

I am the Way, the truth, and the Life

March 9, 2008

Stadium Village Church

Question: What is the most difficult unanswered question you have?

What do you think is the most difficult question concerning Christianity? There are several difficult questions that we who believe in Jesus are faced with. For example, how and when did God create the universe and the world we see around us? Or, how do you explain the Trinity – that there is a Father, a Son, and a Spirit, yet God is one. Or, where is heaven? Or, when will Jesus Christ return to this earth? What will happen when Jesus returns to earth? Or, how about this one – does God know everything about the future? While those are hard questions, and there are plenty more, I don't believe any of those is the most difficult question to answer. I think the most difficult question to answer is.....oh, just a minute. I was not going to tell you until later. Sorry.

We are in the middle of a sermon series for the season of Lent. We have called this series the "I am" sayings of Jesus. In the book of John we find seven sayings of Jesus in which He says "I am....." We are going through each one during this time before Easter when we will celebrate the fact that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Here again is the list of the "I am" sayings of Jesus.

Today we are on the saying: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Before we dig in to find out all that this statement means, it would be helpful to know when Jesus said it and why He said it. Like the saying we talked about last week – "I am the true vine" – Jesus said this on the last night of His life on earth. He had gathered together to celebrate the Passover with His closest followers. The disciples were well aware of the danger they were in. Jesus had come to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration and had caused quite a stir. Large crowds had followed Him and had listened to His teaching for the past few days. The religious leaders were concerned, jealous, and afraid of Jesus. They were plotting to find a way to kill Him without causing a riot in the city during this special holiday season.

Jesus could sense in His disciples their fear and concern about the future. He spoke to them words of hope and assurance. He told them that He was going away and that they couldn't come with Him now. But He also told them He was going away and would make a place ready for them. We understand that to mean heaven – that Jesus returned to heaven after dying and rising again and has made a place ready for His followers. Jesus told them that He would make a place for them and come back and take them back so that they would be with Jesus forever. Jesus promised His followers, and we believe that this promise is for us as well, that He would prepare an eternal home for them. Someday He would come back for them and take them home, really home.

I think I have shared this with you before, but I think it is worth repeating. And this comes from Tim Keller, a pastor from New York City. We have this sense that we are not really home here on this earth. If you are from another country you may feel this even more, but even when you go home, you probably have a sense that this is not really home. How can this really be home if we are always in the process of dying and then we must go someplace else? It is like if we would be in a space ship and land on Mars. We could step out onto the surface without the protection of a spacesuit and we would quickly die – the atmosphere would not support our life. Mars is not our home. But neither is this earth – when we are born into this world, we begin the process of leaving. It might take a long time – but we know we will be leaving. Jesus promised His followers that He would take them to an eternal home, their real home.

Then Jesus added: "You know the way to the place where I am going." The disciple named Thomas replies in logical fashion – we don't even know where You are going – how can we

know the way? The other disciples were probably thinking the same thing. Know the way? We don't even know the place.

Then Jesus responds, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." I wonder if Thomas thought that Jesus really answered his question or not. Jesus' answer really forces the disciples and us think about three questions: How do we get to our eternal home? What is our eternal home? What are we called to do?

First, how do we get to our eternal home? Jesus answer to Thomas' question is often quoted by itself – in fact many of you can probably quote this verse from memory. The problem is that it doesn't mean much by itself. If someone just says, "this is the way" or "I am the way," we are naturally going to ask, "the way to what?" We need to remember that this is an answer to a question. Jesus had told them about preparing a future home. Thomas had asked how they could know the way to get to that future home if they don't even know where it is. This was Jesus' answer to that question.

I don't know about you, but I would have probably asked the same question that Thomas did. The home that Jesus is going to be preparing sounds great – tell me more about it and how to get there. Show me a map. Is it above the earth somewhere? Is it behind the moon? Where is it? I am curious about this place. Is it made of solid gold? How big is it?

The disciples were looking for how they could get to God and have a secure and eternal future. Basically, every human religion does that. Human religions tell you that if you do this very well, you can hopefully have a wonderful eternal existence. Follow these rules well and hopefully you will get to heaven. Thomas question is about what we need to DO to get to heaven.

But Jesus' statement doesn't answer any of those questions. Rather He points to something very important. While the disciples were thinking about a method to get to a place, Jesus tells them that the way home is really a relationship. Thomas was asking the way – Jesus says "I am the way."

How could Jesus say this? How could He claim to be the way? I think that the answer is found in the rest of the answer – He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Jesus is the way because He is the truth and because He is the life.

Jesus Christ is the truth. He came to this world to show us ultimate truth. As the Son of God, He could show us who God is – ultimate truth. Jesus is the embodiment of truth.

And Jesus is the way because He is the life. Jesus came to this world to bring life. Humankind had disobeyed and rebelled God – separating ourselves from God and resulting in our death. Jesus came to live as a human, to die, but then to come back to life. In coming back to life, He conquered death – He cannot die again. Jesus invites us to join Him – in dying to sin and then rising to a new life.

Jesus can rightly say that He is the way to our eternal home – He is the truth because He reveals God to us; and He is the life because He will conquer death and bring us life.

Jesus is the way home – but what is home? What is this eternal home that Jesus described to the disciples? We know that this earth is not really our final home, but I think that we are often tempted to think about a beautiful city of gold as being our eternal home. We see pictures people have made of heaven and we tend to think of this place that is beautiful and rich and wonderful. And that may all be true – but we are really told very little about our eternal home. Again, let's consider what Jesus said. Thomas asked how could they know the way, they don't even know where this eternal home is. Jesus replied that He was the way – and no one comes to the Father but through Him. In other words, the eternal home is really a relationship with the Father. The main thing about being home is being with God. Jesus said He would prepare a place for them to live eternally – but the main thing about being home is being with God.

While the disciples wanted a method to get to an eternal dwelling, Jesus told them the way was a relationship with Him and the eternal home was really a relationship with the Father. The

greatest thing about being eternally home will be God – dwelling in a close relationship forever with our Creator.

The third question that Jesus' statement makes us face is what does it call us to do? Was Jesus telling His disciples about home just to make them feel good? Jesus had been preparing His followers to work – to share the message – that He is the Way and that our eternal home is with the Father. This answer called them and us to two things. First, it calls us to have hope. No matter what happens in life, we are on the way home and our eternal future is secure. But it also calls us to tell the world about the way and we can spend eternity with God. Jesus promised His followers their needs in doing that mission would be supplied. He even promised that the works that He had done during His time on earth, they will do as well.

Now, back to the question – what is the most difficult question facing us as Christians? Let me share with you what a friend once asked me. Suppose there are two people. Both are nice, pleasant, honest, kind people. One of them has prayed to God – asking God to forgive his sins. He believes that Jesus Christ died for his sins and that when he dies, he will go to be with God in heaven. The other person who seems just as good and kind, has not prayed to God and isn't sure about who Jesus was. Doesn't it seem awfully drastic that one person goes to heaven and the other person goes to hell just on the basis of praying and asking that God would forgive his sins? How can we answer this question?

I believe that the toughest question that faces us as Christians is: How can we be so narrow minded to believe that the only way to the Father, our eternal home, is through Jesus Christ, the Son of God? The world that we live wants us to give this one up. Many forces in the world say – sure, you can believe in Jesus and heaven and whatever else, BUT you must not force your beliefs on others. Somebody else might be following another religion and you must accept their beliefs as being just as good as yours.

I am going to suggest that the best way of answering this question is by understanding what happens when a person become a follower of Jesus. What really happens when a person becomes a Christian? What happens that is so drastic that a person who was headed to eternal punishment is now headed toward going to their eternal home with God? Do they just become a little bit better? Do they just improve enough to get a passing grade in God's eyes? That doesn't seem reasonable, does it? That one person is sent to eternal punishment because they get say 69 points, and another gets 71 because they believe in Jesus and now get to live in heaven forever?

If that is all there is to being a Christian, getting a few more points to getting a passing grade, that IS terribly unfair. Yet, many people think that – they try to be a Christian, they go to church some times, they try to be good, and hope they will get a passing grade. But is that what Jesus meant when He said – I am the way? Or was He saying much more about what it means to get home through Him. I believe He was saying much more – more than we can even comprehend. When a person trusts in Jesus to be the way home to the Father some very important changes occur, eternal changes. But there are also some things that change slowly and some things that really don't change at all.

When a person turns to Jesus and trusts in Him to be the way, there are really two kinds of a change that occur: there is a change in STATUS and there is a change in CIRCUMSTANCES. Both are very important.

First there is a change in status – when a person puts their trust in Jesus to be the way, a major transformation occurs. Their sins are forgiven – everything they ever did wrong is forgiven by God. They are adopted into God's family – before they were like orphans but now they are children of God. Their direction is changed – they were going away from God, trying to do things on their own now they are doing things because they love God. They are part of a different kingdom – they were in the kingdom of darkness and now they are part of God's

kingdom. Their disobedience to God made them dead to God – they had no relationship with Him. Now, they are alive to God – God by His kindness caused them to be alive to Him.

Second, there is a change in circumstances. When a person puts their trust in Jesus Christ to be the way to God, God makes a major change in their life – He puts His Holy Spirit in them. Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus that “when you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession – to the praise of His glory.” God puts the Spirit in you when you turn to Jesus and trust in Him. The Spirit now starts working in your life – He helps you make decisions, He helps you turn from what is wrong to what is right. He becomes Your Friend and Counselor. He becomes your connection to God. God the Father and God the Son dwell within you through the work of the Spirit.

The Spirit also comes to work through the follower of Jesus to accomplish the mission of telling the world about this Good News. As the believers submit themselves to the will of the Spirit, the Spirit can work through the believer the same things that Jesus did for the purpose of bringing people to the Way.

And then some things don’t change. When a person turns to follow Jesus, they still have the same body, the same brain cells, mostly the same personality traits, memories, and strengths and weaknesses. Some things may have changed immediately – I have heard people say that after they put their trust in Jesus, the desire for some things that were wrong, simply disappeared. Some times a problem with anger was solved immediately. But often character traits are not changed right away.

So from the outside, things don’t look much different. If after you put your trust in Jesus and you go back to work, people may not see a change right away. You probably won’t come to work a genius, or knowing the answer to a difficult question in research.

Maybe a simple illustration – it is like you are driving in a car on the freeway. Maybe you are up in North Dakota on Interstate 94 and you are going west – farther away. It is getting drier and more desolate. But you want to go home to Minneapolis. You realize that you are headed the wrong direction. So you get off the freeway at the next exit, you turn around, and get back on the freeway going east. You are now headed for home. But around things still look pretty much the same. You are still in North Dakota. But the difference in some ways is huge – you are on the way home. You can’t see home – but you know you are on the right way. And if you look at a car going west or a car going east – they may look pretty similar – but they are completely opposite in direction.

Likewise with people – when they turn to Jesus as being the way home, they still look pretty much the same – but things will not stay the same. Their direction is completely different. And, the Holy Spirit will be working in their life. As they allow the Spirit to work, He will be gradually helping the person to become more and more like Jesus Christ. The fruit of the Spirit will grow.

The Spirit will also be empowering a person to serve. As they allow the Spirit to have control and to work through them, He will be using them to serve others and to tell others about the way home. The gifts of the Spirit will be there to do the work God wills.

If you have not put your trust in Jesus Christ as being the way to the Father – you can accept that offer today. Jesus is the way – put your trust in Him.

If you have put your faith in Jesus Christ and you know you are going the right way, God is always offering to give you His Spirit. When you put your trust in Jesus, God puts His Spirit within you. But there is an aspect of being filled with the Spirit that is a continuous process. We need to continue to turn our lives over to the Spirit and let Him have His way in you, to fill you again and again to do all that God wills.