

Week of September 19

KNOWING GOD THROUGH JESUS

[Evangelism Lesson]

Bible Passage: John 14:1-4

Key Verse: John 14:6

❖ *Significance of the Lesson*

- The *Theme* of this lesson is knowing God better.
- The *Life Question* to consider is, How can Jesus help me know God?
- The *Biblical Truth* asserts that people know God and experience His salvation only by believing in Jesus.
- The *Life Impact* is to help you be sure you know God through Jesus.

One Way or Many Ways to God

Almost everyone wants to go to heaven and most people believe they are going there. In a recent survey 68% of Americans believe they will go to heaven when they die, and only 3% believe they will go to hell. Why 43% of Americans believe pets will go to heaven, but 40% think it is only for people. Most persons are interested in what happens when you die, and in our post-modern, pluralistic culture it is stylish to believe almost any way will get you there.

Pluralism, the view that says there are many ways to God, stands in sharp contrast to what the Bible teaches and what Jesus claimed Himself. Jesus declared that he was the only way to God, to the Father, and this claim has been at the very heart of the gospel for almost 2,000 years. Further, it has been the foundation for Christian missions compelling us to go “and make disciples of all the nations” (Matt. 28: 19). This view of salvation is called exclusivism, and many find it narrow and intolerant. In one sense they are right. While we make a universal offer to all, without discrimination, to come to Christ, the way is narrow and exclusive. The way to God is possible only through God’s Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Only those who trust Christ truly know God. Only those who trust Christ will be welcomed into God’s heaven. This is not our message. This is the message of Jesus.

Word Study: Way

The Greek word translated **way** in John 14:6 is the Greek word *hodos*. The word can refer to a road or natural path. This is the way it is used most often in the synoptic Gospels and in passages like Acts 8:26 (“road”) or 1 Thess. 3:11 (“direct our way to you”). The word can also have a metaphorical meaning as in Matt. 21:32 and 2 Pet. 2:21 (“the way of righteousness”). Paul could speak of “an even better way” when talking about the essential nature of Christian love (1 Cor. 2:31).

In our text the word is personified as the Lord Jesus makes plain that He, and He alone, is the path to God. One must travel the road named Jesus to find their way to God. Jesus is the access to the Father, the highway to heaven. The **way** will become clear very soon: it will constitute the

shame and humiliation of a Roman cross. Jesus' own path or road was by **way** of the cross. It is by this *way* that He becomes **the way** for others. Jesus is not one way to God, He is **the way**, the only **way**. It is interesting to note that in the early days of the Church, Christianity was referred to as "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23).

Search the Scriptures

John 14-17 has been referred to as "The Upper Room Discourse" or "The Farewell Discourse" (chs. 14-16) and "The Lord's Prayer" or "High Priestly Prayer" (ch. 17). Our text is the first part of the discourse and is filled with words of comfort and promise, and it also answers two questions raised by Peter at the end of chapter 13: "Lord, Simon Peter said to Him, where are You going?" (13:36) and "Lord, Peter asked, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for You" (13:37). The disciples are confused and upset at the thought that Jesus would be leaving them soon. Graciously He explains to them some of the details and implications of His leaving, and in the process provides words of comfort and instruction for His followers in every generation. Jesus intends for us to understand that it is only through Him that one can know and get to God. Just as we rightly **Believe in God**, we should **believe also in [Him]** (14:1).

Jesus Prepares a Place (John 14:1-4)

*Why were the disciples troubled? What kind of claim was Jesus making in 14:1? What is the real imagery of **many dwelling places** in v. 2? When Jesus says He will come back, to what was He referring?*

Verses 1-4 [Lifeway types]

When John wrote the fourth gospel there were no chapter or verse divisions. In fact he would have written with all capitals and no separation between the words. This is important for this section of Scripture because these verses are, in part, a response to the end of chapter 13. There Peter asks in verse 36, "Lord, . . . where are You going?" He follows this question again with a similar query, "Lord, . . . why can't I follow you now?" I will lay down my life for You" (v. 37). Jesus responds by predicting Peter's denial (v. 38). This response, no doubt, was troubling to the disciples. They cannot go where He is going and the leader among the 12 is going to deny the Lord. Jesus senses this and provides words of comfort and encouragement to them, but also to us.

Your heart must not be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me." The cross and all of its suffering is on the near horizon, and yet Jesus takes the time to minister to His followers. They are confused and unclear about what is happening. Based upon what Jesus just said, the future does not look very promising. Jesus realizes that His words concerning His soon departure need some explanation. He begins with a tender word of encouragement, and then a bold declaration that gives the reason for not having a troubled heart. **Believe in God**, trust the heavenly Father in any and all situations. He is the sovereign Lord, He is in control. He is never caught by surprise. But as you believe in Him, **believe also in Me**. Both statements have the force of an imperative or word of command, and the latter is also a striking claim of deity on the part of Jesus. As God is the object of your faith and trust, so Jesus should be as well. He is "the Word become flesh" (John 1:14) who speaks the words of God and does the works of God (John

5:19). You can trust Him in exactly the same way you trust God because He is God (John 8:58; 10:30).

Jesus now expounds on His earlier statement that He would be leaving by explaining why He would depart. His **Father's house** has many **dwelling places** and He is **going away to prepare a place for [them]**. The **Father's house** of course is heaven, and the phrase **many dwelling places** is a much better translation than the "many mansions" of the *KJV*. The *NIV* translates it "many rooms," the *NASV* "many dwelling places." *The Message* paraphrases and says, "There is plenty of room for you in My Father's home." There is more than enough room in heaven for the children of God. If this were not so Jesus says **I would have told you**. He then adds, "**I am going away to prepare a place for you.**" These words are open to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Does heaven need some type of construction work before we can go there and occupy it? Is our Lord still working on things after 1950 years? No, this way of thinking misses what He is saying. D.A. Carson is helpful at this point when he writes, "It is not that he arrives on the scene and then begins to prepare the place, rather, in the context of Johannine theology, it is the going itself, via the cross and resurrection, that prepares the place for Jesus' disciples."¹ This then is the means of preparation that makes the way for us to go to heaven, the **Father's house**. And, if our Lord is going to go to such great lengths, and He must experience the suffering of the cross to prepare the place for us, we can be confident the he **will come back and receive us, that where I am you may be also**. This looks forward to when our Lord returns to receive us into His presence. Paul also addressed this subject in providing comfort to the church at Thessalonica concerning their loved ones who had died (1 Thess. 4:13-18). At the rapture, we "will be caught up together . . . to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17). Because the disciples know Jesus and can trust Him just like they trust God (v. 1), they **know the way where He is going**. To know Jesus is to **know the way** to God and heaven, even if you do not understand all the specifics and details. To know Christ for who He truly is and what He has done is enough. It is also essential.

Verses 1-5 teach us several important lessons about our faith:

- 1) To trust Jesus is the same as trusting God.
- 2) Putting our faith in Jesus is the way to cure a troubled heart.
- 3) By His cross and resurrection Jesus prepared the way for us to go to heaven.
- 4) Jesus has promised to come back again and take all of His followers to be with Him in His Father's house.

Jesus is the Way to the Father (John 14:5-7)

Is the confusion of Thomas something with which you can identify? What is the significance of Jesus' incredible claim in v. 6? How do others handle the "way to God" issue? How does v. 7 complement v. 1?

Verses 5-7 [LifeWay types]

Christians throughout Church History have criticized and appreciated Thomas. We take shots at him because of his lack of faith and understanding, yet we appreciate him because we so easily identify with him. In some ways he is like Peter: quick to offer an opinion and not shy to tell you what is on his mind (see John 11:26; 20:24). Jesus assures them that they know the way to the

Father's house and Thomas assures Him that they don't. Thomas affirms that they are still unclear about the Lord's destination and therefore, **How can we know the way?** If we don't know where you are going we most certainly can't know the way.

Jesus' response is one of the most important in all of the Bible. It has significance both for the doctrine of Christology and the doctrine of salvation. Jesus replies to Thomas and the other disciples by boldly declaring, **"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."** This crucial statement requires our evaluation at several points. Verse 6 literally begins with the declaration "I myself am the way." Jesus used an intensive pronoun to emphasize that He and He alone is **the way, the truth, and the life**. Significantly, the definite article *the* prominently appears before the words *way, truth, and life*. Contrary to popular opinions in the 21st century, salvation is not possible through many ways; there is only one way. As **the way**, Jesus is the path to God. He shows us how we can come to the Father. As **the truth**, Jesus is the presentation of God. He is the very embodiment of the revelation of God. As **the life**, Jesus is the power of God. He is able to breathe spiritual life into the souls of those who are spiritually dead (see Eph. 2:1-3).

Jesus reinforced this truth when He said, **No one comes to the Father except through Me**. Jesus explains this staggering statement when He says that to know Him is to know the Father (14:7). Whatever makes the Father God, Jesus is all of that as well. To know Jesus is to know God. To see Jesus is to see God (John 14:9). When we come to Jesus, we can be sure we have come to the only true God.

The religious climate today is similar to that of the first century A.D. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the Roman Caesar claimed to be God. Augustus was deified and worshiped by his subjects. Roman and Greek goddesses were worshiped.

Today the claim that Jesus is the only way to God is not popular, because the western world is characterized by an intellectual, philosophical, and cultural outlook called postmodernism. Rejecting all absolutes, postmodernism asserts that there is no absolute truth; rather, truth is an individual determination. All worldviews are equally valid and no one worldview is more true than any other.

How do followers of these religions and movements view the person and work of Jesus Christ? What do they think about John 14:6? Three theological ideas dominate the contemporary religious discussion of salvation.

Universalism

Also known as pluralism, universalism teaches that there are many ways – or even an unlimited number of ways – to God and that everyone will eventually be saved and reach heaven. This is a popular position among liberal theologians, as well as among New Age adherents.

Inclusivism

This view claims that Jesus is the only Savior but that it is possible for Jesus to save people even though they may never have personally trusted Him for salvation. Inclusivism teaches that people can receive salvation by responding to God's revelation in nature and conscience (called

general revelation) or possibly even through other world religions. Although other religions have an imperfect understanding of the one true God, the truth they possess is believed to be adequate to save them. It is said that we may be able to recognize these “anonymous Christians,” a phrase coined by the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner, by their good deeds. Hence, belief in a works salvation often accompanies this position.

Exclusivism

Exclusivism is the teaching that the church has held for most of its history and the view that naturally emerges from what Jesus says here in John 14:6. This orthodox, evangelical position teaches that salvation comes only through a personal faith commitment to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. This requirement does not apply to those who die before reaching an age of moral responsibility and accountability, such as infants and small children, or to those who are incapable of moral discernment, such as mentally handicapped people. These individuals are the objects of God’s saving grace and mercy. But exclusivism affirms the absolute uniqueness and finality of God’s revelation in Jesus. He alone is the Savior, the definitive and ultimate expression of divine truth. Only in Him can people be saved. God would not have sent His only Son to die on a cross if He could have saved us another way. The cross of Christ is God’s greatest testimony that Jesus is the exclusive way to the Father.

How should Christians view universalist and inclusivist claims? Proverbs 14:14 says,

“There is a way that seems right to a man,
but in the end it leads to death.”

Though they may differ in their particular teachings and rituals, all religions other than Christianity teach salvation by good works, self-reliance, or personal accomplishment. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ and His work on the cross proclaim the good news of salvation by grace through faith in the accomplishment of One who paid in full the price of sin as our Savior – Jesus, our Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5).

Christians are often criticized and put down for claiming that Jesus Christ is the only Savior for humankind. We are frequently called narrow-minded bigots. However, if we are to be true to our Lord and the Bible, we must proclaim such a message. This is exactly what Jesus said about Himself.

In his classic *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas a Kempis comments on Jesus’ words and drives them home with great force:

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.²

This is not the first time, nor will it be the last, that Jesus proclaims a great “I am” statement, a wonderful and unique feature of John’s Gospel. There are seven such declarations, and each highlights a different aspect of our Lord’s person and work, with the focus always on His divine nature as the God-man.

John 6:35	I am the bread of life
John 8:12; 9:5	I am the light of the world
John 10:7, 9	I am the door of the sheep
John 10:11, 14	I am the good shepherd
John 11:25	I am the resurrection and the life
John 14:6	I am the way, the truth, and the life
John 15:1, 5	I am the true vine

Jesus adds to His bold affirmation by making it clear that to **know Me** is to **also know My Father**. The words must have been ringing in the apostle John’s ear when he wrote his first epistle, for in 1 John 2:23 he writes, “No one who denies the Son can have the Father; he who confesses the Son has the Father as well.” He adds in his second letter, “Anyone who does not remain in the teaching about Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God. The one who remains in that teaching, this one has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Jesus affirms that **from now on**, from this time forward, **you do know Him**, the Father, God, **and have seen Him**. To know Jesus is to know God. To see Jesus is to see God. His words could not be clearer. Their importance cannot be overstated.

Verses 5-7 emphasize the following important truths:

- 1) Jesus is the only way to God. There is no other possibility for anyone to get to God except through Him.
- 2) It was Jesus Himself who said He was the only way to God. To disagree with this statement is to disagree with Jesus.
- 3) To know Jesus is to know God the Father.
- 4) To see Jesus is to see God.

Jesus Revealed the Father (John 14:8-12)

*Is Philip’s question in verse eight surprising to you? Do you think that it disappointed Jesus? How are we to understand Jesus’ statement, **The one who has seen Me has seen the Father**, in light of the doctrine of the Trinity?*

Verses 8-12 [LifeWay types]

Philip and the other disciples have, in a real and true sense, come to know God because they know Jesus. Yet there is still a lack of full recognition on their part which will not be completely cleared away until after His death and resurrection (cf. 20:28). Jesus has told them that to **know Me** is to **know My Father**. Incredibly they still do not get it, and so Philip asks Jesus **Lord, show us the Father, and that’s enough for us**. These words must have disappointed Jesus. It is one thing for His enemies not to recognize who He is, but these men have been with Him for three years. They have heard His words and seen His miracles. This is an important reminder that someone can look and listen to Jesus for some time and still not understand who He really is.

That Philip's statement disappointed Jesus seems clear from what Jesus says, **Have I been among you all this time without your knowing Me, Philip?** The sound of sadness drips from these words, and yet, Jesus does not end this important theological discussion but presses on with an even more direct statement than that of verse seven, **The one who has seen Me has seen the Father.** Jesus again drives home the point that the most intimate relationship exists between the Son and the Father, a truth He will now develop more fully. As John 1:18 affirms, "No one has ever seen God. The One and Only Son – the One who is at the Father's side – He has revealed Him." In the Son God is fully and perfectly revealed both in person and work. Philip and the others should know this by now, so Jesus gently but firmly chides them: **How can you say, show us the Father?** The Son is God as His Father is God. They are one in nature and essence, as is the Holy Spirit, a theme Jesus develops in John 14:15-26. But there is distinction of persons in the Trinity. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God; and yet, the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father. The three persons of the Trinity constitute the one true and living God (cf. Mat. 28:19; 1 Cor. 12:4-6; 2 Cor. 13:13). Within the Godhead exists the most intimate and perfect relationship. The love, knowledge and oneness of purpose that is shared is beyond finite human comprehension, but Jesus tries to help us catch a glimpse of it here. **Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me?** There is a mutual indwelling and intimacy that the Father and Son enjoy (cf. John 10:38). In fact, so intimate is the relationship between the Father and Son that when one speaks the other speaks, and when one acts it is the same as if the other is acting. **The words I speak to you I do not speak on my own.** Jesus in His incarnate state, perfectly obeys the will of the Father speaking the exact words His Father gives Him. By this Jesus can beautifully state, **The Father who lives in Me does His works.** Jesus grows more intense, determined that His closest companions would understand this crucial truth. **Believe Me** almost has the force of a command, you need to believe what I have just said. **I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.**

Jesus adds one additional avenue of compelling evidence: His miraculous works. **Otherwise, believe because of the works themselves.** Contemplate what you have seen, the turning of water into wine (John 2:1-11); healing a sick child (John 4:46-54); healing the lame (John 5:1-14); feeding 5,000 (John 6:1-15); walking on water (John 6:16-20); healing the blind (John 9); raising Lazarus from the dead (John 11:38-45). Jesus could do what He did because He was who He was. The miracles He performed are enough to prove He, and He alone, reveals the Father. He is the one worthy of your trust, your faith, the surrender of your life.

Truths from the verses in this section include:

- 1) Listening to Jesus and seeing His works is no guarantee you will come to an accurate understanding of who He is. Spiritual blindness will continue where an unbelieving heart persists.
- 2) The most perfect and intimate relationship exists between God the Father and God the Son.
- 3) There is a oneness of essence and nature but a clear distinction of persons in the Trinity.
- 4) The miraculous works of Jesus are a sufficient evidence of His deity.

Jesus Answers Prayer (John 14:13-14)

How is it possible for us to do greater works than Jesus when He walked on the earth? What does it mean to pray in Jesus' name? Does verse 14 give us "carte blanche" when we pray?

Verses 13-14 [LifeWay types]

Jesus concludes this section of teachings by emphasizing the fruitfulness of those who trust Him. **I assure you** is literally *amen amen* in the Greek language. The **New International Version** translates it, "I tell you the truth," the **New American Standard Version** as "Truly, truly." Believers are promised that they **will also do the works** that Jesus does, but then our Lord adds, remarkably, that we **will do even greater works than these, because He is going to the Father**. Exactly what this means has been much discussed. Some believe it is greater acts of humility and love, others the preaching of the gospel to greater numbers, and still others more spectacular supernatural works. None of these explanations is sufficient. The key to what Jesus means is found in the phrase **because I am going to the Father** (cf. John 5:20). The works that the disciples will do are greater because they follow the climax of Jesus' ministry in His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Following His perfect sacrifice for sin and resurrection from the dead a new day has dawned. The undeniable evidence of His passion and exaltation reveal conclusively His deity and the perfection of His revelation of God. They will preach the gospel in a time of greater power by means of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) and greater clarity for now Jesus has been "established as the powerful Son of God by the resurrection from the dead according to the Spirit of holiness" (Rom. 1:4).

Because Jesus is **going to the Father** as our "advocate" (1 John 2:1) and intercessor (Heb.7:25) we can be confident in our prayers. Jesus promises that **whatever you ask in My name, I will do it, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son**. He, in essence, repeats the promise in verse 14. Note carefully the conditions Jesus attaches to His promise. First, it must be **in My name**. Prayer must be in accord with all that Jesus' name represents concerning who He is and what He does. Second, what we ask must glorify the Father and the Son. First John 5:14-15 is in perfect harmony with what our Lord says here, "Now this is the confidence we have before Him: whenever we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears whatever we ask, we know that we have what we have asked Him for."

Truths from the verses in this section include:

- 1) Because we stand on this side of the crucifixion and resurrection, we can do even greater works than Jesus when He walked the earth in the limitations of human flesh.
- 2) Because our ascended Lord is in heaven to hear our prayers, we can be confident that He will answer us when we pray according to all that His name represents, and when we pray for the glory of God.

Spiritual Transformations

Troubled hearts can be put to rest when they hear the words of Jesus, consider all that He has done, and fully trust in who He is. He is the only way to God. A person, by faith, must trust their eternal destiny on that truth. He perfectly shows us who God is and what God is like, for He, Himself, is God.

Have you put your trust in Jesus alone to deliver you from your sin? Are you committed to the truth that Jesus is God and that He has perfectly revealed God to us?

Prayer of Commitment: Lord Jesus, I believe You are the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one comes to God the Father but by you. I gladly stake my eternal destiny on that truth, because I believe you, and you alone, can and will take me to Your Father's house to live there forever. Amen.

¹ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 489.

² *Ibid.*, quoted in Carson, 492.