

West Valley  
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## Easter: Encounters with Christ<sup>1</sup>

### John 14:6

I can't begin to thank you enough for spending your Easter morning with us; we are honored that you are here, and I promise you that God wants to make sure you know before you leave how much he loves you. You can experience the amazing, transformed, resurrection life he has for you. No matter whether you've known Jesus for a long time, or you are just getting acquainted with him, I'm confident that you will have a fresh experience with him today.

Have you seen one of these before? One of our boys got this for me as a sort of ironic gift; they got it for me as a reminder of what Jesus is *not*.

For about ten bucks you can buy one of these plastic Jesuses that bounces on a metal spring and adheres firmly to the dashboard of your car. One advertisement for this product says you can "stick him where you need forgiveness" and he will "guide you through the valley of gridlock." Another says, "They say that you are never alone when you let Christ into your life, but now you can do one better, and let him sit in your car! If you are looking to curb your road rage, remember that you literally have Jesus looking out for you."

The dashboard Jesus has become somewhat of a cultural phenomenon. In the song "Plastic Jesus" Billy Idol sang a few years ago, "With my plastic Jesus, goodbye and I'll go far, with my plastic Jesus sitting on the dashboard of my car." Paul Newman sang it in the movie *Cool Hand Luke*. The words begin, "Well, I don't care if it rains or freezes, long as I have my plastic Jesus sitting on the dashboard of my car." A couple years ago, country and western artist Carly sang the song, "Dashboard Jesus," with the chorus:

Everybody says she's dreamin'  
Call her crazy for believin'  
Sometimes, all you really need is  
Fifty dollars and a dashboard Jesus

You know, to lots of people, Jesus is like a dashboard plastic Jesus, but he is not a life-changing reality. But that superstitious or sentimental view of Jesus is a myth. Jesus of Nazareth was no plastic saint. He's a real-world Savior.

It's not important whether you have Jesus on your car's dashboard, but it *is* vital to know he's living in your heart. He isn't plastic, he's powerful. He's not small, he's infinite. He's not a good-luck token. He's the risen Lord of time and eternity.<sup>2</sup> He has risen!

Today I'm going to introduce you to him if you haven't met him yet, and if you have, you'll have the opportunity to encounter him in a new and deeper way.

For six weeks we've been spending time using a book called "Way Truth Life" as a guide for our

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<sup>1</sup> Busic, David *Way Truth Life: Discipleship As A Journey of Grace* (The Foundry Publishing, KC MO, 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from David Jeremiah, "A Dashboard Jesus or My Lord Jesus?" [DavidJeremiah.org](http://DavidJeremiah.org) (Accessed 8/18/21); Josh McDowell and Ed Stewart, *Josh McDowell's Youth Devotions*, Book 1 (Tyndale, 2003), 21.

spiritual journey through Lent, Holy Week, and to Easter, so if you've been with us, you'll know that this is the apt conclusion of that six-week spiritual conversation we've been having together.

There is an incredible statement that Jesus made about himself. It is found in John's account of the Gospel, or Good News, about Jesus, in chapter fourteen. This is what Jesus said:

"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."  
(John 14:6, niv)

This is one of the most powerful, comprehensive, and (for some people) perplexing statements that Jesus made about himself, and it has everything to do with Easter!

On this Easter Sunday I want to unpack this statement and its context, and then talk about how it applies to our lives. At the end, you will have the opportunity to decide what you want to do with what you've heard Jesus say to you, and how you plan to apply it to your life.

One writer says, "When Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life,' he was talking about more than a sequential intellectual equation or a transactional agreement we make with God. He was describing the..."<sup>3</sup> relational journey with God that will happen. The way, truth, and life are not philosophical abstractions or life principles; Way Truth and Life are *a Person*.

When Jesus said that, he was pointing us to the goal of the journey: real *life* as God intended, and the means by which we reach the goal are the *way* and the *truth*, fulfilled in and through himself.

When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," he wasn't giving us some motivational statement that we can hang on the wall. He was actually answering a question that was raised by his scared and confused disciples.

The statement that we are looking at is found in what is called "The Last Discourse of Jesus," which is found in John 14-17. These four chapters of John, more than any of the New Testament Gospels, gives us an inside look into what Jesus was thinking about and teaching his disciples just before he was arrested, tortured, and crucified and died. So really, these chapters could be described as the last will and testament of Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup>

It's important to see, first of all, that Jesus made a remarkable claim about himself at the beginning of this statement: he said...

## **I AM.**

What exactly did Jesus mean by this statement? Is this like what Rene Descartes meant when he said, "I think, therefore I am"? Descartes was talking about how he figured out he exists; Jesus was making a claim that he is God. Big difference! This "I AM" is intended to cause us to think about the name that God gave for himself. Remember when Moses encountered God in the burning bush in the Exodus story? Moses said, "What is your name? When they ask me who sent me, what will I tell them?" And God said, "I AM." It is the great name of God, the eternally existent, always present One. Jesus wasn't simply saying "My name is..." like Eminem rapped about. It wasn't the same as saying, "Mi nombre es..." Jesus was making a bold and radical statement that he is the Christ, the Son of God, God himself. In John 8:58 Jesus

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<sup>3</sup> Busic, 13

<sup>4</sup> Busic, 15

made this incredible statement when he spoke about Abraham, the father of the Jewish ethnicity and religion. He plainly said, “Before Abraham was born, I AM.” Abraham, like all of us, had a beginning. The Son of God does not have a beginning. He is eternal. He is God. Jesus knew exactly what he meant when he said, “I AM.” Jesus came to earth as a human, born as a baby, but he has eternally existed before that. Before you and were fashioned together in our mother’s womb, we didn’t exist. Jesus *entered* this world as a child and grew to a man, but he always existed as God and with God forever. Jesus was claiming to be the ever-existing, self-existent God. No other religious figure of the major world religions in all of history has made that kind of claim. And this isn’t the only time Jesus made this statement. John records several official “I AM” statements of Jesus:

1. “I am the bread of life.” (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51) As bread sustains physical life, so Christ offers and sustains spiritual life.
2. “I am the light of the world.” (John 8:12) To a world lost in darkness, Christ offers Himself as a guide.
3. “I am the door of the sheep.” (John 10:7,9) Jesus protects His followers as shepherds protect their flocks from predators.
4. “I am the resurrection and the life.” (John 11:25) Death is not the final word for those in Christ.
5. “I am the good shepherd.” (John 10:11, 14) Jesus is committed to caring and watching over those who are His.
6. “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) which is what we are talking about today, and
7. “I am the true vine.” (John 15:1, 5) By attaching ourselves to Christ, we enable His life to flow in and through us. Then we cannot help but bear fruit that will make a difference in this world.<sup>5</sup>

If you are counting, there are seven “I AM” statements that Jesus made. And seven is the number for divinity or God or perfection. So Jesus wasn’t making *one* random statement about himself; it was one among SEVEN that he said to make the point very clear: he is the Son of God.

These “I am” statements are often linked with Jesus’ miracles. Each “I am” statement included a miracle, and each contribute to the understanding of the other. So when Jesus proclaims that He is the light of the world, He proceeds to bring sight to the blind man. Before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, He tells Martha that He is the resurrection and the life. The raising of Lazarus is intended to show Jesus’ power to give life now and to demonstrate His power to do what He proclaimed He was able to do. After Jesus had fed the five thousand, He declared that He was the living bread that came down from heaven. Each of these miracles is interpreted by the “I am” statement. All in all, the “I am” statements in John’s Gospel help us identify Jesus as divine. He is the ever-existing God.<sup>6</sup> This “I AM” statement is so powerful that in John 18, when they came to arrest Jesus, the soldiers announced who they were looking for, and Jesus said, “I AM he,” and all the soldiers fell backward. Jesus is the I AM.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.thomasnelsonbibles.com/blog/jesus-seven-i-am-statements/>

<sup>6</sup> Eugene E. Carpenter and Philip W. Comfort, *Holman Treasury of Key Bible Words: 200 Greek and 200 Hebrew Words Defined and Explained* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 306.

I remember when I was a youth pastor in Southern California, I met a guy on the beach who thought he was Jesus. The guy lived on the beach near Ventura. He also introduced me to his wife *and* mother, Mary (the same woman; she was apparently both wife and mom at the same time). She lived with him on the beach. They also had a dog, named “Sporty.” I’m about 99.9 percent sure he was *not* Jesus, but *he* sure thought he was.

CS Lewis, the great Christian writer from Oxford, once said that Jesus is either a lunatic, a liar, or he is Lord. To make this statement about himself, he’s either a crazy guy living on the beach with his wife/mom and dog, or he was willingly lying to people, or he...is who he said he is. The guy on the beach wasn’t the only drug-fried lunatic or liar who has claimed to be God. But Jesus was the only one to back up his claims with his documented miracles and then by – oh yeah – *rising from the dead!*

Jesus is the One who claimed to be and proved to be the Son of God; the One who rose from the dead and is alive and is here in this room by the power of his Holy Spirit. The risen Jesus is here today.

If we go back to the context of when Jesus made this statement in John chapters 14-17, in this part of the conversation with his disciples, Jesus has just delivered to his disciples some really bad news. They had gathered in a borrowed room. Everyone was packed into a tight space. Jesus had washed all the disciples’ feet, which made everyone really uncomfortable. He’s told them that one of them is going to betray him. To make things even worse, after they’ve travelled everywhere together for the last three years, Jesus tells them he is going to leave them and that they can’t go with him. The disciples are so upset that Jesus tries to encourage them by telling them not to let their “hearts be troubled.” (14:1). The word for “troubled” is the same word used to describe the Sea of Galilee during a raging storm, where the waves can get as high as ten feet. That’s what the disciples are feeling like. Maybe you’ve felt that way at times. Their stomachs are churning, and their heads are spinning. Their emotions are on overload. So Jesus tries to comfort them, saying, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled...I am going to prepare a place for you...I will come again to get you to take you with me so you can be with me. You know the way to the place where I’m going.” (14:1-4, paraphrased).

So that’s when Thomas spoke up. He’s been misnamed “doubting Thomas,” but he really just wants to know what’s going on and he’s the only one brave enough to ask the questions. So he says, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going. How can we know...”

## **The WAY?” (v. 5)**

Life is like that, isn’t it? There are times when we find ourselves wondering which way to turn; when we thought we knew where we were going but then realized we were completely lost. I remember a time back in 2006 when I was taking a sabbatical from the church we were pastoring in Idaho. We had friends in the Air Force who were stationed in Germany, so we stayed with them for six weeks and travelled to several places in Europe. While we were there, Germany was hosting the World Cup. Our three boys all played soccer and they really wanted to see a game, but we couldn’t afford to buy any tickets (we wouldn’t have been able to afford that trip if we weren’t staying with friends!). But the town of Kaiserslautern had a huge World Cup gathering in the middle of their town square with all kinds of vendors and fun activities and an enormous jumbotron set up so you could watch a game. Kaiserslautern was only about 20

minutes away from the village we were staying in, but we had no idea where we were going. There was no such thing as google maps on phones in 2006, but there were GPS devices that you could get for your car, and our friends had a Garmin in their car, which we borrowed both. We didn't know where the town square was, so we just input the center of town. Garmin was going to take us to the very center. We made it into the town without any problems, but navigating the town itself was a little difficult. I should mention that in Germany, like many places in Europe, the streets are very narrow, and people drive very small cars (remember Smart cars?). We were driving in our friends' big van. So we got into K-town, and we were following the Garmin when she told us to turn right down a particular street. But once we got started, we realized that the street was actually a street café. We didn't know what else to do, so we kept driving – weaving around the café tables. We got about a block when we realized the street was closed; it was a dead end. We had no room to turn around, so we had no choice...I had to drive in reverse...backward around all the tables again. I'm pretty sure they knew we were Americans. We finally made it out and we asked a local for directions. Wouldn't it have been great if we had a local driver that we could follow? Better yet – if we were riding with a local driver?!

When Jesus says he is the way, he is saying don't just follow me; I *AM* THE WAY. You don't have to worry about the directions; if you are in me and remain in me, you will be in THE WAY to God. When Jesus made that statement, the emphasis is on “The WAY.” The way comes first. You won't get anywhere meaningful in this life and most certainly not in the next if you are not a believer of the One who is The WAY. It's not that the truth and life aren't important; it's that the truth and the life are the how and why Jesus is The WAY.

Maybe today you are on a spiritual search, wanting to find out who God is. The resurrection of Jesus Christ proves that the way to get to God is through believing in Jesus Christ. He is the WAY because he *is* God.

Maybe today you are finding yourself needing direction in life. Maybe you feel your life is drifting along without direction.

Maybe there is a specific direction that you are trying to discern; there is a decision you need to make about your life. Jesus is The WAY; he is God, the One who created you and knows what is best for your life and which decisions will lead you in his best direction for you. You can trust him.

You received a card when you came in; if you are needing direction, check the box that says, “I need Jesus the WAY.”

If you are online, let us know you need Jesus the WAY. Jesus is The WAY because he is...

## **The TRUTH.**

Years ago when I was in college, I had a course called Psychology of Religion, and for my final project I did a study on a place called “Rajneeshpuram.” There was a guru from India named “Bahgwan Shree Rajneesh” who had started a cult outside of a small, central Oregon town and they built this huge compound/commune that grew to close to 7,000 people living there. So my friend and I drove out there, spent the night in our car, and then took their guided tour. For a place that was supposed to be filled with free love and peace, there were armed guards to make sure we didn't leave the group and wander into places they didn't want us to see. We did,

however, manage to sneak off for a while and saw some pretty scary things, before being encouraged by guys with AR-15's back into the group. We rejoined the group in a big tent. I had a small tape recorder and microphone to secretly record it all. I asked the question, "Do you feel that yours is the only way to god?" The guide said, "We believe that all of life is one big banquet table, and all religions are just different plates of food to enjoy. But all of them are part of the same table of god."

You might think that sounds a bit goofy, but it is a myth that is very popular today.

In Oprah Winfrey's lifetime achievement award acceptance speech at the 2018 Golden Globes, she said, "What I know for sure is that speaking your truth is the most powerful tool we all have."

"Your truth." Those two words are so entrenched in our language culture today that we hardly recognize them for the incoherent nightmare that they are. Among other things, the philosophy of "your truth" destroys families when a dad suddenly decides "his truth" is calling him to a new lover, a new family, or maybe even a new gender. It's a philosophy that can destroy entire societies, because invariably one person's truth will go to battle with another person's truth, and devoid of reason and real truth, only power decides who wins, and that power is often violent. You see this play out in the violent rhetoric of our nation's political and cultural wars. In our world, ask the folks in Ukraine about that. Russia manufactured their "truth" so they could justify genocide in Ukraine.<sup>7</sup>

Some would suggest that the only truth in this world is that there is no truth (which is self-contradictory!)

Folks, there *has* to be truth in this world. When Jesus made this statement, it was a relief to his disciples. At that time there were so many different Jewish traditions, each started by some person claiming to have the answers, that people were confused, not knowing who exactly God was and what his will could be. Then Jesus came along and said he *is* the Truth – *and proved it* – with his death and resurrection. In John's gospel, Jesus is called "the Word," because he is the embodiment of God's will, God's purpose, and God's character. Whatever God says is demonstrated in and fulfilled in Jesus alone. He is Truth.

Jesus is Truth not only in contrast with what is false in this world about people and about God, but he is also Truth in contrast with the incomplete. The Bible tells us that Jesus is the "fulness of God in a body" (Colossians 2:19). Coming to the Father through Jesus assures "the fullness of his grace" (John 1:16–17). There is no need for any further explanations of God because you have Jesus,<sup>8</sup> and with Jesus you now have a genuine relationship with the God who loves you and gave his life for you.

Do you need to know Truth? Do you need to be able to sort out what is false and what is real? Maybe you have been lied to by people who you should've been able to trust – parents or pastors or governors or presidents or the press – and you are wondering where you can find the Truth. Jesus is the Truth! Check that box on your response card that you need Jesus the Truth. Tell us online.

Because Jesus is the Way and the Truth, you can be certain that in him you can have and experience...

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<sup>7</sup> Brett McCracken, *The Wisdom Pyramid*, (Crossway, 2021), pp. 59-60

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Dongell, [John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition](#) (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 174.

## the LIFE.

Death has abounded in America over the last two years. According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 570,000 more people died in 2020 than in 2019, and about 385,000 of those involved COVID-19. Another 462,000 died in 2021 involving COVID-19, and as of April 15 over 988k deaths involved COVID.<sup>9</sup> Nearly one million deaths.

When roughly that same number died over the four years of the Civil War, it had a widespread impact on American culture. Historians say changes included increased attention to cemeteries, the rise in the importance of family photographs, and rapid growth in the popularity of practices of spiritualism, a new religious movement that claimed to help people communicate with the dead.

What impact today's pandemic deaths will have on American culture remains to be seen. But we can already see one shift now: The percentage of people age 40 and older who say that religion is "very important" in the funeral of a loved one has gone up for the first time in a decade.

The importance of religion at funerals jumped 12 percent by the end of last year. A growing number of Americans are feeling a new need for religion, at least at a funeral.

Sarah Jones, an atheist raised in a strict evangelical home, wrote about this experience: "I could plant a flag for my grandfather . . . but the gesture feels thin. I don't know what exactly I would want from a memorial—whether it's catharsis or meaning or something else altogether. (But) I thought several hundred times this year, *Maybe I should go to church.*"<sup>10</sup>

Death has touched too many of our lives this last year. Once is too many, but all of us have had death come close to our lives. There are people who come to my mind that I know and love, who are grieving the loss of a husband or wife or child or parent. My wife Shelly's dad died in January of last year, and my own mother died in September.

After the last few years, all of us could use some life; how much greater would it be to have the source of ALL life – the ONE who has overcome death! When Jesus said that he is the LIFE, he was saying that "(He) has been authorized by His Father (5:25–27) to overturn the physical and spiritual death that threatens all of humankind with total ruin."<sup>11</sup> The last conversation I had with my mom the day she died didn't include words. Her brain cancer had progressed so much that she couldn't open her eyes and couldn't speak. But the last thing she said to me was clear. For hours she hadn't been responsive at all, but as I was by her side, she took my hand and squeezed it tight, raised my hand in hers like this, and shook my hand forcefully. I knew what she was saying: she was saying she loved me, that she was ready, and that she would see me in heaven one day. You might say I'm putting words in her mouth, but you don't know my mom. I know her, and I know what she was telling me. And it was correct, because she had trusted in Jesus the I AM, who was her WAY, her TRUTH, and her LIFE.

Jesus was emphatically clear: there is a brand new quality of life you can live NOW because he rose from the dead, defeating sin and death. Your life NOW can be filled with meaning, with joy, and with a real sense of purpose. And not only that, when you pass through death at the end

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/nvss/vsrr/covid19/index.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Source: Editor, "Return to Ritual," *CT magazine* (Jan/Feb, 2022), p. 21

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Dongell, *John: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1997), 174.

of this life, you will live forever with God and with all those who have also trusted their lives to Jesus being the way, the truth, and the life.

Do you need a relationship with the One who is the LIFE – and have a real, full, purposeful life here, and do you need to know that you will live beyond death forever in heaven? You can! If that's what you need, check the box that says, "I need Jesus the Life." Tell us if you are online.

In a couple minutes, you will have the opportunity to bring your card up and put it in one of these baskets.

But before you do, there's one more part of that statement that Jesus made: he said, "No one comes to the Father but through me."

I've already mentioned this issue of pluralism that is so popular today – that there are many roads to the same god.

One of the problems with that view is that these different beliefs often contradict each other and make mutually exclusive claims. When you look at Christianity compared to the other religious systems, it is the *only* faith that makes the definitive claim that Jesus is the exclusive way to God. You can't believe in Jesus Christ's exclusive claim, "No one comes to the Father but through me," and still say that there are other ways to get access to God. To do that would be to deny the very Christ who said those words. Jesus didn't say, "I am one of many ways to the Father." He didn't say, "You can choose to follow me if you want, but there are other choices that are just as viable." Jesus did not say, "Whichever spiritual path you walk down will be fine with me, as long as you are sincere."

Years ago I went skydiving a couple of times doing what's called a "tandem jump" – that's where you are in a harness with the instructor strapped to your back. Your instructor has the parachute. In a tandem jump, you free fall for about a mile and a half, then you pull the cord, your chute opens, and the two of you float gently to the earth. Take my word for it – if you go skydiving, you can count on two things: (1) an exciting experience and (2) the need to follow some basic rules. For instance, before you participate in a dive, your "Jump Master" will give you the following instructions:

- Don't curl up into the fetal position. (You can slip out of your harness.)
- Arch your back and hold your arms out in front of you. (To keep you from slipping out of your harness and to get you flying in the correct position.)
- Stick your legs out in front when landing. (No explanation necessary.)
- Do everything your jump master tells you to do. (Immediately.)

These are not negotiable, especially if you want to live. They are absolutes.

Now let's imagine another skydiving experience. When you arrive a smiling instructor begins strapping a parachute to your back while walking you toward a plane idling just outside. Over the plane's engine noise the instructor yells, "We here at the Relativist Skydiving School believe there are many ways to get from the plane to the ground. We respect everyone's desire to skydive, and we don't believe in absolute rules. Just listen to your inner voice, respond honestly to your feelings, and have a memorable experience. We'll see you when you get down!"

If that was your experience, would you go skydiving? Most people who go skydiving are glad that there are strict, nonnegotiable rules. You can't be a relativist at skydiving. The rules are there



for good reason. You can sincerely believe that you can follow a different way to skydive, but I promise you: at the end you'll sincerely be a pancake.

One author says it this way: When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, the life, he was saying, "I, I am the way there, and I, I am the truth that will lead you on the way there, and I, I am the life that will give you the power to follow the truth along the way there." Not a set of directions, not a roadmap or GPS, not a set of clues – I AM the Way. Not a set of life-organizing principles or philosophical presuppositions – I AM the Truth. Not an alternative way to live with a more optimistic viewpoint – I AM the only real Life, the singular means to becoming truly human. You can have a relationship with the Way, Truth, and Life.

This claim of Jesus Christ to be not merely *a* way, and *a* truth, and *a* life, but to be the true and unique Son of God, is the bedrock of Christianity."<sup>12</sup> I'm not badmouthing any other faith system, it is simply taking Jesus at his word, the only One who rose from the dead.

While Jesus' claim is exclusive – there is no other way to the Father but through him, the invitation is inclusive – it is open to anyone and everyone.

Maybe today you realize you need to be in this relationship with Jesus; that you need this new life that Jesus offers you. If so, check that last box on your response card. Please let us know you are here by filling in your name, and if you want us to pray specifically for you, you can fill that out on the other side. Please let us know about yourself, and if there's any information you would like from us. If you are joining us online, you can connect with us that way and let us know your decision and how we can pray for you.

The worship team is coming now, and I'm going to pray for us – for you. After I pray, and as they start to sing, please come, and bring your card and place it in the basket. Online campus, let us know your decisions and how we can pray for you.

*Prayer*

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<sup>12</sup> Busic, 20