

I Am the Way

by Albert N. Martin

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Now I wish to begin this evening a relatively brief series of messages entitled "Simple Signposts to the Celestial City." Taking the term "The Celestial City" from John Bunyan's term for heaven in his immortal work *The Pilgrim's Progress*, I plan to preach on some of the most simple and clear Gospel texts given to us in the Scriptures. And my aim in doing this is quite straightforward and uncomplicated, and it is basically a twofold goal. First and foremost, I want to proclaim by means of these texts, these simple signposts to the celestial city, that Gospel which is the power of God unto salvation. And I desire to do so with the prayer and, I trust, some measure of expectation that God will make that preaching of the Gospel with these texts as our sphere of reference the very power of God unto salvation to some who sit among us. And then my second goal is that I want to furnish you, the people of God, with a working acquaintance with some of these most crucial tests, which ought to part and parcel of every mature Christian's stock-in-the-trade of witnessing to others, the kinds of texts you ought to be able to sit down and open up to son or daughter or to neighbor and work associate as God gives the opportunity in seeking to set forth the message of life and salvation in our Lord Jesus Christ.

So without any further words of introduction, I direct your attention to the first of these simple signposts to the celestial city. It is verse 6 of John chapter 14: "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by Me." In this marvelously simple and yet subtly profound text, we have our Lord Jesus Christ telling us in His own words who He is, what He came to do, and the weighty implication of these things as they relate to each and every one of us. Note with me first of all in the words of our Lord Jesus what I am calling the amazing personal claims of Jesus Christ. And those claims are with respect to three things. Look at the text. "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

First of all, our Lord Jesus claims to be the way. Now this word "way" is used in a figurative sense. A way is a path or a road leading from one place to another. And in the context, Jesus had just spoken of the Father's house, heaven, the celestial city. And in this particular personal claim, the Lord Jesus Christ is declaring that He is the way. That is, all of the building materials needed to construct a road from earth to heaven for sinful men are to be found in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. He is the way. And in the context, He is the way with reference to the question that was asked. Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we don't know where You're going. How can we know the way? If we don't know where You're going, how can we find the road that gets there?" Jesus has been speaking of where He is going. He will in a few short days subsequent to the whole ordeal of Gethsemane and Golgotha be laid in Joseph's tomb. He will come out from the tomb in triumphant resurrection life. And according to Acts chapter 1, He will go back into the presence of the Father. And He says with reference to the one and only path that leads from earth to heaven, "I am the way."

But then the second aspect of His amazing personal claims is that He claims to be the truth. Here we have no figure of speech. Truth is an accurate statement of reality. And therefore, when Jesus in this text makes this amazing personal claim, not only to be the way but the truth, He is saying in the context with reference to the great issue of man's ultimate destiny, making one's way to the many dwelling places prepared by the Lord Jesus, that everything pertaining to how one is fit for those dwelling places, how one obtains a title to those dwelling places, how one can actually arrive at one of those many abiding places, in Jesus Christ is the truth with respect to those great and all-important issues of heaven or its opposite, hell.

But then thirdly, His amazing personal claims culminate in this claim: "I am the life." Now the term "life" is not mere existence. But in this passage when Jesus said, "I am the life," He is speaking of life in its rich and highest Biblical connotation, which means nothing less than realized communion with God Himself. Life in terms of Jesus' definition of it in John chapter 17 where in His high priestly prayer in verse 3, He says, "This is life eternal, that they should know Thee the only true God, and Him whom Thou didst send, even Jesus Christ." What is life? What is life eternal? What is that life which was forfeited by our first father and mother, Adam and Eve and can only be realized in and through the person and ministry of Jesus Christ? It is nothing less than life known and experienced in the realm of communion with the Living God. The knowledge of God, delight in God--this is the essence of life. And the Lord Jesus in John 10 and verse 10, said in reference to His sheep, "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly."

Now these are the amazing personal claims of the Lord Jesus. This is not something a prophet said would be true about the One to come, nor an apostle looking back speaking about the One who had come. This is Jesus in the days of His flesh gathered in that upper room and making this claim: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

Then consider with me secondly, not only the amazing personal claims of Jesus Christ, but the sobering conclusion drawn from these claims by Jesus Christ. Look at it. No sooner does He say, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." There the amazing claims. Now the sobering conclusion: "No one cometh unto the Father, but by Me." Now you see, it has often been said in days past and said right down to the present hour that people have no complaints with Jesus as a good man or a good teacher. But it is the narrowness of His followers, the fanatical claims His followers make, that unless you believe as they believe, you're lost and damned and will roast in hell. People say,

"That's the offence of Christianity. It's not Christ. The meek, the gentle, the loving Jesus went about doing good, taught us the golden rule, gave us the Sermon on the Mount. We've got no complaint with Jesus. It's these fanatical, bigoted, narrow-minded followers who go far beyond Jesus and say, 'Unless you believe as we believe, you'll roast in hell.' Our problem is with those characters."

No, no, my friend, if you've bought into that nonsense, you listen to Jesus. Listen to the meek, lowly Jesus. This is not something I'm saying about Him. This is something He says about Himself, and this is what He says. A sobering conclusion drawn from those amazing personal claims is this: "No one cometh unto the Father, but by [or through] Me." Note in this conclusion that it is universal in its scope. It says, "No one cometh unto the Father, but [through] Me." No one! This is Jesus' own conclusion

based upon His amazing personal claims. It is universal in its scope. It touches every single one of us in this building--you and you and you and you and the preacher standing in this pulpit.

Now notice, it is undeniably exclusive in its intent. Look at the language of Jesus: "No one cometh unto the Father, but [through] Me." Now what is He saying? Well, surely He is not saying, "No one will see the Father as Judge in the last day," because that would contradict the rest of the Scriptures and many other statements of the Lord Jesus. Acts 17:30 says, "[God] commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent." Why? "[Because] He hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world...." Romans 14:12 says, "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God." Yes, you will in that sense come to the Father. You will see God in the day of judgment and see His approval of having His own Son as the appointed Judge seated upon His throne when the books are opened. Yes, you will have dealings with God. But what Christ is saying is this: none can come to God as Father and find Him a welcoming God, a pardoning God, a receiving God, a gracious God. None can come to the Father and find forgiveness for all of their sins, for all of their iniquities, acceptance and welcome. "No one cometh unto the Father, but [through] Me [that is, through Me as the way to the Father, through Me as the truth concerning how sinners can approach the Father, through Me as the life who alone can impart that knowledge and saving relationship to the Father]." In other words, Jesus is giving the most explicit, simple affirmation that He is the exclusive mediator between God and man. Listen to old Bishop Ryle. How the old bishop could hit the nail on the head in some of his comments on Gospel portions. Commenting on this text, the old bishop said,

"We should mark in these verses how expressly the Lord Jesus shuts out all ways of salvation but Himself. He declares, 'No man comes unto the Father, but by Me.' It avails nothing that a man is clever, learned, highly gifted, amiable, charitable, kind-hearted, and zealous about some sort of religion. All this will not save his soul if he does not draw near to God by Christ's atonement and make use of God's own Son as his Mediator and Savior. God is so holy that all men are guilty and debtors in His sight. Sin is so sinful that no mortal man can make satisfaction for it. There must be a mediator or a ransom payer or a redeemer between our self and God, or else we can never be saved. There is only one door, one bridge, one ladder between earth and heaven--the crucified Son of God. Whosoever will enter in by that door may be saved. But to him who refuses to use that door, the Bible holds out no hope at all. For without the shedding of blood, there is no remission. Let us beware if we love life, of supposing that mere earnestness will take a man to heaven though he knows nothing of Christ. This idea is deadly and ruinous error. Sincerity will never wipe away our sins. It is not true that every man will be saved by his own religion no matter what he believes, provided he's diligent and sincere. We must not pretend to be wiser than God. Christ has said, and Christ will stand to it, 'No one cometh unto the Father, but by Me.'"

Having looked at this text under the two headings, first of all, the heading of the amazing claims of the person of Jesus Christ, secondly, the sobering conclusion drawn from these claims of Christ, now thirdly and finally, I want to give you some searching personal questions based upon Jesus' claims and His own conclusion. Now I want you to envision that we dismissed the whole congregation and set up appointments that they had to go through the next three to four days. And each one of us were able to go to the back room where the elders meet for prayer. And you

were sitting down three feet away, and no one else was there, not even your husband or wife. And I looked you straight in the eye, and I asked you these questions in the light of this text. I want you to conceive of yourself, as in that setting I'm asking you with Judgment Day earnestness and intensity and tenderness. Hear these questions; answer honestly in your heart.

Question one: have you, not your wife, husband, son, daughter, father, mother, cousin, uncle, aunt--no, have you come to the conviction that your own condition is such that you can have no safe dealings with God apart from Jesus Christ? Why do I say safe dealings with God? Well, you're going to have dealings with God, my friend. You're having them right now. Whether you think of God or not, He thinks of you. He knows your every thought, every idle word. He knows every unclean, dishonest thought. He knows every mean, petulant, selfish, ungodly word that comes out of your mouth. He sees the envy of your heart. He knows our thoughts from afar. Every one of us is having dealings with God right now. And every one of us will have dealings with God in the day of judgment. But you see, Hebrews 10:31 says, "It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God." That's not a safe dealing with God to fall into His hands, to have God deal with you in judgment, cast you into hell saying, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." Now my question is this, fellows, girls, men, and women, teenagers: have you come to the conviction in your own hearts that you can have no safe dealings with God apart from Jesus Christ?

Second question: have you come to the conviction that only the Christ of the Bible can secure your acceptance with the Father? Have you come to that conviction, "If I do not lay hold of and have answering for me the Christ of the Bible and have no safe dealings with the Father"? Have you come to the conviction that only the Christ of Biblical revelation can secure your acceptance with the Father, that your acceptance is not in yourself? It's not in your deeds, it's not in your prayers, it's not in your sighs, it's not in your groans, it's not in your church attendance, it's not in your participation in the sacraments, it's not in rituals and forms. It is outside of yourself in a person, and that person is Jesus Christ. And faith is the casting of yourself--I say it reverently--into the arms of Christ, that He might present you to the Father. It is laying hold of Christ as the pierced One, the resurrected One, saying, "Lord Jesus, be my mediator with the Father, with the incensed Godhead that has righteous anger against my sins. Lord Jesus, be my propitiation, the One who turns away the wrath of the Godhead from Me because You bore that wrath in the room instead of sinners upon the cross." Have you come to the conviction that only the Christ of Biblical revelation can secure you acceptance with the Father?

Well, then I come to the cruncher, the third and final personal question. Is Jesus Christ right now your way, your truth, and your life? Can you say to the best of your knowledge,

"Yes, I have turned away from every hope to find in all the universe the raw materials that will make a way to God. I believe they are all in Jesus Christ. In the uniqueness of His person and in the perfection of His work, I am convinced, so convinced that I placed the whole weight of my soul upon Him. I put the feet of my soul upon Him as the way, the only road that leads to the Father. I joyfully acknowledge that He is My way"?

Is He your truth? Have you embraced Him as the One who speaks the words of God, whose truth makes free and liberates from the tyranny of men's silly notions about

life, the meaning of life, death and what lies beyond the grave? Take all of the theorizing of the most profound, insightful, intellectual philosophers of all the ages, and on the most simple issues that a little child asks ("Mommy, what happens when I die? Where do I go?"), and take all of that the philosophers have said and pile it up, and it's nothing more than a dung heap of human ignorance. Christ is the truth. Is He your truth? Do you cling to Him with a death grip in terms of His Word? You say reality is what Jesus says it is, no more, no less. Christ is my truth. Is He your truth, your truth about yourself, that you're a sinner; your truth about God, that He's holy; your truth about the only way that sinners can be made right with a holy God through the blood-shedding of the incarnate God, the Lord Jesus, through the triumph of His resurrection, through the impartation of His Spirit?

Is He your truth, and is He your life? Can you say in the language of John, "I know I have passed from death unto life"? Do you know what it is to say, "I once was dead"? As the Father said of the prodigal, "This my son was dead, but now is alive." He was dead in terms of communion with his father, dead in terms of delight in his father's presence and his father's ways and his father's rules. But when he came back with the disposition of desire to see his father's face and live in his father's presence and live under his father's government, the father says, "My son was dead and is now alive." And so it is true when Christ becomes our life. We love the Father's face, we love the Father's fellowship, we love the Father's rules. Is Christ your life? Is He your way, your truth, and your life?

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