



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

John 14:1-14
NRSUVE

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for

you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.”³ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, but if you do not, then believe⁹ because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me¹⁰ for anything, I will do it.

Let me begin by encouraging conversation on this Touchpoint. While I may appear unbending on this, it comes from my own wrestling with the “I Am” scriptures. It is worthy of a healthy conversation about what Jesus meant when He said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” I could be wrong.

What an incredible conversation Jesus was having with his friends when he said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” It is one of those passages I have avoided since I defected from strict evangelicalism. And by evangelicalism, I mean the established tenets that the Bible must be believed as the literal Word of God, is without error, and is essentially the only way to know God. So you can see why I’ve had an aversion to this section of the Bible.

I have a little refrigerator magnet with a picture of Jesus standing on a hill and saying to his disciples “Now pay attention and listen to me the first time and I don't want have to hear four different versions.”

Jesus cared about the individuals he was speaking to. He was not using the disciples to create a religion or a movement that would win cities for himself. Jesus cared about the individual lives that had walked with him and were about to witness him suffer the unimaginable.

The idea that these people he loved would feel alone when he was gone must have been tormenting. I mean, look at all the things he did to anchor his truth for them: the wine and the bread, the unforgettable miracles—and now he was telling them something so profound they could not possibly forget.

He did not say I am telling you the way, I am telling you the truth, I am telling you the life. I am telling you I am the way, I am the truth, and I am the life. What if Jesus would have followed that up with, “and so are you.”

Don’t we boldly sing songs about being the hands and feet of Jesus to the world? Is this statement any different than when Jesus said if you have done this to my little ones you’ve done it unto me?

That is what I find brilliant! If he would have left with them with the beatitudes right before he died it would not be as personal and as freedom giving. Those were instructions on how we live this life with others. Jesus had told them to follow him this way. Jesus asked them to trust him, and they did. Jesus told them to live this life with their eyes on love. And like us they would surely forget.

You see 30 years ago, I would have felt like I needed to defend Jesus as being *the* only way to God. All other faiths are damned. Jesus was a belief system, an entrance into heaven, an escape from hell and a euphoric experience in mass with others called a worship experience.

Try joining me and placing yourself in this dialogue of Jesus with his friends in the days before he was killed. He is saying there is so much more than this life on earth. In fact, “I go to prepare a place for you.” But this divine place is not only a place in the future. It is consistent with his parables of the presence of the Kingdom of heaven, which he said is at hand.

The “I am” language of Jesus was the same language that Moses heard when he needed the courage to lead the Israelites out of captivity.

It is the same I am Jesus used when he said I will never leave you or forsake you. He will not leave us in this present world or future world.

In that intimacy between Jesus and his friends, they must have experienced a profound depth of love. Would Jesus have known that we would use these words to separate ourselves from the rest of the world as a superior religion? Perhaps he would say we missed the moment with his friends—and the eternal point.

Jesus was speaking of the embodiment, the incarnation of God with us when he said I AM. Not a God in the heavens up watching us and only comes around once in a while. That would make God like Santa Claus. We better watch out we better not lie; I'm telling you why Jesus is coming back again. Or that God would come only when beckoned. That would make Jesus a cosmic social worker.

For Jesus to say, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," is consistent with his statement that "you will do greater things than I." How could we possibly do anything greater than Jesus unless we embodied the God to whom he led his disciples?

The I am the way the truth and the life is about embodiment. It is consistent with Jesus saying, "if you have seen me, you've seen the father.

I can understand the feeling that Jesus must be defended as being God in the flesh, but if Jesus was really trying to convey this message to them as a doctrine in that intimate moment, then Paul would not have said, "It is not I who lives, but Christ who lives in me." Wouldn't that infer Paul is the Messiah? I think Paul understood that he was not the Messiah when he said that.

"I AM..." is about embodiment. The glorious incarnation of God with us- Emmanuel.

It would be consistent with the scriptures that teach us about *being* the body of Christ. It is about embodiment.

Let's pause for a few minutes and, in silence, breathe in the embodiment of God. Inhale the life of God in Christ. Take in God's presence as you breathe in that which offers itself to you in every moment. As we exhale, give your life in return—and repeat.

Let us take a couple of minutes in silence to rest in the here and now, focusing on the breath that embodies God within us.

Pause and breathe.

Jesus was saying I am embodying the way the truth and the life. Right here and right now. It is hard to conceive of a oneness with God. Meister Eckhart offers a mind twisting phrase, he says, "I am not God and God is not me, but I am not other than God."

Jesus did not share this intimate moment with his disciples as material for an evangelistic curriculum. He was comforting them with the embodiment of God. When he said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” it was deeply relational. Jesus lived the “I Am-ness” of God.

Maybe that is why we do not have a gospel according to Jesus—he wrote it with his life. He was living it. He was being the way, the truth, and the life.

The gospel writers shared this moment with us so it would never be forgotten: that in Christ, we are never alone.

Why else would Jesus begin his conversation with his friends saying, “Do not let your hearts be troubled?”