

The Way

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[0 : 00] This morning, we're continuing in our ongoing sermon series, Acts to All the World. And through this series, we're exploring the New Testament book of Acts. So, easy one to start with this morning.

Our focused passage this morning is found in Acts 9, verse 2. So let's hear that now. It's a bit of a refresher from our passage two weeks ago. He, Saul, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus so that if he found any there who belonged to the way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.

So we're going to be considering quite a few passages from Scripture this morning. So keep your Bibles handy. We're going to consider a lot of things this morning in our sermon titled The Way. Yep, good. I hear the Bible's coming out of the piece. So keep your Bible handy. The passages will be on the screen and I will read them as well. So you don't need to panic too much if you miss something.

Referring to followers of Jesus as Christians. And then the gatherings of those followers into what we know as the church. It's one common way of referring to the people of God.

[1 : 12] But there are definitely others, aren't there? Romans 16, verse 16 says, Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ send greetings.

1 Corinthians 1, verse 2 says, To the church of God in Corinth, To those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, Together with all those everywhere who call in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Their Lord and ours.

So we've heard already the church of God or the church of Christ. Ways of referring to Christians. Ephesians 1, verses 22 and 23 says, And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, Which is his body.

The fullness of him who fulfills everything in every way. Colossians 1, verse 13 says, For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. Do you hear those ones? Body of Christ. The kingdom of Christ. So those are some of the names that are used in scripture to refer to the church. And we can probably come up with lots of others, as I suggested, off the tops of our heads even.

[2 : 34] Flock. Bride. Family. There are many metaphors that scripture uses and the authors of scripture use to refer to the church.

But in the early days of the church, the followers were also known as people of the way. And we've heard that in Acts 2, verse 9. So then we hear that again in Acts 22, verse 4.

Saul of Tarsus persecuted people of the way, scripture says. After his conversion, Paul became a champion of Christ and the church. And the term the way was still being used then.

Acts 19, verses 8 and 9 tells us, Paul entered the synagogue and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God. There's a name.

But some of them became obstinate. They refused to believe and publicly maligned the way. So Paul left them. Acts 19, verse 23 tells us, About that time there arose a great disturbance about the way.

[3 : 44] In Acts 24, verse 14, Paul said, However, I admit that I worship the God of our ancestors as a follower of the way, which they call a sect.

I believe everything that is in accordance with the law and that is written in the prophets. Acts 24, verse 22, when Paul is brought up on charges.

Then Felix, who was well acquainted with the way, adjourned the proceedings. When Lysias, the commander, comes, he said, I will decide your case.

Felix was the governor of the area and he was presiding over Paul's trial. So have you ever thought about it? Maybe you haven't. These days, when we hear the words the way, we're more likely to associate them with one of Jesus' I am phrases.

I am the way. We're more likely to associate it with that, with that expression of Jesus, with that identifier of Jesus, as we are to refer to it as the church or Christians.

[4 : 49] And today the expression, I googled, the expression the way is rarely used, except by some ministry organizations. There are a few that use it. Individual congregations sometimes use it in their naming.

And unfortunately, even some cult groups use it. So what does it mean? What did it mean in the early days of the church? So we're going to consider this together. The way.

Here's your massive, so original meaning. Is that? Yeah. So just hold this thought. In Matthew 7, verses 13 and 14, Jesus says, Enter through the narrow gate.

For wide is the gate, and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate, and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

So Jesus taught in that teaching there that there were two gates, two ways people could choose from. A broad gate, or a way that leads to destruction, and a narrow gate that leads to life.

[5 : 57] And so as I touched on a moment ago, and we considered how the way might be most familiar to us, let's hear John 14, verse 6, where Jesus answered, and here it is, we touched on this a minute ago, Jesus answered, I am the way, and the truth, and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Jesus claimed he was personally the way, the only way to truth and life, the only way to salvation, the only way for us to be restored into relationship with and connect with the Father, the only way.

So it's likely a fair assumption that Jesus' own statements led to the use of the way to refer to his followers, right? We can see that. It makes sense. So now that we have an idea of how it was originally used, perhaps, what does it mean?

Well, in New Testament, you can see him there, Simon Kistemaker. New Testament scholar Simon J. Kistemaker suggests the term, the way, may refer to a few things.

It may refer to the teaching of the gospel. It may refer to a Christian's conduct and behavior as directed and guided by the gospel. And or a Christian community in general.

[7 : 20] Another theologian named J.B. Polhill suggests the use of the way reflects an early self-designation of the Jewish Christian community. They saw themselves as the true way within the larger Jewish community.

So Jewish Christians saw themselves as the way within the Jewish faith. So in both doctrine and life, the way likely refers to following Jesus.

That's the best way to summarize it. So our bigger teaching this morning, in what ways, pun intended I guess, is Jesus himself the way?

What does it mean to follow the way of Jesus? What are some of the things that we can see involved in doing that, in following that way? Well, let's begin.

What does it mean to follow the way of Jesus? Jesus, in John 14, 6, you can turn there. Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

[8 : 25] Ephesians 2, verse 18 says, For through him we both have access to the Father by one spirit.

The way of Jesus is the way to God. John 18, verse 37 says, You were a king then, said Pilate. Jesus answered, You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.

John 8, verse 32 to 36 says, Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. I wonder how many people use that quote recognizes that it comes from Scripture.

They answered him, We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we will be set free? Jesus replied, Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

[9 : 28] Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the son sets you free, say it with me, you will be free indeed.

Jesus came to bear witness to the truth, and that truth is what sets us free from the bondage of sin. The way of Jesus is the way to truth.

John 10, verse 10 says, The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

John 11, verse 25 says, Jesus said to her, Friends, Jesus came to give us a more abundant life. He came to give us the opportunity to experience a new life when this one is done. The way of Jesus is the way to life.

[10:37] John 13, verse 34 says, A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

Pretty clear directive, right? Matthew 5, verses 43 to 45 says, You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.

He causes his Son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. Jesus taught his disciples to love each other.

He modeled it and to even love their enemies, and he modeled that too. Jesus, the way of Jesus, is the way of love. John 15, verses 10 to 11 says, If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love.

I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. John 17, verse 13 says, I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I'm still in the world so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.

[12:03] Jesus wanted his disciples to experience full and complete joy, not just of their own, but he wanted them to experience his joy fulfilled in and through them.

The way of Jesus is the way of joy. John 14, verse 27 says, Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you.

I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 16, verse 33 says, I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace.

In this world you will have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world. Jesus offers a peace unlike any kind the world could ever offer.

Not even close. One that will ultimately overcome the world's tribulation. Can you take comfort in that? Especially now? The way of Jesus, my friends, is the way of peace.

[13:18] John 17, verses 20 to 23 says, My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be one as we are one.

I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

A little bigger chunk. Ephesians 2, verses 11 to 17 says, Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, which is done in the body by human hands, remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

But now, in Christ Jesus, you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.

[14:52] His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. See, Jesus prayed for unity among everyone who believed in him, regardless of their origin.

His death on the cross was an act of reconciliation, both between people and with God. The way of Jesus is the way of unity.

In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus gave us a model for praying diligently and humbly. And Hebrews 4, 14 to 16 reminds us, therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin.

[16:07] Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

1 John 2, verse 1 says, My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

Jesus modeled prayer for us, and he also stands in a gap between us and the Father, stands in that gap as an advocate who intercedes on our behalf.

Jesus, the way of Jesus, is the way of prayer. Matthew 6, verse 12 says, as part of the Lord's prayer, and forgive us our debts as we have also forgiven our debtors.

Then continuing in verses 14 and 15, For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But, if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

[17:23] Luke 23, verse 34 says, Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Through his life and ultimately even his death, Jesus taught and modeled the importance of forgiveness and forgiving others. The way of Jesus is the way of forgiveness.

John 15, 1 to 2 says, I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit.

Well, every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. And continuing in verse 8, This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

See, Jesus taught the importance of bearing fruit being connected to being his disciples. The fruit that we portray to the world, that we share with the world, that we bring to the world, better be good fruit to reflect the Lord that we serve.

[18:40] And in that, in remaining connected with Christ, that's the key, friends, that's the key to bearing good fruit. The way of Jesus is the way of bearing good fruit.

Matthew 20, verses 25 to 28 says, Jesus called them together and said, You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant. Jesus flips expectations. And whoever wants to be first must be your slave.

Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. And to give his life as a ransom for many. John 13, verses 12 to 17 says, When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place.

Do you understand what I've done for you? He asked them. You call me teacher and Lord, and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you should also wash one another's feet.

[19:58] I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly, I tell you, no servant, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.

Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. Galatians 5, 13 says, You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free.

But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh. Rather, serve one another humbly in love. Jesus came to serve others in love with no expectations, no qualifications, and he asks us as his disciples to do the same.

The way of Jesus is the way of service. Luke 24, verses 25 and 26 says, He said to them, How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all the prophets have spoken.

Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory? 1 Peter 2, verses 20 to 23 says, But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it?

[21:20] But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps.

He committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate. When he suffered, he made no threats.

Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. Jesus himself had to suffer to fulfill his mission and to enter into his glory.

And he calls his disciples, he calls you and me to be willing to suffer as well if necessary. The way of Jesus is the way of suffering.

2 Thessalonians 1, verse 10 says, picking up partway through the phrase there, on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among those who have believed.

[22 : 26] This includes you because you believed our testimony to you. 2 Thessalonians 1, verse 12 says, 1, verse 12 says, we pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified glorified in you and you in him according to God's grace of our God, according to the grace of God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3, verse 4 says, when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will also appear with him in glory. Hopefully I get some amens from this.

Not yet. But that's a good one too. Jesus will one day return and be revealed in glory. Do you believe that? Are you sure?

All those who believe in him, that's you, that's me, will also be glorified. Is that a pretty good deal? The way of Jesus, my friends, is the way, the only way to glory.

The way of Jesus. Maybe you're counting, maybe you weren't. I was going to give you a number before I started the whole list. I didn't want anyone to panic or go start lunch early.

[23 : 48] We've covered a lot this morning. A lot. There's a lot there. So we may or may not refer to ourselves as people of the way. Maybe now we can recognize it.

We can see the value there. And there are other designations of us as followers of Jesus that explain us, that describe us, or describe the church.

And they're no less scriptural. They're no less valid. They're no less acceptable and relatable. But we should never stop thinking about Jesus as the way.

The way to God. To truth. To life. To love. The way of Jesus is the way of joy. Of peace.

Of unity. And of prayer. The way of Jesus is the way of forgiveness. The way of bearing good fruit. The way of service.

[24 : 49] The way of suffering at times. And ultimately the way to glory. In Matthew 11 verses 28 to 30 Jesus said take this into your hearts this morning.

Come to me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Do you need rest right now?

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

My yoke is easy and my burden is light. And in Matthew 28 verses 18 to 20 he said all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit teaching them to observe all things I have commanded you.

[25 : 58] Take this to heart as well my friends and lo I am with you always even to the end of the age.

Have you accepted Jesus as your way to salvation? Your way to eternal life? Are you willing to become His disciple?

To live for Him? To learn from Him? My friends turn or return you've heard me say this before to Jesus as the ultimate way for you both in this life and as your promise for eternity.

Amen.