

JESUS ALONE

By Rev. Will Nelken

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If there's ever a bone of contention that people want to pick with believers, it's exclusivity. "You're too narrow," they say to us. "I don't mind you believing what you believe, but don't say it's the only way."

We don't say this — it's Jesus who said it. Call us narrow if you wish, but Jesus is the One who said, "*The gateway to life is very narrow*" and "*the highway to hell is broad*". (Matthew 7:13-14).

There are no other men or women, other religious leaders, who have come from God and paid the death penalty for humankind's sins. Jesus alone.

A college student once complained that he didn't like the Bible because it is filled with dogmatism. It's true; it is. But don't you realize that it is characteristic of truth to be dogmatic? Truth must be dogmatic.

I had a teacher who was the most dogmatic, narrow-minded person I've ever met. She insisted that $2 + 2 = 4$. It didn't make any difference what you had two of — apples or cows or dollars — she always insisted that $2 + 2 = 4$. She was dogmatic about that. I have discovered that the bank I do business with operates on the same principle. Only with them it is $2 - 2 = 0$, and they are dogmatic about it. One of the characteristics of truth is its dogmatism.

Right Relationship

Jesus' solution to humanity's spiritual and moral dilemma is not a religious recipe, but a spiritual relationship.

Before sin entered the world, the first couple, Adam and Eve, enjoyed a threefold privilege in relation to God; they were in communion with their Maker; they knew their Creator, and they possessed spiritual life. But when they disobeyed and fell, this threefold relationship was severed.

They became alienated from God, as their hiding from Him painfully demonstrated; having believed the Devil's lie, they were no longer capable of perceiving the truth, as the making of fig-leaf aprons clearly evidenced; and they no longer had spiritual life, for God's threat, "*In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die,*" was strictly enforced.

Into this same awful condition, each of Adam's descendants has entered this world, for "*what is born of flesh is flesh*" (John 3:6) — a fallen parent can give birth only to a fallen child. Every sinner, therefore, has a three-fold need: reconciliation, illumination, and regeneration. This threefold need is perfectly met by Jesus the Savior.

Jesus, the Way

Today, let's look again at Jesus' declaration, "*I am the way, the truth and the life*" (John 14:6). He did not say, "I am a way," as if others may be found. Nor did He say, "I teach a way," as if it could be isolated to His words. Nor did He say, "I point to a way," separate from Himself. He clearly said, "*I am the way.*"

When Jesus said, *"I am the way,"* He used the Greek term for "I" (*egō*) with the verb for "am" (*eimi*), but this verb did not require a subject since "I" was already contained within it. Jesus' use, then, of this combination was emphatic, like "I — I am." By this, He was saying, "I (and no other) am the way."

The means of salvation, therefore, is exclusive, but its objective is inclusive, for salvation is open to everyone, without precondition. People may come to Christ from another faith, or from no faith at all. Christianity is tolerant, but not ambivalent. *"There is salvation in no one else"* (Acts 4:12).

As I emphasized last Sunday, Jesus is the way that leads to God. He is the Mediator between God and mankind. Christ spans the distance between the sinner and God. We could not make the journey to God, because of sin, so God made the journey to us, in Jesus Christ.

The Jews talked much about the way in which men must walk and the ways of God. God said to Moses: *"You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. You shall walk in all the ways which the Lord your God has commanded you"* (Deuteronomy 5:32, 33). Moses said to the people: *"I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you"* (Deuteronomy 31:29). Isaiah has said: *"Your ears shall hear a word behind you saying, This is the way, walk in it"* (Isaiah 30:21). In the world to come there will be a highway called the Way of Holiness, and in it the traveler, even though a simple soul, will not be lost (Isaiah 35:8). It was the Psalmist's prayer: *"Teach me Your way, O Lord"* (Psalm 27:11). The Jews knew much about the way of God in which a man must walk. And Jesus said: *"I am the Way."*

In fact, "the Way" was one of the early names for the Christian faith (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

What did Jesus mean when He said, "I am the way"? Suppose we are in a strange town and ask for directions. Suppose the person asked says: "Take the first road to the right, and then the second left. Cross the square, go past the church, take the third lane on the right, and the road you want is the fourth on the left." There is a good chance we will be lost before we get half-way there. But suppose the person we ask says: "Come. I'll take you there." In that case, the person is to us the way, and we cannot miss it. That is what Jesus does for us. He does not only give advice and directions. He takes us by the hand and leads us; He strengthens us and guides us personally every day. He does not tell us about the way; He is the Way.

Christ *is* the truth and the life, just as well as He is the way. Nevertheless, the context indicates that the idea of *the way* is predominant. The meaning appears to be: "I am the way *because* I am the truth and the life."

Jesus, the Truth

John also told us about Jesus the Truth in chapter one (v.14), when he wrote, *"We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."* And again (v.17), *"For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."* Here, "truth" was used in the Jewish sense of "faithfulness," as is represented in the New Living Translation. Greek thought presented truth as opposed to falsehood, or reality versus illusion.

Jesus is the truth of God in both senses — as unfailingly faithful, and as opposed to the lies of Satan, which suggest God is posing, but actually unfaithful and undependable. There is no falsehood in Him, and Jesus is *really* God, not just god-like.

He embodies the supreme revelation of God — He is the word made flesh — and He does exclusively what the Father says and does. Therefore, Jesus is the single dependable source of redemptive revelation.

The Baha'i religion teaches that there are a series of "revealers," of which Jesus was one, but after Him came Muhammad (6th century), and then Baha'u'llah (19th century). According to Baha'i teaching, each consecutive messenger prophesied of the messenger to follow, although the next one (conveniently) won't appear before the year 2800. Jesus, however, mentioned no other beside Himself. He said, unequivocally, "I, and I alone, am the truth (for every generation)."

The Psalmist said: "*Teach me Your way, O Lord, that I may walk in Your truth*" (Psalm 86:11). "*For Your steadfast love is before my eyes,*" he said, "*and I walk in faithfulness to You*" (Psalm 26:3). "*I have chosen the way of truth,*" he wrote (Psalm 119:30). Many men have told us the truth, but no man ever embodied it, until Jesus.

There is one all-important thing about moral truth. A man's character does not really affect his teaching of geometry or astronomy or English verbs. But if a man proposes to teach moral truth or to lead others in a moral path, his character makes all the difference in the world. An adulterer who teaches the necessity of purity, a grasping person who teaches the value of generosity, a domineering person who teaches the beauty of humility, an irritable person who teaches the beauty of serenity, or an embittered person who teaches the beauty of love, is bound to be ineffective.

Moral truth cannot be conveyed solely in words; it must also be conveyed in example. And that is precisely where the greatest human teacher must fall down. No teacher has ever embodied the truth he taught — except Jesus. Many a man could say: "I have taught you the truth." Only Jesus could say: "*I am the Truth.*"

The tremendous thing about Jesus is not simply that the statement of moral perfection finds its peak in Him; it is that the *fact* of moral perfection finds its realization in Him.

Truth is not to be found in any system of philosophy, but in a Person — Jesus alone.

What will it avail you in Hell, my friend, if you have mastered all the sciences of men, were acquainted with all the events of history, were versed in all the languages of mankind, were thoroughly acquainted with the politics of our day? Oh, how you will wish then that you had read your newspapers less and your Bible more; that with all your getting you had gotten understanding more than money; that with all your learning you had bowed before Him who is the Truth!

Jesus, the Life

Jesus is the Life that God gives. The New Testament writers chose, instead of the Greek *bios* (biological life) or *psuche* (conscious life), the word *zoe* to represent the life which the Spirit gives. This is life as opposed to the Death that resulted from sin. This is life as God Himself knows it; life in its fullness. Jesus is this life, because this life is in Him.

John revealed, "*As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself*" (John 5:26). And, "*We are in Him who is true — even in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life*" (1 John 5:20).

That's why Jesus said to the grieving sister of Lazarus, "*I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this?*" (John 11:25-26).

The whole Bible bears solemn witness to the fact that the natural man is spiritually lifeless. He walks according to the course of this world; he has no love for the things of God. The fear of God is not upon him, nor has he any concern for God's glory. In him, the light of life has been extinguished.

"The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble" (Proverbs 4:19). "Their understanding is darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Ephesians 4:18).

Self is the center and circumference of his existence. He is alive to the things of the world, but is dead to heavenly things. The one who is outside of Christ exists in this world, but he has no spiritual life.

When the prodigal son returned from the distant country the father said, *"This, my son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found"* (Luke 15:24). But the one who believes in Christ has passed out of death *into life* (John 5:24). *"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life"* (John 3:36).

The writer of the Proverbs said: *"The commandment is a lamp, and the teaching a light; and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life"* (Proverbs 6:23). *"He who heeds instructions is on the path to life"* (Proverbs 10:17). *"You show me the path of life,"* sang the Psalmist (Psalm 16:11). In the last analysis, what man is always seeking for is life. His search is not for knowledge for its own sake: but what will make life worth living. A novelist makes one of his characters who has fallen in love say: "I never knew what life was until I saw it in your eyes." Love had brought *life*. That is what Jesus does. Life with Jesus is life indeed.

So, then, turn to Him who is the Life. If you do, even death cannot keep you from His side.

The Way, the Truth, the Life

God's truth and life are incarnate in Jesus. As the way He *brings* people to God; as the truth He *makes* people *free*; as the life He *produces* fellowship.

He is the *way* to the Father because only He has an intimate knowledge of God, unmarred by sin. He is the *truth* because He has the perfect power to make life one coherent experience irrespective of its ups and downs. He is the *life* because He was not subject to death but made it subject to Him. He died to demonstrate the power and continuity of His life.

This meditation of Thomas à Kempis highlights this theme:

"Follow thou 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 thou must follow; the truth which thou must believe; the life for which thou 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."

The same theme is also beautifully expressed in a triplet of sonnets:

*I am the way to God: I did not come
To light a path, to blaze a trail, that you
May simply follow in my tracks, pursue
My shadow like a prize that's cheaply won.
My life reveals the life of God, the sum
Of all he is and does. So how can you,*

*The sons of night, look on me and construe
My way as just the road for you to run?
My path takes in Gethsemane, the Cross,
And stark rejection draped in agony.
My way to God embraces utmost loss:
Your way to God is not my way, but me.
Each other path is dismal swamp, or fraud.
I stand alone: I am the way to God.*

*I am the truth of God: I do not claim
I merely speak the truth, as though I were
A prophet (but no more), a channel, stirred
By Spirit power, of purely human frame.
Nor do I say that when I take his name
Upon my lips, my teaching cannot err
(Though that is true). A mere interpreter
I'm not, some prophet-voice of special fame.
In timeless reaches of eternity
The Triune God decided that the Word,
The self-expression of the Deity,
Would put on flesh and blood—and thus be heard.
The claim to speak the truth good men applaud.
I claim much more: I am the truth of God.*

*I am the resurrection life. It's not
As though I merely bear life-giving drink,
A magic elixir which (men might think)
Is cheap because though lavish it's not bought.
The price of life was fully paid: I fought
With death and black despair; for I'm the drink
Of life. The resurrection morn's the link
Between my death and endless life long sought.
I am the firstborn from the dead; and by
My triumph, I deal death to lusts and hates.
My life I now extend to men, and ply
Them with the draught that ever satiates.
Religion's page with empty boasts is rife:
But I'm the resurrection and the life.*

In His statement, "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life,*" Jesus took the three basic concepts of Jewish religion, and made the tremendous claim that all three found their full realization in Him.

And there is one way of summarizing all this. "*No one,*" said Jesus, "*comes to the Father except through me.*" He alone is the way to God. In Him alone we see what God is like; and He alone can lead men into God's presence without fear and without shame.