

I Am The Way.... (There were several brief interruptions during this sermon, which we have attempted to edit out of the recording, so apologies for the slight lack of flow in the middle.)

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Preacher: Peter Morrison

[0 : 00] A way up beyond Inverness is one of Scotland's loveliest glens, at Glenafric. And from there the more adventurous, and perhaps some folk have been fit enough to do that, can walk right through to the west coast to the wonderful high falls of Glomach.

It's a very beautiful area. Many years ago, a little bit up that Glen, a very highly committed Christian at Gordon Oswald had a house built on a corner of the road, so that everyone going along that road could see the front of that house.

Because he loved the Lord, he wanted as many people to know that he had experienced everything in Christ. So, in a prominent place in the front of that house, he had carved the words, In Christ is all.

A good man died, and a new owner took it over. And the first thing the new owner did, and this really happened, was to cement over the words, In Christ is all.

But the words are still there. What is it that drives a person to do something like this? What is it that compels a Dawkins to be a militant atheist?

[1 : 30] I believe that right behind it all, is the compelling and unacceptable words of Jesus, that we want to think about today. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And if the militant atheist is militant, why is he militant? Perhaps there's a fear at the bottom.

And the question we ask ourselves, if there's nothing to this, why get so worked up about it? But today, we're here because there's everything to it.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. Way, truth, life. Our Lord didn't waste words.

And if you count these words up, way, truth, and life, does it come to 13 letters? One of the most powerful messages in the words, 13 letters long.

[2 : 33] Isn't that absolutely amazing? Now, there are several I am sayings of Jesus, as well as I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus said in John chapter 6, two mentions, I am the bread of life. Now, what's the symbolism of this?

Ending hunger, giving satisfaction, and saying at the same time that he came down from heaven. There was a saying, I am the gate.

You can go in and out and find pasture. Now, isn't that a picture of absolute satisfaction? Christ the gate.

Going in and out through that gate and finding satisfaction. The gateway to life. The gateway to freedom. The gateway to hope. I am the vine.

[3 : 32] Source of fruit. A sense of dependence in a special relationship with Christ. Us being branches of the vine.

Not being able to live without him. That wonderful sense of dependence. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd, caring, feeding, leading, and facing danger for the sheep.

We'll come back to that later. Then I am the door. The entry into God's kingdom. Entry to salvation. A door that is open to all.

A door with endless possibilities. But nowhere are these sayings better summed up in the expression, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Everything possible is covered by this. At once they're startling, simple, but also exceedingly profound.

[4 : 40] They make demands which no other teacher has gone anywhere near. And they make an offer which no other teacher has been able to offer.

Are we dismayed today? Are we concerned about our relationship or the lack of one? Are we looking for answers to life, to life's mysteries? Are we grieved about the past?

Are we frightened about the future? Are we dismayed by what's going on around about us with COVID and politics and all the rest of it? In these words, we find the answer.

And the wonderful thing is this. It's an answer that is not in a theory, not in a philosophy, not in some code of practice. It's an answer that comes in a person whom one can know.

And here's the crunch about these words. Jesus leaves no room for theories. This statement is either acceptance or rejection.

[5 : 47] It's hope or despair. It's assurance or doubt. It's life or death. And when we see the life of Jesus and when we come to the cross, one writer has said, there are only two positions before the cross.

You've either got a bowed head or a turned back. So these were the sayings. And we come back to that in a moment. But what about the background?

If we look at the background to these sayings, they assume a power that is just unimaginable. The background.

Let's see what was happening. And if you look later at John chapters 11 to 13, the storm clouds were gathering around Jesus and these experiences had an intensity that was just immeasurable. Let me just mention one or two incidents to set the scene. And this is just totally inadequate. But let's just mention it. Chapter 11, the Jews were plotting to kill Jesus, having witnessed him raising Lazarus from the dead.

[7 : 01] The power of Jesus is something that they simply could not stand. Next chapter, chapter 12, Jesus is anointed at Bethany.

Passionate, pure love when he was anointed fragrance that he brought to the cross. As an aside, do we ever think of the effect of our actions for Christ?

When Jesus was anointed, Mary could not have thought that that fragrance would be brought to the cross. Our lives in God's hands and the smallest of actions have got immeasurable effect.

Then chapter 12, the triumphal entry, when the palm branches were strewn at his feet. Also chapter 12, coming right down, Jesus predicts his death.

He said, another very, very short phrase, but so precise, the hour has come. Four words.

[8 : 08] The hour has come. But in chapter 12, the Jews continued in their unbelief. Now we're building up the context here.

Then came the Last Supper. Symbolism of the bread and wine was something immeasurably important. But there was something else.

Jesus took a towel and he washed the disciples' feet. Now if you're plagued by doubt today and you're thinking, is there anything to this?

I think this is one of the most affirmative actions in the whole of Scripture. What other worldly leader would have washed the feet of a grubby set of disciples?

No, they've looked for power. They would have looked to have servants washing their feet. But Jesus undertook this extraordinary action. How we wish we would follow him more.

[9 : 14] Then chapter 13, Jesus predicts his betrayal. Same chapter, Jesus predicts Peter's denial. And so, this list of events that we've gone through, very inadequately, is a series of peaks and troughs.

The peak of the devotion of Mary, but then the troughs of the unbelief and the lack of comprehension of the disciples.

A roller coaster of solemn events. And then, of course, they were backed by a great assurance of Christ's relationship with God.

Very, very well expressed in the passage in chapter 14 that Gary has read. It's done for God's glory, referring to the raising of Lazarus, and also for showing Christ's own Godhead.

Then chapter 14 that we've just read has something else that's absolutely extraordinary. He says, and they were looking for who God was, and he says, I am in the Father, and the Father is in me.

[10:33] I have all the authority of God. Trust in God. And then he says, ask for anything, and I will give it.

So that's a background. We've had the sayings, and that's a background. And then this follows by an amazing confession of ignorance. Thomas, we do not know where you are going.

After all that had been said and done, the truth had not really dawned. Despite everything they had witnessed and participated in, in the miracles and all the rest and all the teaching, the future was clouded by earthly concerns.

These disciples still thought about Jesus as an earthly liberator, one who would give them hope, one who would, and they would be the great leaders of the people as great deputies.

And they still saw him as an earthly liberator. And imagine the heart of our Lord, teaching and teaching and teaching, and the message not getting through, not even the extreme gesture of washing the disciples' feet.

[11:51] the message comes to us. Never be discouraged when you feel you are not getting the message across. Because most of us only hear what we want to hear and are particularly resistant to ideas that we find difficult to accept.

I know many teachers had the experience of teaching what they thought was a really excellent lesson, and then finding out at the end of the lesson the pupils don't remember a thing, a devastating lack of recall.

Thomas expressed concern about the destination. He did not realize that walking with Jesus, he was on the way.

Now we've looked at the background, we've looked at this confession of ignorance, now we want to look at what it means to be on the way.

What does it mean to be on the way? Could I suggest to you there are three ways here, three expressions of the way.

[13:00] It was first of all the way to understanding. They could see, they wanted to find out about God, and they could see God in the flesh, flesh, in Jesus Christ.

Philip had asked, show us the Father, and he was told very simply, look, you're looking at the Father, I am in the Father, and the Father in me. Christ in the Father, the Father in Christ, Christ won it purpose, and all the life that he had was with God the Father.

And Jesus was the only access point to God, but the most obvious access this point. Now, there's enough here to fill out understanding, isn't there?

It's really, really big stuff, but I feel that accepting something doesn't mean that I have to understand it.

Now, many of us on switching on a television set understand the physics and the radio waves and all the rest of it. No, but you accept the picture, don't you? Now, this is not shutting off one's brain, but Christ give a demonstration, you can see God in me.

[14:17] And then he said, reasons for believing. Reasons for believing you can see God in me. And then he gave another reason, and the way to understanding.

Believe, John 14, 11, you can believe in the evidence of the miracles themselves. And earlier, in Luke, chapter 19, he had said, there's a third reason.

He said, if you don't believe, the stones cry out. We're getting back to what we did at the beginning, the evidence of God in the physical world.

Believe me because you see God in me. Believe me because of the miracles I've done. And if you can't do that, believe because of the wonder of God in nature.

And we have to say there, as we alluded to earlier, you can reach entirely wrong conclusions if you just have the one form of understanding.

[15:16] If you try to understand through nature alone, you can end up worshipping trees as animists do. You have to take these all together. Jesus, God.

Jesus, the worker of miracles. God in nature. So it was a way to understanding. it was also the way to freedom. If we understand this relationship, we are on the way to freedom because our whole life's perspective is changed.

Life's biggest questions are answered. How did we come to be here? Do I have a place in this world? How can I cope with the mystery of evil? How can I cope with myself at times?

It's the way to freedom of understanding. And so we come to another way, the way to understanding. It's the way to freedom.

It's also the way to hope. It's the way to understanding, the way to freedom, and it's the way to hope. Christ shows us the way forward, the way to hope.

[16:26] He doesn't promise an easy path. But you know there's this, on the way to hope, there's the total assurance that he will see us through.

He gives assurance, reassurance. He gives a freshness to the promise of Proverbs that was uttered so long, long ago.

The path of the justice is a shining light that shines more and more until the perfect day. And also, of course, John chapter 14. It's the way to glory.

The way to glory. hope. You know, we're talking about Christ the way. He's the way to understanding, the way to freedom, and then before that interruption, we're talking about Christ, the way to hope, the pathway that gets shining every day, the pathway, as Jesus said in that chapter we read, the pathway to my father's house.

The condition of the path may vary, but it is always in the right direction. And let this speak to us today, however bumpy we may feel the path, the path of hope is one that he is leading us on.

[17:45] And if we're trusting in him, however bumpy the path is, the path is always in the right direction. Let that speak to us today, whatever part of the path we are on.

We talk about Christ the way, the way to understanding, the way to freedom, the way to hope. You know, John Newton had a wonderful experience in finding Christ, slave trade master, and he, of course, is totally overshadowed by his hymn, Amazing Grace.

John Newton had, he was overshadowed in his, by his great hymn, Amazing Grace, but he was a wonderful pastor, and he was also a great, he wrote diaries and did many wonderful things.

And one of the lovely things that John Newton said was this. By way of reassurance, he said that what he thought were mountains were turned into valleys so often.

And if we're looking on the way today and we're finding the way bumpy, remember the mountains can be turned into valleys. And I remember that chorus that we learned as kids. Got any rivers you think are uncrossable?

[19:06] Got any mountains you can't tunnel through? God specializes in things thought impossible, and he can do all that none other can do. Christ the way, Christ the truth.

Very soon, Pontius Pilate would ask the greatest question ever. What is truth? It's amazing how very unworthy people can ask the most profound questions.

His problem was that he did not wait for an answer. This age says that the truth is what you understand it to be. All opinions are equally valid, so if I use my body any way I like, it does not matter because I am ruler of myself, and so of course you've got masses of problems with health service being overrun by lifestyle conditions, draining society.

I do my own thing, and that's very wrong, but there's worse. There's ignoring the evidence of the creator when we're looking for the truth.

Some years ago, a Harvard professor declared that for everything we would find a simple explanation and without putting God into the equation, without putting God into the gap in our understanding.

[20:36] What an approach to research. You rule out certain factors before you start the study, and that was back in the year 2005. That's 16 years ago, is it?

And he was given a half million pound grant with his associates to do that. I have followed up that professor's web pages, and in all his papers, there's not one scrap of information that is any near the truth, because you can't rule out God from the equation.

But if there's no truth, anything goes. I could even claim that the world is flat, if I believe it, and the Romans did. If you've travelled far enough, you could fall off the edge of the world.

How intellectually, profoundly, fraud. Then, the Bible says this very clearly, and we come back to God and nature. Since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, been understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

What a wonderful world we live in. Is this a product of chance? No, it's absurd. But we're not left with that. It's not the God of the gaps.

[21:55] I don't understand how the paper falls to the ground and doesn't come together. And I don't say, well, therefore, there must be a God. Because the Bible says that you add Jesus into this, and therefore man is without excuse.

Don't judge by what you see or hear around you. There's a clamour of secular Western Europe just to totally disregard God. And some have hijacked the truth.

Many years ago, in the 19th century, an eminent man who is still eminent today put on the flyleaf of his great work, the front page, these words, a quotation, let no man think or maintain that a man can search too far or be too well studied in the book of God's word or in the book of God's works.

Do you know where that was put? It was put in the front page of the first edition of the origin of species. Charles Darwin recognised a higher power, but of course, his work has been hijacked as an excuse for ignoring the truth.

But there's more than that. We have the Holy Spirit working in us as we read in John 14. Taught by the Spirit, we know what is true. And you've got this great assurance of the truth.

[23 : 31] Jesus said in John 14, peace I leave with you and you will be taught all things. Isn't that wonderful that we have this absolute assurance of the truth and having the peace of God in our hearts?

What a foundation our faith has. Now we're nearly finished. But we saw the way, the truth, and now finally the life.

I am come that you might have life and have it to the full. And we get back to the sheep saying of Jesus, I am the good shepherd.

This refers to the sheep. This was life to the sheep under the threat from thieves. John 10, another reference to the good shepherd laying down his life for the sheep, the ultimate sacrifice.

And the good shepherd, I know my sheep. And life that comes through the death of the shepherd is unmeasurably precious and infinitely abundant.

[24 : 40] And that's a really wonderful thing. This becomes intensely a personal now that we are back at the shepherd, the shepherd who is the life.

What is this sort of life? It's a life that's lived to its design purpose. The world as we've seen us, seen us, God's world, was a new appreciation of the physical world, loved with everlasting love. Heaven above is sulfur blue, earth around is sweeter green. Something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen. Our lives are seen as part of this plan.

Now one of the advantages of getting older is you can look back and see this. If you're young, it's wonderful to be excited about life, life with Christ, life achieving its true meaning.

Looking back, we can see that even the bumps in the road and the potholes were for our good. But you can have this experience whether you're young or old.

[25 : 47] The guiding hand really works. And we can look back and say, look Lord, we've been saved from our worst mistakes. And if you're young, you can be assured that the same hand will guide you.

And as John Newton discovered, the mountains will become valleys. I'm addicted to some forms of poetry and I came across these wonderful words that sum this up so beautifully in conclusion.

A little known person called Anna Shipton wrote of her experiences of Christ, the life, living in Christ. He was better to me than all my hopes.

He was better than all my fears. He made a bridge of my broken works and a rainbow off my tears. The billows that guarded my sea-girth path, but carried my Lord in their crest.

When I dwell in the days of my wilderness march, I can lean on his love for the rest. He emptied my hands off my treasured store and his covenant love revealed.

[26 : 52] There was not a wound in my aching heart, but the balm of his breath hath healed. O tender and true was the chastening sore, and wisdom that taught and tried, till the soul that he sought was trusting in him, and nothing on earth beside.

He guided by paths that I could not see, by ways I could not have known. The crooked was straight, and the rough made plain, as I followed the Lord alone.

Christ the way, Christ the truth, Christ the life. Do we have that experience of following the Lord alone, and the crooked made me mean straight? So where does this leave us?

We have hands to do his work, feet to take us to his work, and eyes with an infinite wisdom of the possibility. Christ in me, Christ with me, Christ through me, because he said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And finally, of course, Christ, touched in us, the hope of glory, in our weakness, being transformed into his image.

[28 : 03] We pray that despite these continuing interruptions, it's something we have spoken to our hearts today. I'm grateful that I have gone on with this, and I hope that something remains with you, that I am the way, the truth, and the life.

Shall we bow our heads in prayer? O Lord, our God, we give thanks for our Saviour, we give thanks for the clarity of his message, we give thanks for his life and death, and may we go away from this place today with a new appreciation of his love.

For his name's sake, amen. Amen. Amen.