

JESUS' WAY IS THE ONLY WAY:

A Sermon on John 14:6

by Randolph Constantine, Jr.

There is a verse in the Bible that just may be the most important verse in the Bible. I happen to think that it is the most important one. It is a verse that is recognized by almost everybody when someone quotes it; but it does not have an easily recognized "address" the way John 3:16 does. Many -- dare I say most -- don't know where to find it in the Bible. A pearl of such great value should not be hidden and should be better known. First, I'll tell you where to find it, just to see if it rings a bell; then I'll quote it. It is John 14:6. It says, "**I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.**" In red-letter Bibles, this verse is in red. It is a direct quote from our Lord Jesus.

What does this mean? There are some obvious questions about this verse and some not so obvious. Is its meaning obvious? It would seem so on its face; but within Christianity, there are some who don't think it means what it says. For instance, there is controversy within the Episcopal Church because their Presiding Bishop, Katherine Jefferts Schorri, is willing to say that Jesus is **A** way to God, but she will **NOT** say He is **THE** way.

Before I clear that up, I want first to look at the context in which Jesus said this so that we won't fall into the error of taking this important verse out of context.

If we read Chapter 13 of St. John's Gospel, we see that the Apostles are in the upper room with Jesus to celebrate the Passover. He has washed their feet and declared to them that one of them will betray Him. Jesus has pointed to Judas as the betrayer by giving him a morsel of bread; Judas has left on his errand of betrayal; and Jesus has foretold that Peter will deny Him three times before the cock crows. The 11 Apostles who are still with Jesus are nervous and fearful of what is to come, so Jesus speaks to calm and reassure them in the first few verses of the fourteenth chapter, saying:

¹Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ²In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, you may be also. ⁴And where I go you know, and the way you know. ⁵Thomas said to

Him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, and how can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. ⁷If you had known Me, you would have known my Father also; and from now on, you know Him and have seen Him."

Here, we can see that in verse 6, Jesus is answering a question Thomas asked Him. I included verse 7, that last sentence that begins "If you had known Me" so that you can see that verse 6 completes Jesus answer to Thomas; but also so that we can see that the answer can stand alone; because even alone, it says what it says.

This wonderful verse, John 14:6, raises a lot of questions because it says so much in so few words. The BIG Question is, of course: Is Jesus the ONLY way to salvation? The other questions are more subtle.

As to the Big Question, there is much in the New Testament that implies that Jesus is the ONLY way, but here are two verses that say it explicitly:

The first is Acts 4:12, in which the Apostle PETER says, when speaking of Jesus: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

The second is the 12th verse of the 5th chapter of St. John's First Epistle, which says: "Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life."

So, if the last part of John 14: 6 is not clear enough on its own, these two verses answer the BIG Question very clearly -- clearly enough that I don't think we need to spend any more time on this so-called BIG question, at least for those who believe in the truth of the Bible. For those who do NOT believe in the truth of the Bible, we, as Christians, have some work to do.

The negative implications of Acts 4:12 and 1 John 5:12 are serious and sobering. Just consider Acts 4:12 where it says "there is no other name ... by which we might be saved" and think of what that implies. Think of all those who have no chance of salvation, all those who will not gain eternal life with God. Just for a start, in Heaven, there will be: No Buddhists, no Hindus, no Muslims, no deists, no pantheists, no new-agers, much less no agnostics or atheists. As I said just a little bit ago, we have some work to do if we are to fulfill our Lord's Great Commission.

The Big Question and its answer is certainly not all there is to John 14:6. In examining this verse, I started at the end of the verse because that is where the Big Question arises. I'm going to continue moving from the end of the verse to the beginning because that will help to keep us from being overwhelmed by all the power and implications of everything in this wonderful verse, but this doesn't mean that we shall forget everything we know.

Remember what John said about life in 1 John 5:12, the verse I read just a moment ago? **"Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son does not have life."** Let's put that together with Jesus' saying, "I am ... the Life;" The theologian William Hendriksen says that based on the Greek text, Jesus is talking about Life as opposed to Death -- Life as a concept -- so that **life** means *eternal life*.

The Bible is full of verses, especially in the St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans, that equate Sin and Death in such a way that the Death being talked about is the eternal death of Hell, which is not an obliteration into nothingness as the annihilationists would like to believe. It is the death of eternal torment. The opposite of that hellish death is the LIFE that Jesus gives -- eternal life with Him; and there is no middle between these two.

The next part for us to consider toward the front of the verse is "I am ... the Truth". This is a simple statement, which, by itself, does not tell us anything we do not already know. After all, Jesus is God -- one Person of the Trinity. As such, He does not lie because He **cannot** lie, for He is without sin. Hendriksen puts it this way: "Jesus is the embodiment of Truth." To say it another way, Jesus is Truth *incarnate*. Jesus, himself, implied it in yet another way the very next day in His trial before Pontius Pilate.

As John reports in the 18th chapter of his Gospel, there was an exchange between Jesus and Pilate, in verses 37 and 38 in which Pilate asks Jesus, **"So you are a king?"**, to which Jesus answers:

"You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born, and for this purpose I have come into this world -- to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." In effect, Jesus had just told Pilate that He, Jesus, is the Truth.

Pilate then utters his infamous question, **"What is truth?"** before going out to tell the Jews that he finds no guilt in Jesus. Pilate's problem was that he did not listen to Jesus, but then the Holy Spirit may have hardened his heart and closed his ears so that he could not hear, because if

Pilate had listened to Jesus, the crucifixion may not have been carried out, *as it had to be*, in order for God's plan to unfold. Pilate was not really interested in finding out the truth -- the truth that Jesus is God Incarnate; because that would have upset his comfortable life as Roman noble.

And now, in our backwards journey through this great verse, we come to the part of the verse that is the answer to what Thomas did not understand. Thomas wanted to know where Jesus was going, but Jesus had already told him where and why-- to His father's house to prepare a place for them. We already know that the destination to which the Apostles would ultimately go was to be in Heaven with God the Father and Jesus; but it seems that Thomas just did not understand this from all of what Jesus had said to him in verse 4. From what we know about Thomas, it seems likely that he would not completely understand it until he received the knowledge brought to the Apostles by the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, on the day of Pentecost.

But because Thomas did not understand the destination, he also asked, "... [how can we know the way?](#)", and that brings us to the first part of Jesus' reply, "[I am the way...](#)".

Now this would **not** have been puzzling to Thomas, for a reason related to the Jewish culture of the time. Jesus' answer, "I am the way..." is obviously a metaphor; for Jesus the man, was not, and is not, a road or a path. As someone whom I read recently said about this statement, "Jesus is not paved with asphalt." William Barclay points out that the metaphor of using the words *path* and *way*, as in "the way to God", to mean *a manner of life* had been deeply ingrained in the Jewish culture long before the time of David, which is why the Old Testament is so full of phrases such as: "[walk in thy ways](#)", "[the way of the Lord](#)", "[the way which the Lord had commanded](#)", "[the paths of righteousness](#)", and "[the path of life](#)". The Bible, especially the Old testament, is full of phrases such as these. One of the most beautiful uses of this idea is in Isaiah 35, verses 8 through 10:

[⁸ A highway shall be there, and a road,
and it shall be called the Highway of Holiness,
The unclean shall not pass over it,
But it shall be for others,
Whoever walks the road, although a fool,
Shall not go astray.](#)

[⁹ No lion shall be there,](#)

Nor shall any ravenous beast go up on it,
It shall not be found there.
But the redeemed shall walk there,
10 And the ransomed of the Lord shall return.
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

This passage from Isaiah is more than a little pertinent because of the use of the words, *redeemed* and *ransomed*. This is because Jesus is our Redeemer, and the ransom he paid for us sinners was to give his life for us on the Cross.

It is also worth noting that this passage from Isaiah 35 has a parallel in Revelation. In fact, what you can see from Isaiah 33:20 through Isaiah 35:10 are parallels to what is found in Revelation 19:11 to Revelation 21:27. The parallels are not exact, and they are not in order, but they are there. I leave it to you to read these passages and see the parallels. I shall just mention two of them: the sword of God in Isaiah 34:6 is the one that comes out of Jesus' mouth in Rev. 19:15; and the verses of Isaiah 35:8-10 describing the Highway of Holiness on which only the redeemed shall walk has to be the way into the gates of the New Jerusalem, the city into which Rev 21: 27 says *27 But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.* There are other parallels if you have eyes to see.

Jesus is the way in so many ways. He has told us in the Gospels how we are to live, and so He has told us the path, the way, on which we must walk. He is our guide on this way, and He leads us and guides us every day. He has made it possible for us to walk on His path by paying that ultimate price for our sins; and in the end, he will be both our advocate and our judge.

Hendriksen says that Jesus is the Way because He is the mediator between God the Father and man and that this mediation flows both ways, from God to man and from man to God. But what is most important for us is the mediation from man to God with Jesus' being our advocate, as is said at the end of the prayer for the Whole State of Christ's Church, where the minister says:

"Grant this, O Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only Mediator and Advocate." -- our Advocate and Redeemer through His work on the Cross.

Now, I have not laid out for you what Jesus' way is. It is laid out for us in the Gospels and the Epistles. It can be boiled down to a few sentences, but has also been the subject of thousands of sermons and books. One of those collections of a few sentences is something we repeat in every Communion service: the Nicene Creed. First, we must believe in Jesus Christ and all that the Nicene Creed says about him; and secondly, we must live our lives according to how he would have us live, loving our neighbors as ourselves. To expand any further on this would be to give another sermon.

Instead, let me take this back-to-front analysis of this great verse and turn it back around and put it all together. Jesus is the Way to the Father because he is the mediator between God and man in both directions, and he is our Redeemer who has paid a price no man or group of men could ever come up with. He is the Truth because he is God Incarnate, and he tells the truth in all that He says. He is the Life we aspire to, the eternal life with God, into which we can be accepted only if we have been baptized with water and the Spirit, believe in His Sovereignty and Resurrection, repent of our sins, and obey His commandments -- not an impossible set of requirements.

So, when Jesus says, " I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, but through Me.", he is telling us all I have just said, **and** that His way is the ONLY way.

If we have set our sights on being with Him in heaven,
We had better believe it!..... Amen.