John 14:6 *Glad You Asked: The Way, the Truth, and the Life*

***Grabbing the Elephant***

There’s an ancient eastern parable about **three blind men who come across an elephant**. None of them has ever *seen* an elephant, of course, so they don’t really know what an elephant is like. They each take a hold of a part of the elephant and then describe what it is like to one another.

The first man takes hold of the elephant’s tail. “I know what an elephant is like,” he declares to the others. “An elephant is like a vine.”

“No, no” says the second blind man. He is by the elephant’s side. He says, “An elephant is like a brick wall.”

“But that can’t be,” says the third blind man. He is stationed by the elephant’s trunk. “What an elephant is really like is a big snake.”

Now, which man is right? In a way, they all are. But none is more right than the others. Each of them has a hold of the elephant, but they don’t know everything there is to know about the beast.

A lot of people think this little parable is a good way to think about the religions of the world. Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and all the other faiths are a lot like these three blind men. They’ve each got a hold of “god” (the elephant); but they’ve only got a hold of part. Thus, the argument goes, each religion has some truth, but not all of it. And they are all equally as good for getting us to God. We might choose Christianity, while others choose Hindu, but in the end we are all going to the same place.

When I was a freshman at UNI I took a comparative religions course. We studied all the world’s major religions. Then, on the final day, somebody asked our professor what he believed. He’d just taken us through all these faith systems, but surely he felt one was better than all the others?

He went to the blackboard and **put a dot in the center** of it. “Suppose this is ‘god’”, he said. Then he **drew a big circle around the dot.** “This is us,” he said. “All of the people in the world are on this circle. And we’re all trying to get to ‘god’.” Then **he started drawing lines**, from the circle to the dot in the center. Like spokes on a bicycle wheel. “These spokes are the world’s religions,” he said. “Each of them ends up in the same place. If a person is a sincere follower of his or her faith, then they’re all going to end up with ‘god’ in the end.”

What about that idea? Do all the religions end up in the same place? Isn’t religion more a product of culture and where you are born? Why do Christians get all worked up about missionaries and conversions and believing in Jesus? Isn’t it kind of arrogant of Christians to insist that sincere believers of other religions have to believe in Jesus, or they are doomed?

***The Question***We are in a series called “Glad You Asked”. For the past month we have been using the Sunday morning sermon to try to answer questions that have been submitted by you, the congregation*.* We set up a link on our website and invited you to post your questions. We had pretty good feedback—something like 20 questions were submitted. Some we were able to group up into similar categories, some seemed a little more silly than serious, and some I just don’t want to answer… No, seriously, they were all good questions. I tried to choose the ones that would make for good sermons. But if you asked a question and we haven’t gotten to it, and you’re still really curious, get in touch with me and we’ll see what we can do.

And the question I’m going to try to answer today has to do with that elephant. Here’s the **question as it was submitted:**

Heard a brief sermon on radio once about “Who is Jesus in other Religions?”....I wanted to hear it more so I could be more clear.   Plus I always wonder how the Jews as the chosen people do not believe ... plus what would most of us think if all our family for generations were Jewish or Muslim or whatever... you know what I mean????

There’s a lot there. I’m probably not going to get too much into what it means for the Jewish people to be the chosen people; but it seems to me that the main thrust of the question has to do with the exclusivity claims of Christianity. **Is Jesus really the only way to God? If people of other faiths are sincere in their beliefs, won’t they end up in heaven after all?**

Just to be clear, only Christianity believes that Jesus is the Son of God and the key to salvation. Most of the other world religions acknowledge that Jesus lived—that He was a historical reality—but none of them believe that His death had any meaning for us, nor do they believe that He was resurrected from the dead.

* Judaism, the faith that Christianity grows out of, believes Jesus was a respected teacher, but he was put to death by the Romans and that is the end of the story, as far as they are concerned.
* Hinduism and Buddhism are both eastern religions that acknowledge Jesus as a great spiritual teacher—perhaps even enlightened—but they deny the idea that He is the key to God—they seek salvation through karma and the suppression of desire.
* Islam is perhaps the world religion that respects Jesus the most: they believe He is one in a line of divinely inspired prophets. But they believe Muhammed is the final and greatest prophet, who supersedes Jesus. They believe Jesus will come again, but when He does, they believe He will be Muslim and will spark a revival of Islam. In Islam, they do not believe that Jesus died on the cross. They cannot accept the idea that one of God’s prophets would have been humiliated in such a way.

So, what about it? Billions of people worldwide follow these other faiths. Many of them are sincere in their beliefs and the practice of their religion. They may have respect for Jesus, but they do not believe in Him the way Christians do. Do we all end up in the same place eventually? Are all religions essentially the same?

***Jesus’ Claim***

Over against the claim that many paths lead to God, Jesus stands up and stakes a different claim. **In John 14:6**, Jesus explicitly rules out the idea that different faiths have a hold of the same elephant. Here’s what He says:

**6**Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus is very clear, and very exclusive. No one comes to God except through Him. There is no other teacher—Buddha or Mohammed—no other system—Hindu or New Age—that is going to lead us to God. It is Jesus, or nothing.

No one comes to God except through Jesus**.** That’s the message for us today. And Jesus wants us to get this so badly that He stakes His exclusive claim in three different ways. He is the Way, He is the Truth, and He is the Life.

***The Road Map***

Let’s consider these three claims of Jesus. First, consider Jesus’ claim to be **The Way**. Jesus claims to be the one and only way to heaven.

Think of it this way: Let’s say you wanted to go from Spencer to Spirit Lake. And let’s say that you are firmly convinced that the way to get to Spirit Lake is by going east on Highway 18. So you get in your car, and you head out of town.

Now, it doesn’t matter how sincere you are in your belief that Highway 18 is the way to go. It doesn’t matter if you follow all the rules of the road for Highway 18. You can keep it right at the posted speed limit, stay between the lines, only pass in passing zones, stop for school buses and all of that. You can be sincere and faithful. But as long as you are on Highway 18, you’re not going to get to Spirit Lake. Sooner or later, you’re going to find yourself in Emmetsburg.

Well, Jesus says there is only one path to heaven, and He’s it. It doesn’t matter how sincere and faithful you are in your other beliefs, if you aren’t trusting in Jesus you’re going down the wrong road.

All roads do not lead to the same destination. You would never believe that Interstate 30 will get you to the same place as Interstate 90, so why would you think one set of beliefs will take you to the same place as Jesus?

Sometimes people will say it is arrogant of Christians to claim that Jesus is the only way. This is not something to be arrogant about. If you go around boasting about how you were smart enough to follow Jesus, and everybody who doesn’t follow Jesus isn’t as smart as you, then that would be arrogant. But Christians shouldn’t boast about this.

The Bible says that Jesus made this claim about Himself. It is up to every person to decide if they believe it or not.

Christianity is not the only religion to make exclusive claims. Islam says: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammed is his prophet.” What is meant by that claim is very close to what is meant by the claim that Jesus is the only way. It is a claim to exclusivity. Every other major religion, in their own way, claims that their system of belief is better than other systems of belief. In other words, logically, they cannot all end with the same result. Each makes claims that, by necessity, exclude claims of the other faiths.

Jesus says He is the only way. You have to decide if you believe Him or not.

Imagine that you do find yourself in Emmetsburg and you’re lost and confused. You really want to be in Spirit Lake. But then you see an old friend driving down the street towards you.  You flag him down and he stops the car and rolls down the window. You say, "Friend, can you give me directions to Spirit Lake?  I'm lost."  And your friend says, "I can do better than that.  I'm going there myself.  I'll take you.  Hop in."  And instead of just providing directions, he puts you in his car and he personally takes you. He is the Way for you to get where you want to go.  He is the map, and he is the transportation.

That’s Jesus. He is the one and only way to the Father.

***Liar, Lunatic, or Lord***

Second, Jesus claims to be **the truth**. He claims to be the one and only true revelation of God.

There is a tendency in our culture today to think of religious truth as a matter of personal preference. We think that truth is subjective, that what is right and wrong is all a matter of perspective. And so we say things like: “What’s true for you isn’t necessarily true for me” or “your truth is different than my truth.”

This is, of course, utter nonsense. If someone came to you and said: “I really, really believe the sky is green” you might say: “That’s fine for you to believe that way, but you’re wrong.” In that case, we all agree that truth is objective. The sky is either green, or it is not. And it doesn’t really matter what we believe about it. Our belief is not going to change reality.

So why, when it comes to religion, do we think that two people can believe two diametrically opposed ideas and still be right? Islam says: “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammed is his prophet.” Jesus says, “I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.” They can’t both be true.

We can’t say: “Well, what’s true for me as a Christian wouldn’t necessarily be true for a Muslim.” It doesn’t work that way. It might be nice for us to think that way so we don’t step on anybody’s toes, but it cannot square with reality. Either Islam has it right. Or Jesus has it right. Or they both have it wrong. But they can’t both be true.

And Jesus, of course, claims to be the Truth. He claims to be the one and only revelation of God. In the verse right after Jesus says no one comes to the father except through Him, **Jesus says this:**

**7**If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Jesus says that to know Him is to know God. Elsewhere, the Bible says that no one has seen God, but Jesus has come to make God known (John 1:18). Max Lucado uses this illustration:

Think of it this way. You’re a fifth grader studying astronomy. The day you read about the first mission to the moon, you and your classmates pepper the teacher with space-travel questions.

“What does moondust feel like?”

“Can you swallow when there’s no gravity?”

“What about going to the bathroom?”

The teacher does the best she can but prefaces most replies with “I would guess…” or “I think…” or “Perhaps…”

How could she know? She’s never been there. But the next day she brings a guest who has. Neil Armstrong enters the room. Yes, the “one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind” Neil Armstrong.

“Now ask your questions,” the teacher invites. And Astronaut Armstrong answers each with certainty. He knows the moon; he’s walked on it. No speculation or hesitation—he speaks with conviction. (Lucado, p. 48-49)

That’s Jesus with God. He knows Heaven. He’s walked the streets of gold. He knows God. He and the Father are one.

Other religions talk about knowing “god.” Muslims claim that an angel dictated the Koran to Muhammed. Mormons claim that Joseph Smith found the book of Mormon written on some golden tablets. But Jesus alone has a unique, one-of-a-kind, been-there-done-that knowledge of God. Jesus claims to be the one and only revealer of God.

What we have to do is listen to see if He is right or not.

I like this quote from C.S. Lewis in a book called *Mere Christianity:*

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a good moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic-on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg-or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great moral teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Those are your choices. Jesus was a liar, or a lunatic, or He's the Lord. You have to decide.

Jesus claims to be the truth. He claims to be the one and only revelation of God.

***Look to Him***

Third, Jesus claims to be **the Life.** He claims to be the one and only giver of real life.

Our greatest problem is sin. It is sin that keeps us from God. Sin that condemns us to eternal death. But Jesus claims to be the solution to that problem.

In the Old Testament there’s a story about Moses and the children of Israel after they left Egypt and were wandering in the desert. The people started to complain. They were sinning against God. And so their camp was overrun by venomous snakes.

Now, this story has always creeped me out, because I don’t like snakes. I don’t like snakes of any kind. I don’t like going into the reptile house at the zoo. I don’t even like to touch pictures of snakes in a book. If there’s a picture of snake in a Ranger Rick magazine, I grab the part of the page without the snake to turn it. I don’t like them.

And I can just picture these folks walking into their desert tents and finding the floor moving, like in an Indiana Jones movie. Not cool. And these snakes start biting people, and they start to die.

Well the people started to feel bad about all their complaining, and they went to Moses and asked if he would pray for the snakes to go away. So he did. And this is **what God told Moses:**

Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live. (Numbers 8:9)

It’s kind of weird. Moses makes a bronze snake and lifts it up high in the middle of the camp. And anybody who gets bit is supposed to look toward the snake, and they live. Refuse to look toward the bronze snake, and they die.

But, as strange as it sounds, this is the only option God gave them. It wasn’t like a buffet table of cures. They couldn’t choose between a pill or a shot or fasting or standing on their head or anything like that. This was the only choice: look with faith at the bronze serpent, or die.

In the same way, Jesus is saying that’s how it is going to be with Him. The world has this sin problem. We have this guilt before God for which a penalty must be paid. But Jesus is going to the cross. He’s going to be lifted up. And if we will look with faith to Him our guilt will be removed. But if not, we die. There’s no other option. No other way for us to deal with the problem of sin.

Jesus says it like **this in John 3:**

**14**Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, **15**that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him….**18**Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

It’s not a question of Jesus having a hold of one part of the elephant and Buddha having another part. It’s not like you can choose between the cross or meditation. Jesus is the one and only cure to the problem of sin.

Jesus is the life. He is the one and only giver of true life. The only solution to our problem of sin.

***Who Will Take the Son?***

No one comes to God except through Jesus. That’s the bold claim of **John 14:6**. He’s the Way. The Truth. And the Life. He doesn’t leave room for other paths, other beliefs, or other saviors.

The elephant story and the spokes on the wheel are interesting ideas, and I can see why people would want to believe that’s the way it works, but it is simply not the picture the Bible gives.

Only Jesus can take us to heaven. Only Jesus has the true revelation of God. Only Jesus can cure our sin problem.

That’s His claim. You have to decide if you will accept it or not.

I’d like to close with a story:

A wealthy man and his son loved to collect rare works of art. They had everything in their collection, from Picasso to Raphael. They would often sit together and admire the great works of art. When the Vietnam conflict broke out, the son went to war.   
  
He was very courageous and died in battle while rescuing another soldier. The father was notified and grieved deeply for his only son.   
  
About a month later, just before Christmas, there was a knock at the door. A young man stood at the door with a large package in his hands.   
  
He said, "Sir, you don't know me, but I am the soldier for whom your son gave his life.” The young man held out the package. “Your son often talked about your love for paintings. I know this isn't much. I'm not really a great artist, but I wanted you to know how much your son meant to me.”  
  
The father opened the package. It was a portrait of his son, painted by the young man. It was not a masterpiece, but still the father could not get over how well the soldier had captured the personality of his son.

The father hung the portrait over his mantle. Every time visitors came to his home he took them to see the portrait of his son before he showed them any of the other great works he had collected.

Some time later the man died. There was to be a great auction of his paintings. Art collectors and wealthy people came from all over, excited at the chance to get one of the great works for their collection.

The auctioneer got things started. The first painting on the stage was the picture of the son. “Who will bid for this picture?” the auctioneer called.

There was silence.

Then a voice in the back of the room shouted, "We want to see the famous paintings. Skip this one."   
  
But the auctioneer persisted. "Will someone bid for this painting? Who will start the bidding? $100, $200?"

Another voice shouted angrily. “We didn't come to see this painting. We came to see the Van Goghs, the Rembrandts. Get on with the real bids!"   
  
But still the auctioneer continued. "The son! The son! Who'll take the son?"   
  
Finally, a voice came from the very back of the room. It was the longtime gardener of the man and his son. "I'll give $10 for the painting."   
  
"We have $10, who will bid $20?"   
  
"Give it to him for $10. Let's see the masters" someone shouted.   
  
"$10 is the bid, won't someone bid $20?"   
  
The crowd was becoming angry. They didn't want the picture of the son. They wanted the more worthy investments for their collections.   
  
The auctioneer pounded the gavel. "Going once, twice, SOLD for $10!"   
  
A man sitting on the second row shouted, "Now let's get on with the collection!"   
  
The auctioneer laid down his gavel. "I'm sorry, the auction over."   
  
"What about the paintings?"   
  
"I am sorry. When I was called to conduct this auction, I was told of a secret stipulation in the will. I was not allowed to reveal that stipulation until this time. Only the painting of the son would be auctioned. Whoever bought that painting would inherit the entire estate, including the paintings. The man who took the son gets everything!"

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by Him. There are no other options, no other ways. Those who take the Son get everything.