



The Way, the Truth, and the Life

It was the night before the Passover Feast, an evening in which every Jewish family commemorated the exodus from Egypt. It was a time when gaiety, laughter, and thankfulness prevailed. Such was not the case, however, in the upper room where Jesus and His disciples had gathered together for the Last Supper. There hung a solemn atmosphere. The disciples of Jesus had become greatly troubled and perplexed. They were at a loss because of what their Master had done and said.

Everything was different from the other times they had eaten the Passover meal. It started already when they had entered the room and Jesus washed their feet. After that, He had shown them what it meant to love the brotherhood: do not always seek your own way, nor force your opinion upon others. Instead, you are to serve them. You must help to them, deny yourself, and be the least among men.

After that, Jesus instituted the Holy Supper. Even though John does not mention it, we learn that from the other evangelists that Jesus spoke of His body and blood. He spoke of how His body would be broken and His blood poured out as a sacrifice that would procure reconciliation and communion with God and each other.

Jesus went on to mention that one of them would betray Him. Just imagine! Someone would betray their Master? He was the One whom they had come to love and to whom they were committed, even if it would cost their life. But there was more! Their Lord spoke to them of His imminent departure in terms that were far from clear to the disciples. What did He mean? To what was He referring? Was He going to die? Would He be speaking of His death, perhaps, as He had done before?

The words of Peter

Peter — the always impetuous Peter — blurted out, *“But I will lay down my life for you,”* meaning as much as: whatever you refer to, Lord, I will see to it that nothing comes of it.

Jesus had answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? No, Peter, before the morning dawns, you will deny me! You will have nothing to do with me. You will only be concerned about your own safety.”

Is it any wonder that the air was filled with apprehension and fear? What did the future hold? What was going to happen? The disciples were at a loss. They just did not understand. Oh, they knew that terrible things were bound to take place. They felt that the actions and words of Jesus were of such a solemn nature that they had reason to fear the worst.

But they did not know exactly what would happen. Even less, they did not know why! No wonder their hearts were troubled! It does not surprise us that their minds were confused. What did their Master mean? To what was He alluding?

How did Jesus react? Did He lose His calm? Was He annoyed because of their blank stares and lack of understanding? No, He was not. He sympathized with them and used the opportunity to elaborate on the difficulties with which they were struggling.

“Let not your hearts be troubled,” He said! Not troubled, we ask? Were there no reasons for it? Was everything that transpired during this evening not mysterious, to put it mildly? Did the disciples

have no cause to be concerned? Was Jesus' imminent departure not something they rightly dreaded? "No," says Jesus!

He continues: *"Just as you believe in God, so also believe in me."* He means as much as, "Don't you understand? Are you afraid that my mission is coming to an inglorious end? But why? Am I not your Master? Have I ever let you down? I am not just a man but the Son of God at the same time! Oh, you of little faith. Why don't you trust me? Why don't you believe in Me? Why can't you safely leave the future in my hands?"

"I am going to my Father soon! I am leaving you for a purpose! That purpose is to prepare a place for you and to see to it that one day you will also be in My Father's house. Have I not told you this before? Have I not made it very clear that my death is an absolute necessity? You cannot enjoy God's blessed presence unless your sins are forgiven. Heaven remains forever out of bounds unless I suffer the penalty that your iniquities deserve."

Jesus adds, "I will not leave you permanently. I am coming back to take you to Myself that you may be forever in My presence. The grave will not have the last word! My death will be completely different from any other death. I will not remain in the grave. I am going to my Father. I came from Him and once My work on earth is finished, I will return to Him! I go to Him not to idle My time away, not to leave you to yourselves, not to forget about My church! No, I go to My Father to be busy for the church. I will make everything ready so that all My disciples will enjoy the blessings of salvation in the presence of their God!"

"You know the way I am going," Jesus continues! He had informed His disciples about it more than once. They could have known! And yet, they did not know because they were so hard of hearing and so dull of understanding. They expected Jesus to become an earthly Messiah who would restore the fortunes of Israel by re-establishing the kingdom of David. That is why they were at a loss and why they could not follow their Master. That is why they failed to understand the deeper meaning of what Jesus had done and said.

The words of Thomas

Thomas, the man we know as the Doubter, becomes their mouthpiece. The disciple who would not believe unless he first saw with his own eyes and felt the wounds of Christ with his own hands, says to Jesus,

"Lord, we do not know where you are going. How then can we know the way?"

If you do not have a clue about someone's destination, it make perfect sense that you are also at a loss about the road that leads to that destination.

The answer that the Lord gives is full of comfort and rich in teaching. He addressed directly the core problem of the disciples – and also of us, I may add. We, too, are often at a loss when it comes to the Bible's teaching. We often get sidetracked when we struggle to understand God's Word. We ought not to elevate ourselves above these men! We must be careful not to get annoyed at their ignorance. They were children of their time. They did not have the complete word of God as we have it today. The Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out. His presence and activity enables us to see and understand the Scriptures in a far more comprehensive manner than the men of our text.

Do you want some examples? How often have we been privileged to celebrate the Supper of the Lord? How many sermons have we heard about its meaning? It has been drilled into us, that Jesus' death is our life and that His love assures us of His ever present care and protection. But how do we live up to that? We must confess that all too often we think far too little of Jesus' assurance. The troubles of life often make us forget about Christ's love so that we become depressed and lose the joy of our faith.

Look at the sins we struggle with and the temptations we face. How often those sins get the better of us! How often we must admit to our shame that we let the Lord down! Yes, how often we flirt

with temptation and toy with sin instead of living holy lives in the power of Christ's Spirit. We attend church and endeavor to live for the Lord, but the day is not finished before our sins make their presence felt. Our good intentions dissipate and we know too well that we have failed our God again.

Imagine if our Lord ran out of patience as quickly as we do! Consider for a moment if Jesus would deal with us as we often deal with Him and our neighbor! Where would our comfort be? Where could we find the assurance that God keeps loving us despite our many shortcomings and failures? Let us thank our faithful Savior for His great love and mercy! Let us go to Him with all our doubts and uncertainties! Let us seek to be instructed by His mouth and trust that He will never leave us.

The Words of Jesus

Listen how Jesus answers the objection of Thomas. See how He puts the fear of His first disciples to rest.

Jesus says, *"I am the way and the truth and the life!"*

What a profound statement! What an affirmation of His divinity! What an assurance for restless hearts! Christ, so to speak, takes Thomas by the hand and in Thomas He addresses all his disciples. He says: Thomas, do you not know yet? Thomas, are you still in doubt why my Father accepts you? Look at me, Thomas! Look at Me, not just as a man but as the Son of God, not as a person whose life finishes up in the grave but as your Savior! Look at Me as the One whose death opens the way to life; whose blood covers all your sins; and whose sacrifice is the only payment that can satisfy God's justice. I am, therefore, the way to the Father's heart and house where you will enjoy a communion of life and joy that lasts forever. This will come to its fullest manifestation when I return to take all My elect to Myself.

First, Christ is the Way! In Him, God demolishes all the barricades that our sins have erected. And, mind you, He is the only Way! There are not half a dozen or more different ways. Your good intentions do not count. Your good works will not do it. Even your covenant membership and church attendance will not assure you of God's loving communion. It is Christ and Him alone! It is when you renounce all that you are and go to Him as a miserable sinner in humble faith that you may find the way.

Second, He is the Truth! All that is opposed to Him is not true; even more, everything the Bible teaches finds its fulfillment in Him. During the Old Testament everything was still provisional. A person could only approach God via elaborate sacrifices and rituals and other stipulations. Even then, it was only from a distance and only for a certain time.

In Christ, all these shadows have been fulfilled. In Christ we may draw near to God the Father twenty-four hours a day. When we believe in Christ, we may enjoy God's communion all the time. He must be our All and Everything. Our faith must be built on a solid foundation. Our faith must rest on nothing else but the Truth; otherwise, it serves no purpose. That truth is personified in Jesus Christ. The Bible makes no sense and has no value unless you discover Him and recognize that it speaks of Christ from Genesis to Revelation.

Third, He is the Life! That is where the Truth leads, and its results. Only the Truth sets us free, says the Bible, free from the stifling weight of our sins and free from the haunting whispers of the devil. Only the Truth sets us free from the wrath of God so that we live again in the sunshine of God's love and in communion with the Father. When our death draws near, that communion will change from faith into sight until it is perfected on the day of Christ's return! Then the Father's house will be occupied by all His children who staked their life on Jesus Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

We have seen so much more than those first disciples. They could have said, "Jesus is the Way? What a way! Hanging on a cross, of all things. Jesus is the Truth? What a truth, when the lies and

the slander seemed to be victorious on Golgotha's hill. Jesus is the Life? What a life! Look at Him when they laid his body in the tomb!"

But how these words of Jesus shine forth in all their comfort and glory! When Christ uttered the words: '*It is finished*,' the way to the Father was opened, never to be closed again. The truth of which the gospel witnesses was manifested when God raised His Son on the third day, giving us the incontestable proof that Jesus' work of reconciliation was accepted by the Father. Life burst forth on Easter morning, proclaiming that sin had been conquered and death been overcome!

O, yes, it is still a matter of faith, but it is a faith that is founded on the Scriptures, which find their focal point in Jesus Christ, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Garrelt Wieske

© 2015

www.christianstudylibrary.org