**Series: What Jesus Would Say**

*VBC*

*Pastor John Johnson*

*John 14:5-7*

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“Is Jesus Too Narrow?”

The other night I was reading an interview with Andre Agassi, one of the great tennis players of our time

-who is now retired and lives in Las Vegas pouring his resources into a charter school

-asked why he has given his life to this—he replied—it is the only way to make systematic change

-either we build schools—or we build prisons

It’s one way to make systematic change

-near the end of His earthly life, Jesus gathered 12 men into an upper room to challenge them to something similar

-it was a final briefing of sort

-preparing His disciples for what they were not prepared for—His death

-priming them for life and mission in Jesus’ physical absence

-and making them ready—as He is making us ready—to make a systematic change in the world we live in

-it was not so much a speech as a dialogue—a series of conversations—each prompted by a different disciple—each with a question

-and each answer serves to inform us as to how you make systematic changes—how to change the world

1. Peter wants to know why Jesus is washing his feet/ Jesus responds—to change the world requires servant leadership
2. Peter wants to know why he can’t go with Jesus/ Jesus responds—to change the world requires mutual love lived out here on earth
3. And now it is Thomas who has a question—prompted by Jesus’ announced departure—read 14:1-6

-at first, it sounds like Jesus is leaving to oversee construction, head to Home Depot and build us a street of dreams

-but “prepare” in this context has more to do with removing the obstacles that get in the way—like our sin

-Jesus is going by way of the cross and the resurrection so that He can “make a way” (Heb 10:20) and bring us to Himself—verse 3

-and Jesus assures them that they really do understand the way—for He has been with them, teaching and living the way

-but Thomas—ever the realist—is not afraid to admit that he doesn’t

-maybe Jesus handed out roadmaps earlier, because right now Thomas is lost

-he would like to MapQuest the route, put an address in his GPS

-because he’s never traveled to heaven

-Jesus’ oblique, other worldly language (“you know the way”) is particularly hard for him to grapple with—as it is for some of us

-so he asks—and we are grateful

-we need the Thomas’ of this world to speak up—say what we too are wondering, ask what we are too afraid to ask

-for we like to be silent, nodding our heads and appearing like we completely understand—even if we have no idea what the person is saying

-we just need someone to stop the conversation and ask—“Wait, can you start over and explain exactly where you are going and repeat how I can get there?”

ILLUSTRATION—surgeon-going over procedures

-so Jesus looked Thomas in the eye and turned a geographic question into a spiritual affirmation—I AM THE WAY

-it is perhaps Jesus most memorable self-definition—

 -I am the WAY—without which there is no going

 -I am the TRUTH—without which there is no knowing

 -I am the LIFE—without which there is no living

-the words are intended to draw Thomas to Christ—and to Him alone

-bring Him to this realization—that He alone is the access to God

-He earlier used the metaphor of a gate—John 10

-the declaration is simple—and absolute, and unambiguous

-it admits of no compromise—there is only one way

IILLUSTRATION—Ione sign—Canadian border—27 miles

-there are two alternative routes—Hwy 25 to the west that is 86 miles/Hwy 95 to the east that is 139 miles to the border

-but the route to heaven has only one way, one access to cross the border from earth to the Father’s house

-any thought of multiple ways to God is silenced—reaching the Father through any other means Jesus is eliminated

-and this is hard for many to accept—maybe even some of you

-maybe Jesus is unique—but then isn’t every important religious figure?

-to say there is only one right way, one right truth, one right life sounds intolerant—akin to right wing extremism

-when Oprah[[1]](#endnote-1) was big—part of her appeal was her spirituality—a more generic type that conforms easily to our pluralistic age

-she once told an audience—“One of the biggest mistakes we make is to believe there is only one way. There are many diverse paths leading to God.”—Oprah Winfrey

-think of it as a ‘designer god’ mentality

-an á la carte blend of religious concepts, from karmic destiny (Zen Buddhism) to reincarnation (Hinduism)

-Marcus Borg, a scholar who has been part of the Jesus Seminar, shares the same sentiment—

*“The enduring religions are all paths up the same mountain. Envision a mountain, broad at the bottom, narrow at the top, the peak finally disappearing into air, space, emptiness. At the bottom, the paths are farthest apart. But as the paths lead higher, they become closer together until they converge on the mountaintop. And then, of course, they disappear. And the place to which they lead, the mountaintop is not ‘heaven,’ but ‘the sacred.’”[[2]](#endnote-2)*

-it plays well with mainstream Western culture that wants religious autonomy—God on their terms, God according to their authority

-but no matter how much you try to shape and squeeze and force fit Jesus to accommodate to universalistic assumptions

-His words in 14:6 will not allow it

-it is not true all roads lead to the top—some lead over the precipice[[3]](#endnote-3)

-so what gives Jesus the right to such a statement—that one path to God is right and all the others are wrong—that He alone controls the toll road to heaven?

-there are at least THREE arguments that affirm His right—

1. INCARNATION

-No one else claims that God, without sacrificing His divine nature, became fully human—but Jesus

-others might claim to be ascended masters—but only Jesus claimed to be the descended God –God in the flesh

-who comes to us in our weakness—assumed our human nature[[4]](#endnote-4)

-only Jesus came and embodied the mission and being of God

-explained (lit exegeted) God—1:18

-hence to Thomas Jesus goes on to say—“The one who has seen Me has seen the Father”—14:9

-Paul made the same statement—He is the image of the invisible God—Col 1:15

-no one spoke in such intimate terms with God—to the point of claiming to be God—as Jesus

-He even takes on God’s personal name in John—I AM-8:58

Point—this makes Jesus more than mere prophet, priest, sage, or king—far more than an idea, a philosophy

-this is the most unique and essential characteristic of Christianity[[5]](#endnote-5)

He alone is the way to get to God because He alone is the way God came to us

2. SACRIFICE

-No one else has paid the price for man’s failure—made a way to God

-no one else has died for me nor you—not Buddha nor Mohammad, not Krishna, nor the goddess of Wicca, nor Black Elk—nor anyone

-no one else has made a way to God—opened a previously unopened access (Hebrews 6:20)

-so why would they be considered yet one more access?

”Would a God who provided for the salvation of the world in a unique, costly, and sacrificial death of His Son be willing to accept any other means—any lesser means—of salvation?” –James Edwards, Is Jesus the Only Savior[[6]](#endnote-6)—

-this is why the disciples stood before the powers of their day—emperor worship, mystery cults, the Jewish religion—and at the cost of their lives declared—

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved”—Acts 4:12

-and Paul to the church at Ephesus—“There is one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus”—

I Timothy 2:5

3. RESURRECTION

-No one else conquered death and rose to sit at the highest seat of authority in heaven

-only Christ has crossed the shore from death to life

-everyone else remains in their graves

-hence—Phil 2:9-11—“God has exalted Him and bestowed upon Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”

Back to Thomas and the upper room

-how does one make systematic change?

-lead by serving—love like Jesus

-and you STAND FOR SOMETHING—FOR THE RIGHT THING

-you don’t waffle—you don’t dither, vascillate on core truths—YOU DON’T ACCOMMODATE TO ERROR!!!

-you don’t wear today’s fashions at the expense of truth

-you don’t engage by surrendering core convictions

-there is one way, one truth, one life—not two, three, or a hundred

CONCLUSION

-The last time I was in Syria—before the civil war—we were in Sweda-south of Damascus

-strengthening the tiny church

-back in Damascus—Nabil asked—why do you do that?

-let each group do their thing—maintain the status quo—let everyone hold to their own way

-it will keep the peace and please the government

-but he misses this that Jesus came—not to destabilize—but to make peace—bring down the walls of hatred

-expose the deceptions of other ways

-and to open eyes to the truth

-if Jesus is the only way—you can’t keep it to yourself!

Are you?

1. Ct, April 1,2002, 45 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Marcus Borg, the heart of Christianity: rediscovering a life of faith, 218 [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Bruner, John, 829 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Edwards, 229 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Edwards, 229 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. James Edwards, Is Jesus the Only Savior, 181 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)