

But they knew enough about human relationships to realize that fierce hatred against Jesus was gaining momentum rapidly. And they were canny enough to grasp that hatred against their leader could quickly translate into hatred against them.

If the kitchen catches on fire, it's not only the head chef who's going to be burned. But the antagonism goes on through the next few chapters.

In chapter 9, Jesus heals a blind man on the Sabbath day, and the Jewish leaders get very angry with him. In chapter 10, he teaches them that he's the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep.

And many of the Jewish leaders respond, he has a demon. He's insane. Why listen to him? He then claims, I and the Father are one. That lights the blue touch paper.

[12 : 46] And again, they pick up stones to stone him. In chapter 11, he raises his friend Lazarus from the grave. Lazarus, come out! And out comes Lazarus, living.

Now, you would think that a miracle of that size would attract universal approval. But does it? In fact, before chapter 11 comes to an end, the High Council of Jerusalem have discussed the problem of Jesus and have begun to make concrete plans to put him to death.

Now, his teaching and his miracles are not universally hated. John tells us during these chapters that Jesus divided his onlookers. There were quite a number of Jews who were drawn to him and who put their trust in him.

But the hatred was the dominant thing and it was unmistakably fierce. It was coming at Jesus like a juggernaut. But the apostles were constantly with him through all this.

They weren't protected from it. They well knew how malignant all this feeling was against Jesus. They knew that the Jewish establishment didn't simply want to gag Jesus or to send him into exile.

[13 : 59] They wanted to kill him and to do it as soon as they possibly could. So when that Thursday evening was finally reached and they were sitting at table with Jesus in John chapter 13, they would have been troubled.

They'd experienced this hostility against Jesus again and again for months on end. And then, to make matters worse, Jesus says to them in chapter 13, verse 33, Little children, yet a little while I'm with you.

You will seek me. And just as I said to the Jews, so now also I say to you, where I am going, you cannot come. In other words, I'm going to leave you.

I'm going to be parted from you. Now is that what they wanted to hear? They certainly did not. They didn't understand either him or his mission with any clarity, but they knew enough about him to know that he was unique and wonderful, that he turned their lives right around.

And the last thing they wanted at this stage was to be separated from him. So Peter says to him mournfully in verse 36, Lord, where are you going?

[15 : 12] It's a question full of sadness and confusion. Jesus' reply in verse 36 does seem to offer a glimmer of hope. He says, where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterwards.

Now back in verse 33, he had said point blank, where I'm going, you cannot come. But in verse 36, he does say to Peter, you will follow in due course.

Now this stirs up everything that is impulsive and hot-headed in Peter, and he blurts out, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I'll come now. I'll do anything for you.

I'll lay down my life for you. To which Jesus, as cool-headed as Peter is hot-headed, replies, will you lay down your life for me?

Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow until you have denied me three times. After which, Jesus immediately says, let not your hearts be troubled.

[16 : 17] He's going to say it again a few minutes later. Just look on to chapter 14, verse 27. Peace I leave with you as a parting gift. My peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you.

Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. So, the immediate cause of their distress is his announcement that he's leaving them and going to a place where they can't follow him, at least not yet.

But behind all that is this period of hostility, months of hostility, when the apostles have been feeling the violent opposition of the Jewish establishment, the establishment that has been itching to pick up stones to hurl at Jesus so as to kill him.

What we need to see then is the way that Jesus answers their anxiety because at the most fundamental level, their anxiety is the same as ours.

And that anxiety is about the future. They're saying to themselves, can't we be with him? Where is he going? What's going to become of us?

[17 : 31] They suddenly feel like a little boat adrift on a very stormy ocean, wondering if they're ever going to reach a safe harbor. Now, isn't that really the human race in a nutshell?

What does the final future hold for us? That's all very well to be 20 or 25 years old and full of energy and red blood. But when the shadows of the day begin to lengthen, when you get to that stage where you're pottering about and reading the obituary columns in the papers, the final future begins to loom rather large and a shadow of anxiety can cross your heart.

So, let's look at what Jesus says to Peter and the other apostles and I think we will find it massively encouraging. Three things, three things. First, Jesus tells us where to place our confidence.

Verse 1, let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me. That's where to place your confidence, Jesus is saying to the apostles.

Trust God the Father and trust me. Now, whenever you're asked to trust somebody, you have to ask yourself if the person asking for your trust is trustworthy.

[18 : 49] Can I trust this person? You say to yourself, do I have good grounds for trusting him? Now, you do need to ask those questions because confidence tricks and scams are being devised all around us.

open this little window on your computer and 50,000 pounds are guaranteed to drop into your bank account. So, just let us have your bank account details, please.

Do you do that? Well, of course not. You smell a rat. It's a stinker. You wouldn't dream of doing that. Jesus, however, is saying to his apostles, by extension, he's saying it to all of us, trust me and trust my Father.

So, do the apostles and we have good reasons for trusting him? We do. We trust his teaching. On one occasion, in John chapter 7, the Jewish leaders have sent the temple police to arrest Jesus.

The police find him but they don't arrest him. They dare not. They return to the leaders not having Jesus with them and the leaders say to them, why have you not brought him in?

[19 : 57] And the police reply, no one ever spoke like this man. Well, that was true back then and it remains true 20 centuries later.

No teaching has ever been a match for the teaching of Jesus. His claim throughout John's gospel is that his teaching is true because it comes from God and he also comes from God.

He claims that his miracles are a demonstration of the power of God and he raised Lazarus from the grave demonstrating the truth of what he'd said back in chapter 5.

He said this, truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. Can we not trust a man who commanded a corpse to live?

Then think of Jesus' cross and resurrection and ascension into heaven. People have tried to prove that Jesus could not possibly have been raised from the grave and they've all ended up with egg on their faces.

[21 : 01] We can trust the Jesus who raised Lazarus and we can trust the Jesus whom death was powerless to hold and keep. As Paul puts it so memorably in Romans chapter 6, Christ being raised from the dead will never die again.

Death no longer has dominion over him. Can we not trust this wonderful Son of God? Let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God. Believe also in me. Now that's where we can place our confidence in God the Father and in Jesus. But in the next few verses he develops this theme and he opens up for us the reasons why we can trust him for our future.

So let's notice secondly the place that he is preparing for us. He tells us in verses 2 and 3 in my Father's house are many rooms.

If it were not so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also.

[22 : 18] Now he's speaking here about heaven and he describes heaven as my Father's house. We learn some wonderful things about heaven from the final chapters of the book of Revelation where it's described as a beautiful and dazzling city.

It's the new Jerusalem. through the middle of the great city flows the river of the water of life and so on. But here in John 14 2 Jesus speaks of other aspects of it.

He tells us that in his Father's house there are many rooms. Now you probably know that in the authorised version it says many mansions. In my Father's house are many mansions which gives the impression that it's full of splendid detached houses standing in acres of parkland a bit like little stately homes.

But John's Greek doesn't suggest that kind of thing. The word translated rooms simply means dwelling places. What Jesus is emphasising here is that there are many dwelling places.

In other words there's room enough and to spare for anybody and everybody who belongs to Jesus. So he's saying to us don't be anxious that you might reach the gates of heaven and find a sign hanging there that reads no vacancies.

[23 : 36] There's more than enough room. Now there wasn't a room at the inn in Bethlehem when Mary needed one but there's endless room for all of the Lord's people in the Father's heavenly home.

But there's something else to reassure the apostles here and that is that Jesus is going on ahead to prepare a place for them. What does that mean?

By what means is he going on ahead of them? Well surely by means of his cross and resurrection and ascension. There's no heaven for the people of Jesus unless he opens the way to it by dying for our sins and then conquering the power of death.

That's what he means by going on to prepare a place for them. But if verse 2 is about his death and resurrection and ascension verse 3 is about his second coming.

If I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you may be also. So what an amazing sweep of salvation theology we have in just two verses.

[24 : 42] Death, resurrection, ascension and return. And yet it's put in such a homely way. It's a bit like your mother saying I'll go on ahead I'll make sure there are fresh sheets on the bed.

I'll put the heating on and I'll have a fat pizza sizzling in the oven. And you relax at that point don't you because your trusted mum is making the preparations. And this is homely.

It's a revelation of home. A friend of mine some years ago who was dying prematurely of cancer kept saying apparently during the final day or two of his life almost home now.

Almost home. Jesus is speaking here about home with a capital H. But the most exciting part of this comes at the end of verse 3 that where I am you may be also.

Now that is the great answer to Peter's worry that he was going to be separated from Jesus and could not follow him. The point is the separation was temporary and it's the same for all Christians.

[25 : 52] Our separation from Jesus is only temporary. The great and final goal of the Christian life is not merely to be in heaven it's to be with him to see him.

As Paul puts it in 1 Corinthians for now we see in a mirror dimly but then face to face. Well what have we seen so far?

Jesus addresses the troubled hearts of the apostles and he gives them two great reasons for laying their anxieties aside. First of all trust God and trust me and second be assured I am preparing a place for you in my father's house.

There are many dwellings there you will not be turned away. Now thirdly one more thing Jesus is about to show Peter and the other apostles in verse 6 something about his identity which he has not shown them up to this point but it comes about in a strange way.

He says in verse 4 and he's still talking here about his father's house he says and you know the way to where I'm going or as the footnote translates it where I'm going you know and the way you know in other words you know both the destination and the route to it.

[27 : 13] at which point we say three cheers for Thomas the Bold. It's a bit like a moment in the Cornhill training course classroom.

The lecturer has just made some weighty pronouncement and then he looks around the class and he says any questions anybody? And there's silence for a few seconds and then a bold spirit pipes up and says Edward your last three sentences were as impenetrable as a bowl of porridge.

Could you explain it again please? So we can say three cheers for Thomas. He's sometimes known as Doubting Thomas but we're going to find out a few chapters later that he is stubborn unbelieving Thomas until the moment when he actually sees Jesus risen from the dead and touches him.

But here in John 14 we can be thankful for this baffled question in verse 5. Jesus has just said you know the destination and you know the route and Thomas says we don't know the destination so how can we possibly know the route to it?

It's his bold willingness to ask that question that provokes the revelatory answer. Jesus says to him that is to Thomas I am the way and the truth and the life.

[28 : 31] No one comes to the Father except through me. So the Father is the destination. the route to him is me, Jesus. Now I think you'll see that of those three words way, truth and life the way is the dominant idea of the three.

The discussion is all about the Father's house and how to get there. And Jesus concludes verse 6 in a manner that shows that the way to heaven is what he's primarily talking about because he says no one comes to the Father except by me.

I am the way to my Father's house where there are many rooms. So let's think about these three words now way, truth and life and we'll start with the dominant one the way.

I want you now to picture a chilly and comfortless crematorium chapel in the Midlands of England on a grey winter's afternoon sometime in the 1990s.

In the little chapel there's a small group of disconsolate mourners sitting at the front. Up in the centre stands a coffin on a trolley and close to the coffin which contains a body there stands a Church of England clergyman dressed in his black and white robes and looking parsonical.

[29 : 57] And that was me. I took many many funerals in chilly chapels and usually usually the families and the deceased were not Christian believers.

Now knowing that the deceased was probably not a Christian and therefore probably had no hope of going to heaven I often used to read the first six verses of John chapter 14 and then I would preach a very short sermon on it and I used to say something like this I'll just give you the very bare bones of it in a concentrated fashion.

I would say to the mourners friends this is a sad day I know that you're missing George terribly you feel all at sea but when somebody that we love has died we're forced to ask the most basic questions about human life what are we here for?

Is there any purpose in living for 70 or 80 years and then ending up in a box? Does life mean anything? does death mean anything? Well to answer these questions we need to turn to the only one who really can answer them the source of all real wisdom and that is to Jesus Christ and in this passage from the Bible that I've just read I'm so glad that Thomas asks this bold question Jesus has just said to him where I'm going you know and the way you know and then Thomas says but Lord we don't know we don't know where you're going and we don't know how to get there now isn't that just the kind of question that you are asking today is there a future is there a heaven and if there is how do we get there and Jesus says to Thomas yes there is a heaven and there is a road to heaven but not everybody goes there there's only one road to heaven that is Jesus himself and he puts it so clearly here no one comes to the father except through me so we can't get to heaven by being good or by trying hard the only way is to trust Jesus and then to walk through the rest of life with him as our Lord and Master so my friends if you've never done that will you do it today put your hand into his hand and trust him when someone we love dies it's a sharp reminder to us that all of us will die there is a way to heaven but there's only one way you need to trust him well that was the heart of my little funeral sermon at the Krem Chapel

I was always very careful not to give the mourners any kind of false assurance about where George now was I was trying to bring some gospel to the living I couldn't say anything about the position of the dead I didn't know I mean he might have turned to the Lord in his weakness at the very end of life people do that occasionally though in reality most people die as they have lived and at a funeral service the preacher must be faithful to the truth he must never give a nod in the direction of the popular sentimental view that everybody goes to heaven after they die the whole Bible contradicts that idea if that were true we wouldn't have needed a savior it's because the sinful world is under condemnation that God in his great love has sent the savior but to be on the way to heaven each person must repent and trust the savior there is a way to the father's house but there's only one way so it can't be by means of living a good life it can't be by means of Buddha or Islam or the gods of Hinduism or mother earth paganism

[33 : 42] Jesus is so clear to Thomas no one comes to the father except through me the apostle Peter understood this very deeply and he says in a speech to the Jewish elders again in a very tense atmosphere in Acts chapter 4 he says there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved Jesus is the way to the father's house so let's thank God that there is a way but there is no other way and he is the truth he embodies the truth the words he speaks are words of truth many times in John's gospel he says that his words are the words given to him by the father in effect he's saying I'm not just making stuff up I'm not some solo operator with the gift of the gab everything I say is the message

I've heard from my father he teaches me what to say later in John's gospel Jesus finds himself confronted by Pontius Pilate and he says to Pilate I've come into the world to bear witness to the truth everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice to which Pilate replies what is truth he sounds as if he's just stepped out of the 21st century what is truth Jesus says I am the truth and he is the life the life in ancient Greek there are two words for life there's bios from which we get the word biology and there's zoe from which we get words like zoology and in ancient Greek bios means physical life blood and DNA everything that we share with ant eaters and grizzly bears physical life but zoe means eternal life and that's the word that Jesus uses of himself here it's a very different word and it means a very different thing it's the life of heaven everlasting unstoppable filled with all the joy of the father's house describing Jesus at the very beginning of John's gospel

John says in him was life zoe and in chapter 5 Jesus says for as the father has life in himself so he has granted to the son to have life also in himself eternal life is the great theme of John's gospel and it's available to every person who is willing to put their trust in Jesus I don't know whether you've read Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress but there's a wonderful scene at the very very beginning of the book I'd like to give you an abridged version of it here's how Bunyan begins as I walked through the wilderness of this world I came to a place where there was a den and I laid me down in that place to sleep and as I slept I dreamed a dream and behold I saw a man clothed with rags a book in his hand and a great burden upon his back he opened the book and as he read he wept and trembled and he broke out with a lamentable cry saying what shall I do now

I'm just going to break into the dream for a moment this ragged man who is a picture of you and me meets another man whose name is Evangelist and Evangelist says to him why are you crying and he says to Evangelist because I perceive in this book which of course is the Bible that I'm condemned to die and after that to come to judgment well Evangelist then helps him and directs him to journey across the wide plain that lies before him where in the distance there's a narrow gate and a shining light go there says Evangelist and you will be told what to do so the man began to run and he had not run far from his own door but his wife and children perceiving it began to cry after him to return but the man put his fingers in his ears and ran on crying life life eternal life and he looked not behind him but fled out across the plain can you picture that man nothing was going to stop him not even his wife and children he was determined to find eternal life and to be saved from the judgment to come here in John 14 the hearts of the apostles were troubled everything seemed to be falling apart their future seemed to be so uncertain they were thinking what is going to happen what will become of us but Jesus says to them and he says it to all of us

I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me well let's bow our heads and pray to him with thankful hearts our dear Lord Jesus risen living you who hold the keys of death and Hades we thank you for the love and the kindness that you showed to the apostles and to the whole world and we thank you that by your death and resurrection and ascension you have opened the way to your father's house where there are many rooms have mercy on each one of us here today and bring us finally to that wonderful house so that where you are we may be also and we ask it for your name's sake amen what you have another if you you might