

“The Way”

In 2001 HBO presented a ten-part miniseries called *Band of Brothers*. As a history person, especially about World War II, I was glued to the television each Sunday night to watch the presentation. The story was about Easy Company of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division of the United States army during World War II. They were known as the *Screaming Eagles*.” They were paratroopers who would eventually see action in D-Day and the Battle of the Bulge.

Easy Company actually trained at Camp Toccoa in Georgia. The company (about 100 men) was led by a hard-driving captain by the name of Herbert Sobel. Although the men did not care for Sobel, they later admitted his training was critical for their survival. But there was a problem. When the company performed field training exercises, Sobel was inept; he could not read a field map. This flaw meant he could not lead the company in battle. He would not lead them when they went to fight in Europe. He would not be able to show them the “Way.”

In our passage today from John 14, Jesus tells his disciples, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” He makes this statement during a time he spends with his disciples known as the farewell discourse. It is before he is arrested, tried and crucified. The orientation of the discourse is towards what will happen. Jesus

explains the significance of his departure to the disciples and points them forward to the life they will lead after he is no longer physically with them.

As many of you know, when I was an attorney, I did estate work. This work included preparing Last Will and Testaments for people. Some clients would actually bring their family members to a consultation and discuss with them how and why they were going to divide up their estate. They often also prepared Power of Attorneys so their affairs could be handled if they became incapacitated before they died.

Jesus' Farewell Discourse is like a Last Testament of a famous man. One might compare it to a gathering of a family with a dying person. It is similar to the book of Deuteronomy, which is cast as Moses' farewell speech to his people and was written for the Jewish people of the eighth and seventh century BCE who were in exile.

The purpose of the discourse is to provide hope and comfort. Unlike the average person's death, Jesus' death will bring victory. His victory over the world in his death, resurrection, and ascension is the governing theological reality of the discourse. He exhorts the disciples to stand firm in the face of his departure when events may look as though death is having its way. He knows they will struggle.

Peter's later denial of him can be seen as an illustration of how the disciples will act if they surrender to their troubled hearts.

The disciples must continue to believe. The disciples' faith in the relationship of God and Jesus will empower them to rejoice in the events of Jesus' hour because through the eyes of faith they will recognize Jesus' hour as the culmination of his enactment of God's work, as the defeat of the ruler of the world. He assures them that his return to God makes it possible for them to join in the relationship that the Father and Jesus share. The disciples are welcome in the Father's house. Jesus will help prepare the place for them.

Jesus also makes the promise that he will come again. This is the first of the Christian expectations of the second coming of Christ. It is the mark of the new age. Jesus' return announces that nothing, not even death, can separate Jesus and his own from God. The return is marked by reunion and reconciliation with God, by inhabiting one's place in God's home.

The focus of Jesus' discourse then shifts to the "way." Thomas remains confused about where Jesus is going. One must understand the "way" is not a geographical term, as Thomas perceived it. It is not the geography of knowing how to read a field map when leading military maneuvers. Rather, it is instead a

description of the revelatory work of Jesus. To “know the way” is synonymous with knowing Jesus himself.

We must understand that at the time of Jesus there were a variety of religions and cultures that intersected with one another in the eastern Mediterranean world where he lived and preached. We are familiar with the Greek and Roman gods such as Zeus, Jupiter, Neptune, Apollo, and Mars. The Buddha had been gaining a following since the sixth century BCE. The Hindu religion and *Krishna* also had an influence.

At the time of Jesus people were looking for a faith which gave them a connection to God. Judaism had provided a theological groundwork for Jesus. Within the Jewish wisdom tradition, “way” denotes the life-styles of the “wise.” In the Psalms, “way” is used as a metaphor to describe a life lived in accordance with the will and desire of God. “Way” is an expression of a faithful unity with God.

Jesus gave us so much more. As with the sayings of I am the gate for the sheep in John 10, Jesus reveals himself to be simultaneously the access to and the embodiment of life with God. “Truth” and “life” clarify how and why Jesus is the “way.” Jesus makes the truth of God available to the world. Jesus’ life and ministry are the ultimate witness to God’s truth. As Christians we acknowledge that one’s

relationship with Jesus is a relationship with the liberating truth of God. Jesus as the “way” provides unity with God as one meets the truth of God.

Jesus says “I am the life.” Jesus brought God’s gift of life to the world. Jesus is the way because he is the access point to God’s presence of life.

What do Jesus’ words mean to you today? We are all seeking a relationship with our creator. We all seek meaning in life. Just as in Jesus’ day, there are many who will try to provide us an answer, either through religion, spirituality, or some other way of life. Some will frame it in terms of self-help if they think you will be turned off by the mention of God. There are many today who want to help you find the way.

What we must remember is, that through Jesus, we can see and know God in a manner never before possible. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” This relationship of Jesus to humanity all points to the unity of Jesus and God in the work of salvation.

Jesus was and is the tangible presence of God in the world and God the Father can be known through the incarnate presence of Jesus in the world. Unlike other philosophies or beliefs or self-help remedies, the ministry and message of Jesus Christ lets us know God and gives us a relationship with God.

It is so important we recognize that Jesus is the truth. In this day many want to provide us the truth but they are often not giving us the full story. Through his ministry, teachings, and his relationship to God the Father, Jesus provides us with the truth that we use in our lives.

As we take this witness of Jesus into the world, let it be a positive message. Let us not use our access to God through Jesus Christ as a weapon. Let us not use it to condemn other religions or beliefs. Instead, let us emphasize what Jesus has done for us. Let us say, “This is who we are. We are the people who believe in God who has been revealed to us decisively in Jesus Christ.” Let us celebrate that through Jesus we know God, have access to God, have a relationship with God the Father, and are given the truth and life. Amen.