

THE WAY

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- [0 : 0 0] There's an ancient parable that's found in both Hindu and Buddhist texts, and in fact, a variety of ancient religious texts. It's known as the parable of the blind men and the elephant.
- And it's possibly a parable that you've heard or engaged with because it's widely used even in modern circles to demonstrate how no one's got the full pictures.
- Just people have got part of a picture, but not the entire picture. And the parable is this. A group of blind men heard that there was this strange animal called an elephant had been brought to their village, and they found it, and they were feeling it to try and work out what this thing is.
- And I think I've just gone one too far. Can you go back for me? Thank you. And the first person grabs hold of the trunk and said, this thing's a big, thick snake.
- And another grabs hold of the ear and says, no, it seems a bit more like a fan. Another blind man wraps his arms around the legs and said, no, this elephant is in fact a tree trunk.
- [1 : 1 5] A blind man who placed his hands up on the side of it said, no, elephants are in fact a wall. And another felt its tail, said, no, no, elephants are a rope. And another one grabbed the tusks and said, no, actually elephants are spears.
- It's been passed down for centuries. It's a famous parable. And someone more recently inverted the story in a bit more of a humorous way and said that six blind elephants were discussing what people were like.
- And after arguing, they decided to find a person and determine what it was like by direct experience. And so the first blind elephant felt the human being with its foot and declared human beings are flat.
- And all the other elephants felt the human being with their foot and said, yes, we all agree human beings are all flat. Now, this parable is used to illustrate, particularly in our modern world, to illustrate how world religions all have part of the truth, but no religion has the whole truth.
- And you come to a passage that was just read out to us in Matthew 14, 6, and you've got to ask yourself the question, are Christians therefore arrogant? Or more to the point, was Jesus especially arrogant?
- [2 : 4 6] He certainly claimed to have exclusive rights to the God business. John 14, 6 just read out to us, I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.
- That's an exclusive claim. And over the next three weeks, I'm going to be looking at that claim of Jesus and his claims to be the way, the truth, and the life.
- And in our times when all sense of reason about issues of faith seem to have been abandoned, I want us to have a reasonable faith.

My hope, as I prayed earlier, is for the thinkers amongst us to believe and the believers amongst us to think. I hope for some of us to be led to belief and others to think deeper about what it is that we believe and find a deeper sense of joy and confidence and hope.

So we're starting today with the first claim, Jesus is the way. I've got three main ideas that I'm running with. Rethinking Jesus' exclusive claim, the sweetness of Jesus' exclusive claim, and humility and this exclusive claim.

[4 : 16] So firstly, rethinking Jesus' exclusive claim. In these verses, you'll notice, as I will read out, that Jesus is providing his disciples with truth that must be believed if their faith is to be triumphant and their lives to be at peace in troubled times.

And it is troubled times for the disciples. They have just heard from Jesus that he is departing. And they're like, their worlds are rocked. He tells them he's departing to his father's house to prepare a room for them.

And then he tells them that they know where he's going in verse four. And it's at this point that Thomas speaks up in verse five and says, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?

Now, blokes in the room, this is really important. This must be the only time in recorded history where a man actually admits he's lost and asks for directions.

It's Thomas a couple of centuries ago, a couple of thousand years ago. But Thomas's question is more ignorant than he actually realizes it is.

[5 : 36] His question implies that the way that Jesus takes to get to the Father, to get to God, is the same way that the disciples will go to get to the Father.

And so Jesus stops at that moment and clears up Thomas's confusion. He stops talking about his way to the Father and addresses the way the disciples will take.

And it's there in verse six. I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.

The way of Jesus to the Father is via the cross and the way of the disciples to the Father is Jesus.

And because Jesus took his way to the cross, he himself becomes the way for others. But here's the sticky bit with this. Jesus insists here that he is the exclusive way.

[6 : 52] He is the way, the truth, the life. He's not opening up the door for any other opportunities, any other options, or ways, or truth, or life.

And we must grapple with the magnitude of Jesus' claim if we're to deal with the person of Jesus.

If you don't deal with the magnitude of his claim, you don't deal with Jesus. It's broadly acknowledged throughout the centuries that Jesus was a teacher.

Jesus taught people to love each other. He was also very kind to the poor in the outcasts of society. He laid his hands on the sick. He fed the hungry.

And throughout history, there have been many people who have done those sort of things. They have told people to love each other. They have cared for the sick. They've been kind to the poor.

[7 : 59] So you've got to ask if there's many people who have done that, why did this one, why did Jesus Christ become the most influential single figure in the history of the world?

And it's not because of the nice things that he said and did. It's not because he told everyone to love each other. I mean, that message is everywhere.

It's because of the controversial things that he said and did. It's because of the outrageous claims of Jesus.

You see, with Jesus, there is a whole bunch of humility but no modesty. His actions are humble, they're gentle, they're kind, they're loving.

He weeps with the weeping. His heart breaks at the death of his mate Lazarus. He is gentle with children. His character is unquestionably strikingly beautiful and compelling.

[9 : 12] He is, and yet, this Jesus is always combining highest majesty with the greatest humility.

He joins the strongest, absolute strongest commitment to justice with astonishing mercy and grace. He reveals transcendent self-sufficiency and yet entire trust and reliance upon his heavenly father.

He is tenderness without weakness. He is boldness without harshness. He is humility with absolute towering confidence. He is the perfect combination of truth and love.

his actions and his character were so completely unself-centered.

That is totally unself-centered. And yet, his claims about himself are so completely self-centered.

[10 : 22] you never see him pompous or offended or standing on his dignity.

He's approachable to the weakest and the most broken. He's never moody. He's never moody. in fact, in his book called The World's Religions, Houston Smith says that only Jesus and Buddha, historically, only Jesus and Buddha so impressed their contemporaries that they asked not just who are you but what are you.

In the history of all religious leaders, only those two were asked what are you. Smith makes the case that these two figures had characters that transcended ordinary human life to the degree that that question became necessary for people.

And yet, Buddha asserted with great clarity that he was not God, that he was not even an angelic being or any form of divine being.

He made it absolutely clear that I am just a normal human being, not Jesus. He was totally different.

[12 : 00] He repeatedly claimed to be the God, the creator of the universe. And so we don't come to grips with the real Jesus until we come to grips with the controversial things he says.

We don't deal with Jesus until we deal with his enormous claims. And that is what the average person in this country is unprepared to do.

The average person in our country thinks well of Jesus. They're positive towards Jesus with some reservations. Love the love stuff. Don't like the truth stuff.

Don't like the claims of Jesus. When we went through Mark's gospel very recently, we noticed throughout Mark's gospel that Jesus is always always working hard to try and avoid people coming to that conclusion.

You see, he's not interested in people liking him with certain reservations. If you listen to Jesus and have any intellectual integrity, then what Jesus does to us is he consistently pushes us to the extremes.

[13 : 26] you can't sit in the middle with this guy. We either reject him outright or we embrace him outright and both of those are on his terms.

You reject him on his terms, you embrace him on his terms. What he says about himself, the controversial things, is either the worst thing that anyone has ever said or it's the best thing that anyone has ever said.

I am the way is his claim. And either he is right and we follow him and we adore him or he is wrong and we destroy him.

But how dare we decide to sit in the middle and say we just like him. That is not coming to terms with who Jesus is. He polarized people in the first century.

So we need to rethink this exclusive claim. But secondly, we need to see the sweetness of Jesus' exclusive claim.

[14 : 41] It's really crucial for us to see here that when Jesus says that there's no one comes to father except through him, he's not offering us, he's not saying that you cannot know anything about God, without him.

That's not what he's saying. In fact, philosophers, theologians have argued for many, many years that every world religion, philosophical system gets some knowledge of God from this world and all of them are arguing in one way or another in that direction, but they fall short because they don't see Jesus.

so we can know something of God through general God has revealed himself according to Romans 1, revealed himself in the created order.

What Jesus is saying here that no one comes to the father except through him, what he's saying is there's no way to come to the father and really know the father except through him.

there is a real sweetness to these words of Jesus. Jesus is promising so much more than just knowledge of God.

[16 : 01] He's promising intimacy with God. Jesus is the only way to change God from being an oppressive boss who I need to please to being a loving father who accepts and embraces me.

he's the only way to turn a relationship with God from fear and uncertainty to absolute confidence and warmth and love. Now my girls know, I've got three daughters and they know that if they tell me that they're going to do a chore, like unpack the dishwasher and go and watch TV instead, that there will be consequences for that.

But they also know that the consequence isn't going to be I'm going to fire them from the family. They're not going to get the sack from being in the family for that.

Even at their age, what they don't fully understand is that they haven't even begun to plumb the depths of what me as their dad and that as their mum would do if they were in danger.

they didn't even plumb the depths of that. Back in 2012, I was in Saisha, it's right up the tip of Australia, I've been Cape York, and one afternoon I went to this place, which is at Saisha, on that wharf fishing.

[17 : 34] And I was up there with a group of friends, and one of the blokes had his four-year-old son with us, and we were on the deck of that wharf doing the fishing, and we were told, it's about a four-meter drop from where we were to the water, and we had been told that afternoon that there is a four-meter saltwater crocodile that lives under the wharf.

No point fishing there, catch anything decent, the croc will grab it, and there'll be nothing left for you. But this is my only time to fish at the top end in the Gulf, and hopefully catch something of reasonable size.

And my particular issue with the wharf at Saisha is that there was no fence, no barricades, or anything like that. I'm trying to enjoy an afternoon of fishing, and I've got this four-year-old, who's kind of an overconfident four-year-old, doing this at the edge of the wharf, looking over it, and doing this along the edge.

And I'm thinking, there's a four-meter crocodile. Your afternoon tea is what you are to this crocodile. And so I'm trying to relax. It appeared to me that this kid's dad was not concerned at all about this.

He's not in line, getting best dad of the year. I'm going to do this. Dad's over there. This kid, for some reason, wanted to hang around me and do this.

[19 : 14] And I'm conflicted here. I'm wanting to enjoy my fishing, and I couldn't enjoy my fishing, because at any moment, this kid, in my view, is going to tumble into the water.

And I'm now conflicted, because if he ends up there, I feel like I'm going to have to jump in and rescue him. And I don't want to rescue him, because there's a four-meter crocodile down there.

And so I'm conflicted at this point. What do I do? Will I, I mean, for me, getting eaten by a crocodile's got to be the worst way to go. Potentially, the worst way to go.

And certainly not a helpful way to go, that's for sure. And so I cannot relax. And to save me the possibility of surrendering my life to the jaws of a crocodile, I gave up my one and only opportunity to fish in the gulf by packing up and going back to the campsite.

Because I was not going to jump in, well, I might have had to have jumped in to save a four-year-old. Now, I am a finite, flawed, totally average parent.

[20 : 40] And it scares me to know how far I would go to save one of my daughters. If that was my daughter that happened to fall in in that moment, I would not even think, not even think for a moment, I would willingly give my life to a four-meter crocodile for one of my kids.

There is a real sweetness here, because Jesus is saying that there is no other way for us to have this kind of confidence about a relationship with God, a confidence that this God, this Father would love me and us so much more than any mother would love their children or father would love their children.

There is only one way to have that kind of confidence. And that is in Jesus. That's the sweetness that he offers here in declaring that he is the way to the Father.

He's offering us intimacy. And there is no other religion in the history of this world that declares that God loves us more than we love ourselves. Not a single religion declares that God loves us more than we love ourselves.

There's not a single religion that declares that you cannot be fired from the family like the Christian faith. Not a single one.

[22 : 27] And so that makes this exclusive claim of Jesus good news not good advice. Every other religion and philosophical system even the system of no religion declares that if you follow this advice or you live in this particular way you obey these rules then you will achieve the goal of life.

Not Christianity. Jesus has not come to show us how to strive. He did the striving. He didn't come to show us a mountain of righteousness to climb.

He climbed it. it was all done for us because we are incapable of climbing and striving.

You see the biblical picture of the human nature and the human race says that we need someone to intervene. And Ephesians 2 1 to 3 we see why we can't do it.

It says we are dead. We are dead in our transgressions and sins in which we used to live. All of us also lived among them at one time so we're all dead and we're all by nature objects of wrath.

[23 : 46] You see God's diagnosis of the human condition is not that we're in danger of death but that we're in a state of real and present death. And yet you look around a room like this and there are people whose bodies are active, whose minds are sharp, personalities brimming.

And yet in the area that matters the most, our souls, our relationship with God, there is no life there. We are all blind to the reality, to the demands and the glory of our created God.

We simply do not love him. We simply do not love him. He is dead to us.

Ali, can you push the next slide for me? As John Stott says, we should not hesitate to affirm that a life without God, however physically fit and mentally alert the person may be, is a living death and those who live it are dead even while they are living.

We are helpless, we are hopeless, and we are in great peril unless something is done for us. I've got a picture up here of the philosopher Jeremy Bentham.

[25 : 12] He died on the 6th of June 1832. And this guy left his entire estate to the University College of London, University Hospital College Hospital in London, on the condition, you can have all of my estate on the condition that you preserve my body and stick it in a wooden box.

And that my body in the box gets wheeled out for attendance at the hospital board meeting. Every hospital board meeting, I meant to be there. And over the years, they have reworked that requirement to the point where once a year, I think it's at the AGM, the cabinet's wheeled out to the board table and the chairman says, Jeremy Bentham, present but not voting.

Weird thing, that is, this guy will never raise a hand in response, he never submits a motion, he's there in body but he's been dead for 175 years.

I believe his head is now waxed. Been dead for 175 years. You see, dead people can't do anything for themselves and that is all of us spiritually.

We need someone to act for us and yet the very next verse in Ephesians declares the good news of Christianity. Have a look at it up on the screen. Because of his great love for us, God who is rich in mercy made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in our transgressions.

[26 : 56] It is by grace that you have been saved. In our state of deadness, spiritual death, God acted with grace.

God knows our true state and what is required to fix it. We are dead in transgressions and sin and so the Lord Jesus took that deadness upon himself that is God, the created God took on human form, identified with us, took on death for us, broke that curse so that we can have access to God.

He went to the cross to open the way for us back to God. And so what that means is that Christianity is not good advice on how to improve your life. It is life-altering news that declares that the only way that you can have your sins forgiven and be saved is Jesus.

The only way you can be raised from death to life is Jesus. The only way you can know God as a father and not as an oppressive boss is Jesus.

God's grace allows the weakest to come. It allows every dead person to come. Every spiritually dead person to come.

[28 : 25] It excludes no one. So, that means that Jesus' claim here to be the way is an exclusive claim.

But it's the most inclusive exclusive claim there is. In our world, everyone's making exclusive claims.

But this is the most inclusive exclusive claim because of the grace of God. When someone says, you know, surely a good moral person can find their way to God, they are being so, so exclusive at that point.

The premise behind that exclusive claim is that the good moral people find God, but all the bad people don't. So, some people are in, some people are out.

It elevates that exclusive claim, elevates certain people in society over others. Jesus says, in actual fact, those who acknowledge that they are in fact dead and sinful and bad come to him and trust him and his work.

[29 : 41] They're the ones who are in. It's those who see their sin against God and their offense against God. It's the humble who are in and the proud who are out. And so, yes, this claim of Jesus is exclusive, but it's sweet because it's the most inclusive exclusivity because it is open to everyone.

Everyone. So, thirdly, my third point is humility and this exclusive claim. Christians are the only people, the only people whose exclusive claim leads to humility, not arrogance.

If you, for instance, belong to a religion or a philosophical system that says you are in, you're part of the in group and you get access to God because of your effort or belief or knowledge or culture, then ultimately what that means is you start to feel superior to people who don't hold those views.

You start to see those other people as, look at those poor people who don't have the same knowledge or belief that I've got. If you are a secular person who thinks that all religions are the same or that they're relative or they've all got bits of the truth, then ultimately you will feel superior to those poor fools who think that their religion is the only true one.

Remember that parable I'd said right at the beginning about the elephant and the blind men? The point of that parable is that every religion has part of the truth but no one sees all of the truth.

[31 : 28] And that is how vast ways of our society view it. The problem with that is the only way that you could possibly say that all religions have part of the truth but no religion has the whole truth is if you think you see the entire picture.

You're working on the assumption that you've got the picture. You've got the truth. truth. The only way you can see that every religion is blind in some way is if you think you're not blind.

The only way to say nobody has the superior knowledge is to assume that you have the superior knowledge. Whichever way you come out of it, your exclusive claim leads to pride, leads to arrogance, arrogance, because it elevates you over others.

But if you're a Christian, you are saved by grace. This means that when you talk to an atheist or you talk to a Buddhist, it is likely that they are better than you.

But you're not saved because you're better. You are saved by grace. Christianity is the only exclusive claim that creates a spirit of humility.

[33 : 04] Christians therefore should be the most loving towards people who disagree with them, who have different views than they have. Christians should be the most forgiving. Christians should be the most patient. Christians should be the most humble.

And friends, reality is until we are, why should our society believe this incredible claim of the Lord Jesus?

Until they see this incredible claim of the Lord Jesus producing in us humility and grace and mercy and patience.

the reason most people don't see it in Christians is because most Christians either don't understand they're saved by grace or forget they're saved by grace.

Could that possibly be you? Up on the screen, have a look at verses 8 and 9 of John 14. Jesus answered, don't you know me Philip?

[34 : 14] Even after I've been among you such a long time, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say show us the Father?

You see what Jesus is saying to Philip there? Have you been around me for so long, Philip, and yet you still don't know me? See, Jesus claims to be the way to God.

He died that we might have intimacy with God. In fact, intimacy with God is what the universe is about. It's what the cross is about. And my question, potentially for you, if you're sitting in church for years, is what Jesus says to Philip here something that he might be saying to you?

Is your relationship with God knowledge about him or is it intimate knowledge of him? That is, deep in your heart, do you sense the warm embrace of the gospel?

Do you sense the warm embrace of the Lord Jesus? In the moments of failure, do you sense the warm embrace of the Lord Jesus? where he won't sack you from the family?

[35 : 47] Secondly, that warm embrace of the gospel is what's at stake for our world when we as Christians back away from the outrageous claims of Jesus.

Jesus. When we want to not offend anyone with the outrageous claims of Jesus. Jesus has been offending people for 2,000 years. Why stop now?

We go soft here and intimacy and yet that is what is happening. A few years ago there was a large ecumenical service in one of the cathedrals, Christian cathedrals in Hobart to mark an anniversary of the Port Arthur massacre.

One Christian minister, a guy I know, was asked to do the Bible reading. The passage for the Bible reading was printed on the service sheet and it was John 14 verses 1 through to the first half of verse 6.

it stopped at the second half of verse 6 which reads no one comes to the Father except through me. And the organizer said to this minister I know that it was very important not to read that bit of the verse so as not to offend anyone as if the rest of the verse 6 didn't offend anyone.

[37 : 22] but not to read that specifically so that people would not be offended. My friend said I in fact submit to a higher order of being and I will be reading it and so he did.

I'd never been asked to do it again but he did. It is so so crucial for us to stand firm in those moments and not be embarrassed. To stand firm on this claim of Christ because all hope is lost.

Intimacy with God is lost. It's so crucial for us not to back away from this claim because as Acts 4 12 says this about Jesus salvation is found in no one else for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.

Amen.