The Way, the Truth, the Life

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[0:00] Well, the University of Glasgow was founded in 1451 with the motto, Via Veritas Vita, via Veritas Vita,! which is a Latin translation of John's Gospel, chapter 14, verse 6, which we just read when Jesus says, I am the way and the truth and the life. Now, Glasgow University still has that motto. I know some of you are graduates of Glasgow University.

Some of you are currently at Glasgow just now. I wonder if you knew that was the motto of the university. You'll still find it if you look around the West End on some of the old university buildings. And of course, the university today will value that principle of education, that education should help you find your way in life. It should teach you the truth and it will help you to have a good and better life.
But I guess for most people, those words, truth, way, truth, life, are probably divorced from the original meaning that Jesus gave them when he first uttered them.
Because what Jesus says here is radical. When you think about it, Jesus is saying, I am the way and the truth and the life. Without Jesus, he is saying, you will never discover where you should go.
[1:31] Jesus is saying, without him as the truth, you will never learn what you should know. And Jesus is saying, without him as the life, they will never understand how we ought to live.

In fact, Thomas Akempis, the medieval theologian, said, without the way, there is no going. Without the truth, there is no knowing. Without the life, there is no living.
And so in this single statement of Jesus in the Gospel of John, Jesus is telling us that he is the key to life itself. He is the only way to God.
Where it's only by knowing God through Jesus that life makes any sense. And that's why Jesus emphasizes the fundamental importance of believing.
I wonder if you noticed that as we read those verses, in these 14 verses that we're looking at today, in this conversation between Jesus and his disciples, the word to believe comes up six times.
[2:35] Now, remember, this is the farewell discourse where Jesus is in an upper room in Jerusalem with his disciples the night before he dies.

And so Jesus is preparing his disciples for his imminent death. And so Jesus is speaking these words directly, specifically to them and not to us.
But of course, Jesus is preparing them for what will happen when he's gone. And so whilst his words may apply to us, they first apply to Jesus' disciples before they apply to us.
And that context really helps us understand what Jesus is saying here. And so we're going to look at these verses under three headings this afternoon, all connected around this theme of believing.
So the first point, believing comforts troubled hearts. Second, believing answers confused questions. And third, believing equips for greater works.
[3:34] So first of all, believing comforts troubled hearts. We said Jesus is about to depart. He is going towards his death. And so he wants to comfort his disciples.

Look at verse one again. Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. So Jesus doesn't want them to be troubled.
Now, we've already read earlier, if you've been with us in John's gospel, that Jesus himself is troubled. He's troubled because he is moving towards his death on a cross. And yet Jesus here focuses on the fear of his disciples because he knows that they are distressed.
Because if he's got to say, do not let your hearts be troubled, then clearly he realizes his disciples are troubled. Now, remember, these are guys who have left everything to follow Jesus.
And now Jesus has said that he is leaving them. And so they're worried and they're confused about what is going on. But Jesus tells them they don't need to be. They must believe in God and believe also in Jesus.

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[4:45] That's the cure for their troubled hearts. They've got to trust Jesus completely. Now, their world is about to fall apart. And they'll be overwhelmed.

And so they've got to listen to Jesus because Jesus knows what he is talking about. Because what Jesus going will do will actually be for their benefit.
Look at what he says in verse 2 to 4. Okay. What does Jesus mean when he says, Well, the simple answer here is that Jesus is referring to heaven.
Heaven. But we should also be thinking of the fullest expression of heaven that we find in the Bible. And it comes really at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation. This great vision of the ultimate temple where John says, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.
And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem. And I heard a loud voice coming from the throne saying, Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people.
[6:10] And he will dwell with them. Okay. So Jesus going to the cross to die for sin is part of the preparation for his disciples getting to this place where they will dwell with God.

So Jesus is saying there's a place reserved for you. And in a sense, Jesus is going to confirm their reservation. And so the many rooms here gives the sense of there is plenty of space for everyone to be in God's very presence.
All who believe in Jesus will go to be with God. Where the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross would take away sin and save Jesus' people so they can spend eternity in the very presence of the God who made them.
So this salvation is really the ultimate outcome of Jesus' death for his disciples, but also for us. And that's why Jesus tells them here not to be troubled.
He's not leaving them forever. He's saying that he'll see them again, whether on the other side of death or when he returns at the end of time. Because Jesus' second coming was part of the plan all along.
[7:30] That's why he's talking about what he's talking about when he says he'll come back to take them to be where he is. He'll return at the end of history to gather all of his people from down through the ages.

Where heaven and earth will be joined together and God will dwell amongst his people for all eternity. And so Jesus is saying he is coming back to take us to where we belong.
He's coming to take us home. I wonder if you've ever seen Dunkirk. It's one of my favourite movies by director Christopher Nolan. It's about Operation Dynamo when the Allied soldiers were evacuated from the beaches of Dunkirk by British civilians who all sailed across the English Channel in their tiny boats to rescue the troops.
And so the British soldiers were surrounded by the German troops and they were stranded. And in the film there's this moving scene with Kenneth Branagh. And he's the Royal Navy commander who's been tasked with overseeing the evacuation of the trapped British troops.
And the music, as it always plays a big part in Christopher Nolan's movies, the music reaches a climax. And Branagh sees something in the distance. And so he's handed a pair of binoculars by one of the other soldiers.
[8:59] And the soldier asks him, what do you see? And he replies, home. And then the music changes and the focus switches to the arrival of hundreds of tiny wee boats coming across the channel to pick up the soldiers.

And Branagh's eyes fill with tears. So do mine every time I watch it. Because it's such a powerful moment. But everything seems lost. More than 300,000 otherwise doomed soldiers are about to die.
But then they're rescued. And it's such a great illustration, I think, to help us understand God's purpose in salvation. Because God wants to dwell with his people.
And so Jesus came from the Father in order to die. To then return to the Father in heaven. And then one day he is coming back to take us home.
To where we're supposed to be. And so while Jesus was troubled because he was going to the cross to not only suffer the pain of crucifixion. But also to suffer the pain of God's forsakenness as he bore the burden of our sin.
[10:16] He's able to reassure his disciples here that they need not be troubled. Because Jesus was overcoming the greatest trouble of all.

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What's that? Well, it's separation from the God who made us because of our sin. And Jesus would be defeating sin and death on the cross.
So that we could have access to God and be home. And so his disciples back then, but also those of us who are his disciples today, have actually nothing to fear.
Because by believing in Jesus, troubled hearts can't find peace. So there were reasons for the disciples to be troubled. Sure there were. There are reasons for you and me to be troubled.
Sure there are. But because of Jesus' work for us, there are far greater reasons for why our hearts need not be troubled. Just think about the logic of Jesus' words before we move on to our second point.
[11:20] If Jesus goes to prepare a place for his disciples and he is returning to earth to take them there, then there's absolutely nothing that can harm them in the in-between times, is there?

And so what was true for Jesus' disciples is true for us too. Jesus keeps us. He keeps us until he comes to get us, to take us to be with him in heaven, to take us home.
And so the better we grasp this in our heads and it sinks deeper into our hearts as we believe it, then the less troubled our hearts are bound to be.
So that's the first point. Believing comforts troubled hearts. Second, believing answers confused questions. And this is verse 5 to 11. Remember, this is a conversation between Jesus and his disciples.
And so what Jesus says next basically flows from questions that his disciples ask him. So it becomes like a Q&A session that you might have at the end of a talk or a lecture or at work.
[12:26] And so we'll look at Thomas' question and then Jesus' response. And then Philip's. So first of all, Thomas in verse 5 to 7. Jesus just said in verse 4, You know the way to the place where I am going.

And at once Thomas pipes up and he says, verse 5, Lord, we don't know where you're going. So how can we know the way? Now Jesus has just said he is going to his father's house.
But Thomas is clearly puzzled and he's probably not the only one. But Jesus could not have been clearer in spelling out where he's going. And Jesus, you pick up here, Jesus expects his disciples to know where he's going.
But they're confused. They're confused. And so Jesus tells them, verse 6, Now by saying that he is the way and the truth and the life, Jesus basically summarizes much of what he's been teaching in people and his disciples throughout John's gospel already.
Jesus has been saying who he is and what he came to do. And it comes together in this statement where he says that he is the way to God. Now that's an exclusive claim, isn't it?
[13:47] Jesus is the only way of salvation. Which might sound intolerant. Might even sound bigoted. Because, well, aren't there so many other religions in the world today?

So isn't it arrogant to say that Jesus is the only way to God? I mean, don't all religions lead you to God? Aren't they just different paths that will get you to the same destination in the end?
Well, interestingly, that's not how any strict adherent of any religion would actually see it. In fact, it would insult a strict observer of any religion for you to say to them, Aren't all religions just the same?
What you believe is no different from what anyone else believes in any other religion. Anyone who thinks all religions are the same is actually ignorant of what all religions say.
And so the difference between Christianity and every other religion, if we're thinking about how we separate them, is that none of the other religious leaders ever claimed to be God.
[14:59] And so none of them ever came back to life after they had died. It's only Jesus. His resurrection proves his claim of divinity.

And so this exclusive claim that Jesus is the only way to God is made because Jesus is unique. He's the only one who claims to be divine.
And so if he says he's the way to God, he's got the right and the authority to say so. So what is arrogant is actually ignoring what Jesus says and believing you can get to God your own way while rejecting him.
Think of it like this. Why would God send his son to die on a cross for our sin if there's another way for us to be accepted by him?
Jesus is the way. And Jesus is also the truth. Now earlier in John's gospel in the prologue, he told us that Jesus came from the Father full of grace and truth.

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[16:05] He's the truth because his words and his works come from God. So Jesus spoke what the Father commanded him to say and Jesus did what the Father commanded him to do.

He always pleased his Father. So everything that Jesus said and everything that Jesus did is the truth of God that he has revealed to us.
In Jesus, God is speaking to us, telling us the truth. And Jesus is the life because it's by believing in Jesus that we have life.
And we've seen in John's gospel that this life is eternal life, which is life to the full now while we're alive, but it's also life everlasting after we die.
So it's both a present reality and it's also a future hope. And this life finds its origin in Jesus himself.
So those who claim to know God but don't believe in Jesus don't know God at all.
[17:11] And so Jesus says to Thomas in verse 7, So Jesus doesn't let Thomas off the hook here, does he?

He doesn't accept Thomas' excuse for his ignorance. Jesus assumes Thomas knows more than he's letting on. Thomas is like the man who gets into the car and wants to go somewhere but can't find his keys.
He's frustrated. He can't get going. He can't get moving. Well, all the time his car keys are in his pocket. So for Thomas, the answer to his question is staring him in the face.
It's Jesus. Jesus is the way. Now, you may be a bit like Thomas when it comes to Jesus, just not really sure what to do about everything that Jesus claims.
But what Jesus says applies to you as well as to Thomas. Because Jesus says in no uncertain terms that he is the only way to God, which means you can't simply dismiss Jesus or make excuses for being ignorant about what Jesus says.
[18:25] You've got to take Jesus seriously. That's Thomas. And then there's Philip in verse 8 to 11. He speaks up in verse 8 and says, Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.

So he's asking to see the Father. He reckons if he could just see God, it would be a game changer. Isn't that what people think? If only God would just show himself, then we'd believe.
In a sense, Philip is expressing this longing that the human heart has to see God. In fact, I had this chat with somebody a couple of weeks ago who expressed something similar to Philip.
He felt that it would be much easier for him, in fact, not just him, it would be much easier for everybody all over the world, if God just showed up. How simple would it be to believe in God if God just showed up, he said.
If God revealed himself, that would be enough. Then I would believe. And I'm sure you've heard the same from the folks you know. Or maybe you've even felt the same.
[19:32] Well, just see how Jesus responds here in verse 9. Jesus answered, Don't you know me, Philip? Even after I have been among you such a long time, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

How can you say, show us the Father? He's making an astonishing claim here. He is saying, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. And so Philip has missed the obvious.
He hasn't been paying attention. The Father had been working through Jesus, and so revealing himself in Jesus. And so Philip and the other disciples, because they'd seen Jesus, had already seen the Father.
It's just they hadn't fully recognised Jesus' true identity. They hadn't grasped that in Jesus, God had made himself known to them and to the world.
And that's why there's a sadness in Jesus' response, along with the rebuke of Philip, because despite being with Jesus for a while, Philip still doesn't really know him.
[20:35] Verse 10, Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing his work.

So they don't believe that Jesus is in the Father and that the Father is in Jesus. And so the words Jesus says, he says, come from the Father. And the works that Jesus does, he says, come from the Father.
So there's complete unity between Jesus and the Father. Two persons, but one God. And so we look at Jesus to know what God is like.
The disciples had seen Jesus and so they had all the proof that they needed to believe. And that's why Jesus says there in verse 11, Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in

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me.
Or at least believe in the evidence of the words themselves. Of course the disciples should believe that Jesus is just, what Jesus has just said about his relationship with his Father.
[21:37] They should believe because he said it. But at the very least, Jesus says you should believe on the basis of the works I've been doing. So John's gospel, the first half, usually called the book of signs because all of these signs, all of these miracles, all of these works are pointing to who Jesus is.

So these miracles give the reasons for why we should believe that Jesus is God. And in seeing Jesus, we see God. And so for any like Philip who still think they need to see proof before they believe, or they just want God to show himself, or at least if God were to perform a miracle before my very eyes, then I would believe that would be enough for me.
The answer Jesus gives is, look at me. Look at Jesus. Because God has revealed himself fully and finally in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
It happened in history, so we can't miss it. It happened through the most significant figure who's ever been recorded to have walked the surface of this earth, Jesus.
And so that's enough to believe. And so we can't expect something more to satisfy our curiosity. We can't claim that Jesus hasn't been clear enough in revealing God the Father to us.
[23:10] And so I guess that's why we, like Philip, need to open our eyes and respond to the evidence before us. And just on this, please don't think actual miracles will clinch it for you if you don't believe in Jesus.

Think about the disciples. They got front row seats to see all the miracles that Jesus ever did. And Jesus still needs to tell them to believe.
More often than not, it's that people can't believe rather than they won't believe. Sorry, it's not that people can't believe. It is more that they won't believe.
They refuse to believe and go where the evidence is leading them. And that's not to say you won't have your questions or your doubts like Thomas. That's what Thomas is famous for, isn't it? Doubting Thomas. But if you keep asking questions and questions and questions, when the evidence is already before you, you just never get anywhere.
[24:11] Because what Jesus offers to us is not just propositions. He offers himself. He offers a person. The person of Jesus is the one we need to discover the way, the truth, and the life.

In him alone will we find the way. In him alone will we discover the truth. In him alone will we experience life as it's meant to be. So believing answers confused questions.
Firstly, believing comforts troubled hearts. And thirdly, believing equips for greater works. This is in verse 12 to 14. Let's just read it again. Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing and they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.
And I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Father may be glorified in the Son and you may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it. Okay, what's Jesus saying here?
Because his words seem a little puzzling, don't they? And so the question is whether is Jesus speaking here to all believers? So is this like a general blanket promise to all believers?
[25:25] Is Jesus suggesting that we'll be able to do even greater works than him? Well, surely not. Jesus made blind people see. He made lame people walk.

Jesus controlled the weather. Jesus raised the dead. We can't do any of that. So it would seem that Jesus is not saying this to us. So who's he saying it to then?
Well, of course, he's talking to his disciples, the apostles, in that upper room. He's speaking directly to them, not to us. Notice that Jesus says there in verse 12, very truly I tell you.
The you is his disciples, whom he continues to address in verse 13 and then again in verse 14, which would indicate to us this is not some general promise to all believers, but it's a specific promise to his disciples, to the 11 remaining apostles.
He's talking to them. And so while everything Jesus says applies, not everything applies to us in the same way it applies to the apostles. And so what's the basis for these greater things?
[26:34] Well, it is that Jesus is going to the Father. Now, if you look down, Jesus is about to teach about the Holy Spirit in the second half of John chapter 14.

The Holy Spirit, remember, would come after he had gone to the Father. After he's gone, the Spirit comes. So after Jesus' death would be his resurrection, then his ascension, then the Spirit would

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come and the Spirit would continue the work of Jesus in the world.
And we see this happening in the book of Acts. Because what Acts records is the works that Jesus continued to do through his apostles by his Spirit.
So it seems the power to do these greater things would come from the Holy Spirit. That's how I think Jesus' words can and do apply specifically to the apostles.
So for example, just think about it. The Spirit enabled the apostles to do that greater work by spreading the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth. In Acts chapter 1, verse 8.
[27:40] So as well as the miracles, greater numbers of people came to believe compared to the smaller numbers of people who came to believe during Jesus' own earthly ministry.

And it happens like Jesus said it would. It happens in answer to prayer. So the apostles prayed in Jesus' name and great works were done. And that's why I think it's best to understand Jesus' words here as applying directly to the apostles.
So in the section, it begins with Jesus comforting his disciples in the light of his going. And it ends with Jesus comforting his disciples in the light of his going.
But by telling them, he's got work for them to do after he's gone. What a great comfort for them. Yes, he's going, but as his Spirit comes and descends on them, Jesus will be with them to do his work in the future.
What a great hope and purpose for their lives. And so as we wrap all of this up, the key here, as I said at the beginning, in this whole passage, is believing in Jesus.
[28:57] believing Jesus is all he claims to be and that Jesus will do all that he has promised to do. Because that's the only way we will know comfort for our troubled hearts.

That's the only way we will find answers to our confused questions. You know, God is not playing some massive game of hide and seek with us.
That just goes on forever and encompasses the universe, is he? No, of course he isn't. He's made himself known to us in Jesus Christ.
Where anyone who really wants to find God can find him by simply looking in the right place.
Jesus says, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Good news.
[30:01] Good news for you. Good news for me. Good news for our world. Let's pray together. Thank you, our loving God, for sending your son.

Thank you that through Jesus, we can know you. We can be in a relationship with you that begins in this life, in this world, but one that goes on forever whereby we will spend all eternity with you, dwelling in your presence, the God who made us and wants us to be with yourself.
And so we thank you for how you've made that possible and for how you have shown us in Jesus. We give our thanks, in Jesus' name. Amen.
Amen. Amen.

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