

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## The seven "I Am's" - "I am The Way, the Truth and the Life"

I remember, when I first came to live in Lancashire, hearing the saying, "Your promises are like pie crusts - always breaking." Since then I have often thought how true this can be. Even the most honest of people find it difficult to keep promises. We sometimes make promises, in the heat of the moment, with a genuine desire to help someone. It is only later that we discover how difficult it is to deliver what we promised.

In John 14 we discover Jesus Christ is the person who is able keep every promise He makes. John is the only gospel writer to give us a full account of the words and actions of Jesus on the Passover night before He was arrested and crucified. In spite of the fact that the cross lay before Him, these narratives, from chapter 13 to chapter 17, are not filled with sorrow and dismay. They are the most powerful descriptions of the Lord's love for us and His promises to us - promises He was able to keep.

In John 14, seven things are presented to us.

In verse 1, the *Person of Jesus* as the object of our faith - "believe also in Me." He would no longer be the object of sight to a few faithful followers on earth, but in heaven, the object of faith to the millions who would trust in Him.

In verse 2, a *place is prepared* for us in heaven - "I go to prepare a place for you." The disciples had looked for an earthly kingdom but Christ promises an inheritance in heaven.

In verse 3, *the personal return of Christ* - "I will come again, and receive you to Myself." If heaven was to be the home of His people, He promised to come again to take them to that home.

At the end of the same verse, His presence is promised- "where I am, there you may be also." Whilst Jesus was on earth, they enjoyed His presence but now He was going back to heaven. In the future, He promised they would never be separated from Him.

In verse 13, He introduces them to the power of His name- "whatever you ask in My name, that I will do." It was the name of Jesus which was included on the title above the cross - a name men still despise. But Paul reminds us, in Philippians 2, that the name of Jesus "is above every name" (Philippians 2:9) and that, "every tongue should confess Him as Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). The early Christians knew the power of the name of Jesus and His promise has not changed. We can still ask in His name.

In verse 16, we have the promise of the Holy Spirit as a helper, or Parakletos - "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever - the Spirit of truth." Jesus was not going to leave them orphans. He was going to send another Helper. That is, another Helper of the same type. If we want to know who the Holy Spirit is like - look at Jesus.

Finally, in verse 27, peace is promised - "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Jesus promised peace at a time when the circumstances leading to the cross were all but peaceful. In the words of Paul, a peace which passes all understanding. He wants us to enjoy the same peace.

If I wrote out a cheque for £1,000, it is expected that I would have the resources in the bank to meet its payment. We have seen that in John 14, Jesus makes some very large promises to His people. He underwrites these in verse 6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." Of all the "I am" statements in John's gospel this is the most comprehensive. The person who washed the disciples' feet as a lowly servant in chapter 13 and was nailed to the cross in chapter 19 affirms Himself to be the only way of salvation, the absolute truth and One who gives and sustains life. He is the One who has all the resources needed to fulfil every promise He made.

Today we live in a world which has all but ceased to believe in absolutes. Everything is relative to how the individual feels and thinks. The Christian faith is based upon the absolute statements of God. Even the disciples had difficulty with this in relation to Jesus. Thomas did not understand His work. "Lord, we do not know where You are going," he

said in verse 5. "Show us the Father," he asked in verse 8. Philip did not understand His person. It has always been difficult for people to understand how the lowly Jesus of Nazareth could be the way of salvation, the embodiment of truth and One who is life. To understand this more clearly, we need to look at what He said.

## I AM

Before exploring the meaning of the way, the truth and the life, we must consider the first two words of our verse, "I am". These two words link the Jesus of the New Testament to the Jehovah of the Old Testament. The God whom Israel worshipped was the Person who created everything. He was all-knowing and all-powerful. It was in this way that He revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14, as the "I AM". It is interesting that in the same passage God speaks to Moses about His people and says, "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them." (Exodus 3:7 and 8). It is the I AM who speaks about Himself as a Saviour coming down to deliver His people. This is one of the strongest themes of the Old Testament. God is presented as the only Saviour, His word is truth, and He is the creator and upholder of life. But the I AM was only known from a distance. Even Moses was not allowed to see Him in all His glory. The High Priest could only go into the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and the Temple on a few special occasions. God's power to save was unquestioned but there was always a distance between Him and His people.

The fullness of the heart of God and His true nature were never fully revealed until Jesus came into the world. What we must never forget is that the Person who came into creation was the Creator. It was God who became Man. It was the Son who became the Servant. John 1 explains this to us. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). The deity of the Lord Jesus is asserted throughout this gospel. It is John who records Jesus' words, "before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58). When the officers came to arrest Jesus in the garden they said they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus replied "I am" and they drew back and fell to the ground (John 18:6).

The deity of Christ is fundamental to the Christian faith. In a day when this is questioned, along with many other fundamentals of the Christian faith, it is important that true Christians assert what the Bible teaches. Christ could not profess to be the way, the truth and the life if He were not God.

## THE WAY

If you came to my house, you would normally come in the front door. But you could also come in the side door and you could even come in through our patio door at the back of the house. Whichever way you would arrive in my home. In the Old Testament the tabernacle had only one entrance. There were no side or back ways into God's dwelling place. There is only one way to God and into heaven; that is through the work of Christ.

God's Messiah, who would come to deliver His people, is promised in the Old Testament. The Jews and even the Samaritans looked for Him. The woman at the well in John 4 said to Jesus, "I know the Messiah is coming" (John 4:25). A Saviour was expected. However, when Jesus came it was a surprise to His people. They understood Him to be a mighty deliverer who would set them free from Rome and establish an earthly kingdom. Instead, God revealed Himself as a far greater Saviour, not simply dealing with the needs of those in Israel but One who, in the words of John the Baptist, was the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). God made it clear from the very outset of man's failure that sacrifice was needed to bring man into a right relationship with God. It was God Himself who made the first sacrifice when He killed the animals to clothe Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:21). Later when Cain offered to God a sacrifice of the fruit of the land, which had been cursed, God did not respect it. He did respect Abel's sacrifice of a lamb.

Abraham explained to Isaac that God would "provide for Himself a lamb for a burnt offering" in Genesis 22:8. In Exodus 12, when God instituted the Passover, Moses was told to instruct the people of Israel to take a perfect lamb and to kill it. Its blood was to be put on the doorposts and lintel of the house where they lived. God promised, "when I see the blood I will pass over you" (Exodus 12:13). All these examples verify that the way to God was by sacrifice. But equally these examples looked on to the Person who was the perfect sacrifice - the way to God. Christ was the fulfilment of all God's pictures and promises. He was the Lamb of God. He sacrificed Himself so we could come to God. He did not make a way, He was the way.

When the passenger ferry, *Herald of Free Enterprise*, sank several years ago, many people lost their lives. There were also many heroic stories of those who tried to save others. In one remarkable instance, a man made himself into a human bridge so that that people could walk over him to safety. This is what the Lord Jesus did for the world; He became the way to God. This demonstrated the wisdom of God. God's problem, if we can use such an expression, was how He could remain righteous and still forgive sin. His wisdom is seen in Christ. He personally paid the penalty for sin by suffering all the righteous judgement of God against it. The penalty for sin has been paid in the death of Christ. Now God can righteously forgive those who come to Him by faith in Christ. God is no longer at a distance. When

Jesus died, the curtain of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom (Matthew 27:51). This provides a remarkable picture of how the way to God was now opened by the death of Christ.

At the end of verse 6, Jesus declares, "No one comes to the Father except through Me." There is no choice in this matter. Jesus is the only way to the Father.

In Acts 16:17, we read about the "way of salvation". This is a reference to the Gospel which explains God's salvation - in other words how God's salvation works. We also read in Acts 19:9 and other places about the Way. This refers to Christian faith and the pattern of life which it produced. It was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians" (Acts 11:26). They did not give themselves this name but others, seeing Christ in them, called them "Christians". Jesus is not only the Way by which we come to the Father, but He is the pattern and power for our lives, once we have done this.

## THE TRUTH

"What is truth?" was Pilate's question to Jesus in John 18:38. It is interesting that he did not wait for the answer. Great thinkers and the most ordinary of men have asked the same question. Today, the fashion is to think that truth is no longer absolute but open to interpretation depending upon how we feel or think. John 14:6 teaches us that truth is a Person.

Jesus had told Pilate that He had to come into the world to bear witness to the truth and that everyone who is of the truth heard His voice. Truth has been described as the reality lying at the basis of an appearance - the essence of a matter. In Romans 15:8 we read about the "truth of God" and how God, in Christ, had fulfilled all His promises. All the Old Testament promises and prophecies were centred on Christ. On the road to Emmaus, in Luke 24, Jesus went through the whole of the Old Testament expounding the things concerning Himself to the two disciples who walked with Him. Later they spoke of "their hearts burning within them" (Luke 24:32) as He opened the scriptures so they could understand. They were of the truth and heard His voice.

In Ephesians 4:21, we read about "the truth that is in Jesus." This means that truth in all its fullness and scope is embodied in Him. He was the perfect expression of the truth. In John 8:44, the Devil is described as having "no truth in him" and as a "liar and the father of it". He had deceived man from the very beginning of creation and the consequences of that deception were catastrophic. During this time, God's truth had had its effect on the hearts and lives of many of His people. However, in spite of all the faithfulness there had been also been failure. When Jesus came, He was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). All God's promises were summed up in the Person of Christ. His words, actions and thoughts were all perfect. No one before had ever kept the law of God until Christ came. No one had ever loved neighbour and enemy alike until Christ. Wisdom, gentleness, humility, and grace were characteristics which had in some measure been seen in the people of God down the ages. Now they were displayed perfectly in Jesus. There were no mixed motives, no ambition, no love of money or power. The Devil could not deceive Him when he was a hungry Man in the desert as he had succeeded in tricking Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Lord Jesus defeated him with the truth - the Word of God.

When people ask, "What's it all about? What's the meaning of life?" the answer is found in Jesus. In Him we see the heart of God displayed and the power of life. Think what the world would be like if everyone lived as Jesus did. What sense and meaning there would be instead of the violence, destruction and corruption we see today. It is the Christian who has the responsibility to live as Jesus did and witness to the truth. We have indwelling us the Holy Spirit who is also described as the Spirit of Truth. We also have the word of God. The Lord Jesus prayed in John 17 that the Father would, "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth." (John 17:17). God has provided everything that is necessary to know the truth of God and for the Christian to grow more like Christ.

## THE LIFE

At the very beginning of his gospel, John introduces us to the One who is the Word and declares, "In Him was life" (John 1:4). It is wonderful to realise that the Person who created life came into creation. I once read a story of a father and son walking through some woods. They came across an anthill which had been partly destroyed. The ants were rushing about trying to repair their broken world. The father asked his son what he would like to do for the ants. The young boy replied, "I'd like become an ant and help them repair their home."

When God looked down on His creation, so damaged by sin and its effects, His heart responded by sending His Son. When He came, He brought life. In Luke 4, we find a tremendous introduction to that life. In verse 16 we read, "So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up." A little earlier I referred to the "I AM" who spoke to Moses and said "I am come down to deliver them" (Exodus 3:8). It is astonishing that Jesus, the Son of God, is referred to as being brought up in Nazareth. This was the place from which the disciple Nathaniel doubted that any good thing could come (John 1:46). But it was in that poor squalid town that Jesus showed He was the life. In the synagogue on the

Sabbath day He read from the book of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." (Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-19). Moments later He said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). At last, the One Who was the life was here. That life was demonstrated in all its power. When He touched the leper, that leper he was clean (Luke 5:13). When He spoke to the sea, it became calm (Luke 8:24). When He cast the demons out, there was peace (Luke 8:35). When He called to Lazarus from the tomb, Lazarus came out alive (John 11:44). When He gave thanks for the five loaves and two fishes, five thousand were fed (Luke 9:17). Wherever Jesus went, He brought life. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

In John 10, we learn from the Lord Himself that "He had power to lay down His life and power to take it again" (John 10:18). He had come to display life but he had also come to lay it down in love for us. It is touching to compare what the Lord read at the beginning of His life-giving public ministry with His own sacrifice.

- He preached the Gospel to the poor; in 2 Corinthians 8:9, He became poor.
- He healed the broken hearted; in Psalm 69:20, reproach broke His heart.
- He proclaimed liberty to the captives; in John 18:12, He was led away captive.
- He recovered the sight to the blind; in Luke 22:64, He was blindfolded.
- He set at liberty those who were oppressed; in Isaiah 53:7, He was oppressed.

God is light and God is love. The nature of God was manifested in the life of Christ and in the way His life was laid down. But the Lord Jesus had power to take it again. In resurrection, we see the life in all its victorious power. The book of Hebrews reminds us that Christ lives now for us in the power of an endless life (Hebrews 7:16). We share in that life. "He who hears my words and believes in Him who sent me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgement but is passed from death into life" (John 5:24).

This is a life which is to be expressed. John reminds us of this in 1 John 2:6, "He who says he abides in Him (that is Jesus) ought himself also to walk just as He walked." Christians are to live here as Christ did. The pattern is a simple one. The Lord Jesus lived for His Father when He was on earth. Now Christians are to live like Him on earth. In the words of Paul, "You were bought with a price therefore glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20). How do we glorify God? By living like Jesus did until the day we live with Jesus.

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