

I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life

4/7 I AM Series

John 14:1-7

03 14 2010 Sam Jones Memorial UMC

Introduction

Navigation devices are a booming business in personal electronics. **Global Positioning Systems** are found in automobiles, cell phones, handheld devices, and even watches. They have revolutionized how we get from Point A to Point B.

The GPS depends upon 24 to 32 Medium Earth Orbit satellites that transmit microwave signals, enabling receivers to determine location, speed, direction, and time. The military originally designed the system for targeting accuracy, and the satellite network is still managed by the United States Air Force 50th Space Wing.

In 1983, Ronald Reagan made a limited version of the navigation system available for civilian use. In 2000, Bill Clinton removed all restrictions, and the margin of error decreased from 1,000 feet to 65 feet. This dramatically increased the popularity of the personal devices.

The Global Positioning System has evolved from targeting ICBMs tipped with multiple nuclear warheads to directing commuters to the nearest Starbuck's. Perhaps this is a partial fulfillment of the prophet's words in Isaiah 2:4: "*They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.*"

I. I AM the Way, the Truth, and the Life

This morning we are continuing our worship series on the seven "**I AM**" statements of Jesus in the Gospel according to John. Today's text comes from John 15. On the night before his crucifixion and death, Jesus shared a Last Supper with his disciples. He warned them about what the next hours would bring; but then the Lord spoke these words of comfort and assurance:

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you so. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going."

Have you ever sat in a class where everyone but you appeared to understand what the teacher was saying? In reality, however, no one else had a clue either! The disciples did not understand what Jesus meant, but there was one man who wouldn't pretend otherwise. Thomas raised his hand and plaintively asked, "*Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*"

Jesus answered: "***I AM the way, the truth, and the life.***" Today we are focusing on the first part of Christ's statement: "***I AM the way.***" Christ shows us:

- 1) The way to salvation.
- 2) The way to live.

3) The way in daily life.

II. I AM the Way: Salvation

Jesus is THE way to salvation. The Lord went on to say, “*No one comes to the Father except through me.*” In Christ, God has created a new covenant or relationship with his people.

You may recall from high school English the difference between **indefinite and definite articles**. Indefinite articles include “a” and “an.” The definite article is “the.” This grammatical distinction is crucial in hearing and responding to Jesus’ words. Jesus did NOT say “*I am A way*” to salvation. Instead, Christ declared, “*I am THE way.*”

We live in a pluralistic society with a variety of different religious beliefs. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Over 75% of the population still identifies themselves as Christian. However, our population also includes significant numbers of Jews, Mormons, Islamists, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.

Last fall *The Washington Post* (August 30, 2009) published an article about **Facebook** religious preferences. When a participant completes a profile, one category is “*Religious Views*” with a 100 word limit. The most popular response by far is “Christian.” It is followed by “Islam” and “Atheist.” Others go farther afield—the # 10 most popular response was “Jedi.” And a surprising number of people online identify themselves as “Amish!”

American Christians live in a dynamic tension. On the one hand, we are thankful to live in a land with religious freedom. People are free to worship or not worship as they choose. The foundation of our government is that ALL people are created equal and endowed with certain God-given, inalienable rights. We of all people should be the first to affirm the liberties of every citizen.

On the other hand, we hear Jesus’ words: “*I AM the way.*” Not “A way,” not “One of the ways,” but “THE way.” All paths are not the same. All faiths are not equal. All religions are not valid. In a politically correct world, we are tempted to think, “It doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere.” However, this sentiment is shattered upon Christ’s words, “*I am THE way . . . no one comes to the Father except through me.*”

Jesus Christ is THE way. However, this exclusive claim is radically inclusive. ALL are invited to receive God’s gifts of forgiveness and eternal life.

III. I AM the Way: To Live

Jesus is the way to salvation. Secondly, Christ teaches us **the way to live**. In the New Testament, the Christian faith was first known as “**The Way**.” We began this Lenten journey by hearing these words of Jesus: “*If anyone would come after me, he must deny self, take up his cross, and follow me.*” The essence of Christian discipleship is following in the footsteps of Jesus, living as our Lord leads us.

Only later in Antioch were Christ's followers first called "*Christians*." (Acts 11:26) The title "*Christian*" literally means "*Christ-like*." Martin Luther said that Jesus' followers are "*little Christs*." Disciples follow the example of their Master.

In the 1990s, "**WWJD**" bracelets and bumper stickers became quite popular. "WWJD" stands for "What would Jesus do?" The phrase first appeared in an 1896 book by Charles Sheldon entitled In His Steps. The characters in the book attempt to lead their lives by the simple credo: "What would Jesus do?"

The Hebrew Scriptures contain over 600 different commandments, ordinances, and laws. The Law serves as a protective fence around God's people. The Ten Commandments and other Scriptural principles post "No Trespassing" signs on the places where we should not go. When we ignore these signs, someone always gets hurt.

Despite knowing better, however, we all occasionally go astray. We sing the hymn: "*Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.*" There's a reason The Lord's Prayer includes the words, "*Forgive us our trespasses.*"

When you go off course, a GPS will recalculate a course to get you back on track. You will hear a small voice that says, "**Recalculating, recalculating.**" Then you can find your way. The Holy Spirit continues to call, convict, seek, and woo our lives. The Lord loves us too much to leave us alone. There's always a way back home.

Within the boundaries of God's law Jesus said that the Bible can be summed up in these commandments: "*Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength*" and "*Love your neighbor as you love yourself.*" All else is commentary on God's Word.

In his farewell address to the disciples, Jesus said, "*A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" (John 13:34-35) Those who seek to answer the question "What would Jesus do?" find themselves answering time and again, "Love."

In his life and example, Jesus showed us the way to live. The Lord came to serve and not to be served. He associated with sinners and was unafraid to touch the leper. He turned the other cheek. He helped the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and the lame to walk. The Lord forgave his enemies and prayed for them. Jesus sought out the least, last, and lost. Jesus said that when we minister to "*the least of these,*" we have ministered to God.

So when we take the time to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and sit with the lonely, we are people of the Way. When we sacrifice time to teach a children's class, deliver Meals on Wheels, serve as a Pink Lady volunteer, or work in the Church Shop, we are people of the Way. When we pray for one another, worship in harmony, mail a card to the grieving, or give a special offering for some need, we are people of the Way.

IV. I AM the Way: Daily Direction

First, Jesus Christ is THE way to salvation. Secondly, God's Word teaches us THE way to live. Thirdly, the Holy Spirit **guides us along the way in daily life**. Jesus described God's Spirit as our Comforter, Consoler, Teacher, and Guide.

While in college, I elected to take an **Economics** course. At the time, I mistakenly assumed it would be an easy “A!” So I looked in the course catalog and discovered that the basic subject was divided into two courses: Macro and Micro Economics. “Macro” means “large” and refers to the overarching sweep of economics. “Micro” means “small” and studies particular cases within the larger framework.

As we seek God's will in our lives, I believe these two categories of Macro and Micro are helpful in understanding how the Lord calls us to live.

A. Macro

God has a Macro or overall will for our world. God's ultimate goal is the foundation of his kingdom in the world. Not just in a future, completed fashion, but in individual lives. God’s kingdom comes whenever and wherever the Lord rules.

In The Lord's Prayer, “*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done*” are the same prayer repeated. To do the one is to do the other. For the most part, the way we are supposed to live is spelled out in detail in the Scriptures. Mark Twain once said it wasn't what he did understand about Scripture that bothered him. It was what he did understand!

The rich young ruler came to Jesus with question, “*Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?*” Christ's first response was, “*You know the commandments . . .*”

If we asked Jesus, “What's your will for my life?” then he might answer, “You've gone to Sunday School and church, read your Bible and Upper Room. You know what to do. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Love your neighbor as yourself.” This is enough to keep us busy for a life time.

B. Micro

The Macro or overarching will of God for our lives is clear. He wants to adopt us as his children and then teach us to live up to our family name! Yet there is also a Micro or individual side to God's will. And I think this is what most Christians probably mean when they ask, “What is God's will for my life?” We face specific questions and decisions in our living, and sometimes God's direction seems unclear. What do we do? The best way to learn God's will is to abide in Christ in a daily relationship.

In a *Reader's Digest* article, a writer told about his mother who had over 200 plants in her Florida home. Exasperated by the disinterest of her children in the hobby, she hit on a way to get their attention. Before a recent trip to the mall, they found a series of notes on the refrigerator. “Mike, you'll find money for one shoe under the kudzu pot.” “Mary, the money for your new skirt is under the mignonette.” “And, Mike, the money for your other shoe is in the dish with the philodendron.” The children finally decided it was easier to learn to identify the plants than move all 200 pots in search of the money!

There are other ways we learn about God’s will in our lives. John Wesley talked about the “means of grace” that enable us to grow in Christian discipleship; and one of the side benefits of spiritual maturity is seeing God’s will more clearly.

For GPS to give an accurate reading, it requires four satellites OR three satellites and the altitude of the location. I read an article explaining why this is so, but the techno-jargon made no sense to me. Something about requiring four sphere surfaces to solve for

the position. Regardless, it takes multiple sources to get an accurate fix. Depending upon one source alone can get you into trouble.

In this clip from *The Office*, we see the dangers of putting TOO much faith in a GPS without using some common sense along the way.

DVD	<i>The Office</i>	Season 4, Disc 1	<i>Dunder Mifflin Infinity</i>
	Begin: 33:33	“Proceed straight.”	End: 35:20 Close-up of Michael

There’s an old story about a person who sought God’s guidance by randomly flipping open the Bible. His finger landed on a verse that said, “Judas went and hung himself.” Thinking this was not relevant to his situation, he tried again. The second verse said, “Go and do likewise!” There’s a reason God gives us multiple sources of guidance!

Think about the various resources God gives us to determine the direction of our lives. Some obvious answers exist. Bible study, prayer, fasting, the counsel of friends, circumstances through which the Spirit acts.

I got a Tom-Tom GPS for my car this past Christmas. The menu offers various voices for the device. My personal navigator’s name is Samantha. Overall, I’ve found it to be helpful; however, I have discovered that the Tom-Tom is not infallible. Several times it has given me incorrect directions or stopped short of my destination.

Although we have used the image of a GPS in worship today, oftentimes I find that direction for our Christian walk is more like an old-fashioned **compass**. The needle on a compass points to geographic north. When using a compass in the woods, you determine the direction to travel and then use the compass to sight the way. However, a compass does not take into account hills, valleys, trees, undergrowth, creeks, etc. Oftentimes, you have to detour from a straight path; but a compass will keep you going in the right direction.

Conclusion

There are times in life when we find ourselves repeating the anxious words of Thomas: “*Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*” Time and again we hear Jesus respond, “*I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*” Christ speaks to us words of salvation, holiness, and guidance. We are a people of THE WAY.