

The Seven I AM Statements of Christ

I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14:1-11)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on November 17, 2024

Introduction

- ❖ We're in a series going over the Seven I AM Statements of Christ found in John's Gospel. Which we've been describing as seven self-declarations that reveal his unique identity as the God of the OT, come down in person, in the flesh. **History is littered with prophets and religious leaders, with purported saviors and messianic figures. But none like Jesus.** No one else ever made such bold claims and backed it up. When he stepped out of that tomb, Jesus underscored all seven statements. Proving them true. Proving to be One of a kind.
 - **And it's the uniqueness of Christ that makes Christianity so unique.** That makes it different from all other faiths. And by different, we don't mean as in "chocolate ice cream is different from vanilla ice cream." That's a difference in *flavor* but not in *kind*. They're still both ice cream.

- ❖ **No, when we say Christianity is different from all other religions, we mean different in the way a bowl of chocolate ice cream is different from a bowl of chicken noodle soup.** Not a difference in flavor but in kind, in category.
 - Christianity is not just one flavor of religion. No, it's in a category all to itself. **While all other religions can be described as man's reflections on God, Christianity is rightly understood as God's revelation to man.** All other religions will try to tell you about God. But in Christianity, God is the One who reveals himself to you.

- ❖ **That's why it stands apart from all other religions in the world.** That's how it's unique. And I realize that's an incendiary statement that can rub people the wrong way. **It's considered arrogant and narrow-minded to think Christianity is so special and unique.** That's the problem with Christians – is what many would say.
 - And I get the criticism. **If you're not a Christian and you're a bit put off by what I'm saying,** I hope to explain why Christians make such exclusive truth claims about Christ. I can't make you believe it, but I'll try to offer some compelling reasons for it.

- ❖ **And if you are a Christian – but one who shies away from a topic like this –** who downplays the uniqueness and exclusivity of the gospel – I hope to confront you with what the Bible plainly teaches. What your Lord says about himself and his message of salvation.
 - Look back at v6. Jesus states in no uncertain terms, ***"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*** You can't get more exclusive than that. *No one* comes to God the Father – that is, in a saving relationship – *except through me!* You can't go through anyone else. You can't go through Allah. You can't go through Buddha. You can't go through Krishna. None of them can save you. None but Jesus. He's the only way.

- ❖ Friends, do you believe this? **This is not an easy truth to believe, especially in the context in which we live. Houston is one of the most diverse cities in America.** Immigrants, refugees, and transplants from all over the country and the world move here all the time. We're always coming in contact with believers of other faiths or people of no faith at all.

- ❖ You have colleagues, classmates, friends, and family who are Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, agnostic, or atheist. So even Christians will question our own convictions from time to time: **Do I really believe Christianity is the one true faith?** Do I really believe my non-Christian friends are lost without Christ? Or is there more than one way to get to God?
- ❖ **But honestly, if there are other ways to God, then why did we get up so early this morning? Why don't we just sleep in like our secular friends?** And if those friends say they're just fine in their secularism (or in their own faith traditions), then don't worry about their salvation. Don't bother sharing the gospel. If they're on their own path to God, then let them be. Let them go their own way.
 - But if we take the Bible seriously – if we take Jesus's words seriously – then worshipping Christ and fellowshiping with his people this morning is the best use of your time. **And if Jesus is the only way to God, then sharing his gospel is the most important and most loving thing you can do.**
- ❖ Let me do my best to convince you of this. I'm going to organize this sermon around three assertions. **First, we'll consider why there can't be many ways to God.** We'll see why it doesn't work experientially or logically. **Second, there are good reasons for why Jesus is *the* one way to God.** We'll dive into the passage we just read from John 14. **Third, if Jesus is the only way to God, then the implications are massive.**

There Can't Be Many Ways to God

- ❖ So let's begin by arguing for why there can't be many ways to God. The popular claim that there are multiple ways through multiple faiths has been championed by many. Buddha taught that there are 84,000 paths to enlightenment – so there are 84,000 ways. Gandhi taught, "All paths leading to God are equally good." Oprah teaches that one of the biggest mistakes is to believe there is only one way. **So why do Christians insist there is only one way to God? Why can't there be many ways?** Consider three reasons.
 - ❖ **First, to insist that all ways are valid is not consistent with your own experience.** What I mean is that even if you *want* to say that all faiths are valid ways to God, you probably don't really mean that. Think about it: Would you call a religion that demands the sacrifice of young virgins a valid way to God? What about a religion that requires its followers to sell all their possessions and move out to a desert compound stockpiling guns and ammunition? Would you honestly consider them equal to the major world religions?
 - ❖ **So when you say that all ways are equally valid, what you really mean is that all ways (that you think are rational and sane) are equally valid.** You're not referring to all the kooky cults that do things you consider strange or reprehensible.
 - **But isn't that kind of thinking already being exclusive? Exclusive to faiths you find commendable.** To religions you find respectable. The fact is that all of us discriminate between different faiths. So to argue that all are equally valid is not consistent with your own experience. Everyone excludes to one degree or another.

- ❖ **Second, to insist that all faiths are the same is logically incoherent.** It sounds charitable to say that all religions are ultimately the same. That they all boil down to love and good deeds. **But you can only claim that by flat-out ignoring what these religions teach.** The doctrinal differences between major world religions aren't superficial. They differ at the fundamentals.
 - For example, Buddhism doesn't believe in a personal God. Hinduism believes in many gods. But Christianity, Judaism, and Islam believe in only one personal God. How can they all be correct? The math doesn't work.
 - How can the road that says there is no after life; and the road that says you are reincarnated after death; and the road that says you die once and then face judgment – how can they all lead to the same place? Logically, they can't.

- ❖ Now someone might say, “Well, that just demonstrates that all religions are partly right and partly wrong. **All religions have some of the truth but not the whole truth.** But as long as you follow the truth you do have, you'll end up in the same place.” But this argument also leads to a logical inconsistency. It leads to the third reason why there can't be many ways.

- ❖ **Third, to insist that no one religion has the whole truth is actually a self-defeating argument.** Consider the story of the three blind men and the elephant, which is often told to make the point that the truth is greater than any one religion.
 - Three blind men are holding onto three different parts of the elephant and describing what they're touching. The one holding the elephant's trunk claims, “This creature we're touching is long and snake-like.” But the one holding the elephant's leg says, “No, this creature is stumpy and thick like a tree trunk.” But the one holding the elephant's tail protests, “No, this creature is thin and wispy like a mop.”
 - **And the point of the story is that all three were partly right based on their perspective. But the argument is that none of them had a complete grasp of the truth.** None of them could see the big picture. That it's an elephant!

- ❖ But what seems like a convincing illustration and argument is actually self-defeating. Think about it: **The story is arguing that no one has an exhaustive and purely objective view of the truth. Yet in making the argument, the narrator is claiming that he *does* have that vantage point.** That he *can* see the whole elephant while everyone else is blindly trying to describe it. Apparently, he's the only seeing person. Everyone else is blind!

- ❖ Inadvertently, the person making this argument assumes he has a full grasp of the truth – suggesting that all religions are the same – which is the very thing he's arguing no one person or one religion can have. Not only is this argument self-defeating, it's rather arrogant. **To object to all exclusive truth claims is in itself an exclusive truth claim.**
 - So to ask why can't there be multiple ways to God is not all that helpful a question. **The better question is to ask, “Which way – among the many options – is honest about the human condition and offers a plausible path to God?”** Which way provides a real solution to our greatest human need?

Three Good Reasons Why Jesus is the Only Way to God

- ❖ And as Christians, we believe that Jesus is the Answer. The only Answer. The only way to God. But, of course, the burden is on us to give good reasons why that's the case. **Why do we believe that only those who accept Jesus will be accepted by God and those who reject Jesus will be rejected by God?** There are three good reasons found here in John 14.
- ❖ But let me first offer some context. Jesus is with his disciples on the night before his arrest, and he senses that they're disturbed. So he says in v1, "*Let not your hearts be troubled.*" Now what was troubling them? Well, in chapter 13:33 Jesus just said that he will soon depart and that his disciples won't be able to follow. Imagine how confused and scared they were.
 - But then Jesus comforts them with a promise. **A promise to prepare a room for them in his Father's house.** So that one day he'll return to take them to be with him in the Father's house. Which is figurative language to describe what we'd call heaven.
- ❖ **And then in v4, Jesus tells them that they already know the Way to heaven.** But Thomas objects. He doesn't remember Jesus giving them a map or a set of directions, so how can they know the way? Jesus responds in v6 with the most exclusive of truth claims, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*"
 - I'm going to argue that Jesus set the exclusiveness of the Christian Gospel in light of his own uniqueness. **In other words, the reason salvation is *exclusive* in Christ is because Christ is a *unique* Savior.** The salvation he offers is unique. No other savior comes close to offering a salvation like his. **So that begs the question, "What's so unique about Jesus and the salvation he accomplished?"** Jesus already told us: He is uniquely the Way, uniquely the Truth, and uniquely the Life.

UNIQUELY THE WAY

- ❖ **Let's consider what it means for Jesus to be uniquely the Way.** Jesus alone – among the founders of all the major world religions – is the only one who makes this kind of bold claim. **All other religions have great teachers who claim to *reveal* the way to God. But Jesus actually claims to *be* the Way!**
 - Those religious teachers can only claim, "There's the path to God. That's the path I took. If you follow that way of life and stay true to it, you'll find God like I did." They can point you in the right direction. Getting to the final destination is up to you.
 - **But when Jesus spoke of a Way to God, he wasn't talking about a path but a person. About himself!** He claims, "I AM the Way to God. Don't follow a path. Don't put your hope in a way of life. Put your hope in me. Know me and you'll know the Way." That's why his disciples already knew the way to God – because they knew him.
- ❖ **This is what makes Christianity unique.** Jesus doesn't give his followers a set of directions for how to reach God. He doesn't prescribe a particular way of life by which we can attain to our own salvation. **Rather, he invites people into a relationship with him.** A relationship based on trust – trusting that he is the way to God.

- ❖ **But how is he the way to God? What does it mean for Jesus to actually be the Way?** Try to think of the Way – not so much as a way to get between two spatial points – but as a way to reconcile two parties. **Think in terms of a relational distance – not a spatial distance.** So, for example, a bitter husband and wife can live unhappily under the same roof. There’s no spatial distance between them, but there can be a huge relational distance.
 - Now the way between two *spatially* distant points is a path. **But the way between two relationally distant persons is understood to be another person.** A mediator, to be exact. A go-between who helps two disputing parties come together.

- ❖ **Now other faiths may use different terms, but all agree that there’s some sort of distance between God and man.** In Christianity, it’s taught that we alienated ourselves from God by our own sin. The evil in our hearts has created hostility resulting in a large relational distance between us and God.
 - But what makes the Christian faith unique is that – unlike other religions – it doesn’t expect man to make up the distance. What we desperately need is a mediator to come and bridge the gap. To reconcile us. **And in the gospel, we’re told of how God took the initiative to send us a unique, one-of-a-kind mediator.**

- ❖ What makes a good mediator is the ability to equally relate to and represent both parties. Well, this is where Jesus stands head and shoulder above all other mediators. Since he’s God Incarnate – the only person equally God and equally man – only Jesus could fully represent both parties at the table and bring about our reconciliation.
 - **And how did he reconcile us to God?** By dying in our place. Paying for our sins. So that, now, whoever pleads for mercy in Jesus’s name will not perish but will receive eternal life. And the right to become children of God – no longer relationally distant.

- ❖ **Do you see why Christians insist on Jesus being the only way?** Only the Christian faith is honest about our human plight and offers a plausible way to be reconciled with God. The religions of this world are simply too optimistic. They assume our human condition is not that bad off. They think we can find God if shown the right way to live, the right path to take.
 - **But only Christianity is realistic enough to admit how bad off we are and how badly we need a Mediator (Savior) who does what we cannot do to bring us to God.** That’s why Jesus is uniquely the Way to God.

UNIQUELY THE TRUTH

- ❖ Now what about the Truth? What does it mean for Jesus to be uniquely the Truth? **It means he alone reveals the Truth about God.** Without him, we wouldn’t know enough about God to have a relationship. Now Jesus reveals the Truth about God in two particular ways.
 - **First, he reveals the Truth about God as an eyewitness testimony.** No one but Jesus was sent from the Father’s side into the world as an eyewitness. The prophets of old were definitely sent to reveal God, but they were just given words to repeat. They could say, “*Thus says the Lord.*” **But none of them could say, “Thus I have seen with my own eyes in heaven and heard with my own ears in glory.”** But Jesus can.

- ❖ But he's more than an eyewitness of God. **Second, Jesus reveals the Truth about God by being God Incarnate.** He is God in the flesh. No one else makes this claim. **The founders of other world religions claim to speak the truth. Jesus claims to be the Truth.** He claims to be living Truth in bodily form. Truth made personal so that we can know God personally.
- ❖ Look back at our text in vv7-9. Here Jesus tells his disciples that they can know God since he has made him known. *"If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."*
 - But the disciples still don't realize Jesus is God Incarnate, so they ask him to show them God. But Jesus says to them in v9, *"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"* Jesus and God the Father are one (Jn 10:30).
 - So if you want to see and know God, you don't have to climb a mountain. You don't need to go to seminary and get a theology degree. You just need to look to Jesus in the Scriptures. **Through Jesus, we don't just hear eyewitness testimony about God – we hear God's own voice.**
- ❖ Go back to that illustration of the three blind men and the elephant. **Remember, the point of the story is that nobody can have that absolute, exhaustive vision.** No one can see the big picture. And Christians would agree. **We agree that none of us can claim to be the seeing person in the story.** We're all blind due to the effect of sin. Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, and atheists are all blind.
 - But even so, we still believe that absolute truth can be known. How? **Because we believe it's a talking elephant.** We believe the elephant has spoken and revealed himself. We believe certain blind men in the past heard his voice and recorded his words in a book called the Bible.
- ❖ Christians believe God still speaks today through the testimony about Christ recorded in Holy Scripture. God hasn't told us everything about himself. Christians don't claim to have exhaustive knowledge. **But he has told us everything we need to know to be saved and to have a real relationship with him. We have sufficient knowledge, and Jesus gave it to us.** That's what it means for him to be the Truth.

UNIQUELY THE LIFE

- ❖ What about his claim to be the Life? What did Jesus mean by that? **By calling himself the Life, he means that he is the only source of the Life of God.** Now I'm referring to a life that's spiritual in nature. In the Gospels, different words are translated into English as *life*, and they carry different connotations. The Greek word *bios* refers to our daily, physical life. It's where we get the word biology. **But the word *zoe* is used to signify spiritual life.** It's usually modified by the Greek word for *eternal*.
 - That's the kind of life Jesus identifies himself as. Yes, he's the source of our daily, physical sustenance, but he's more than the giver and sustainer of physical, biological life. **Jesus is the wellspring of spiritual, eternal life.**

- ❖ In John 4:13, speaking to the Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus promised that, “*Everyone who drinks this [well] water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.*” Those who receive Jesus are promised eternal life.
 - **And unlike what the world has to offer, this divine life can fully satisfy your soul so that you never thirst again.** This eternal life wells up from a tiny spring and turns into a gushing river that overflows its banks to fall upon and refresh those around you who are parched in spiritual dryness. **Jesus is this all-satisfying, all-sufficient Life.** That’s what he meant when he called himself the Life.

Three Massive Implications

- ❖ Let’s bring this home and get personal. **If Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, what does that mean for us?** What are the implications? There are three massive ones to consider. **First, because Jesus taught that he is the Way, we must not shy away from the exclusive tone of his gospel.** I know this is not a popular thing to say. And that won’t change as long as we live in a culture that treats religious tolerance as a supreme virtue.
 - Now, there is a sense in which religious tolerance is a virtue and a very good thing. If we’re talking about a tolerance that calls for equal respect and dignity to be shown to people of all faiths (or those of no faith at all) – that’s the very privilege of living in a free society. **Historically, religious tolerance has meant that I can strongly disagree with your religious beliefs, but I will adamantly defend your right to believe it, to practice it, and to speak it out loud.**
- ❖ But sadly, Christians in our nation have taken those freedoms for granted or have assumed they only apply to us. Now, it’s fair to acknowledge that our nation *was* founded upon principles rooted in a biblical worldview. **But that’s *not* the same as being founded as a Christian nation.** So just as we should be disturbed by any societal efforts to marginalize Christians and Christian influence – **we should be equally suspect of any efforts to institutionally privilege Christianity in society over against other religions.**
 - For the Church to rely on the State to exert its institutional power to privilege Christianity is to play with fire. Because any future administration hostile to our faith could turn the same levers that we rely on for privilege *against us* in favor of another religion or secularism in general (which itself is a faith commitment).
- ❖ So Christians should be strong advocates for religious tolerance – in terms of the State not privileging any religion over others, including our own. But, at the same time, we need to acknowledge that that’s not how the term “religious tolerance” is being used these days.
 - **Nowadays, we’re dealing with cultural pressure (and at times institutional pressure) to promote a tolerance that claims all faiths are ultimately one and the same. That forces all religious truth claims into the same mold.** Culturally shaming or punishing Christians for suggesting that Jesus is the only Way. If that’s what’s meant by religious tolerance, then Christians have to reasonably and respectfully disagree. And I hope that’s the tone and the message being sent today.

- ❖ Here's the second implication: **Because Jesus is the Truth, we do not know God rightly until we know Jesus personally.** Of course, people can know things about God without knowing or believing in Jesus, but no one knows him rightly apart from Jesus. **If you want to know God in a saving way, you have to know Jesus in a personal way.**
 - So think about what that means for those living in religiously oppressive societies that suppress the preaching of Christ and his gospel. Considering those hard to reach peoples, it would be a huge relief if there were multiple ways to God – if Jesus wasn't the only One who reveals God in a saving way. Then there would at least be some hope for these unreached peoples living in these hard-to-reach lands where there are no local churches (or even local believers) around to share Christ with them.

- ❖ **But if Jesus is the only Way to God and the only Truth about God, then all hope is gone – unless those of us who hope in Christ go and share it with them.** This is the heartbeat of global missions. I'm confident that God is uniquely burdening some of you with this realization. You're sensing a call to go and bring the name of Jesus to the nations. Maybe it's a burden you've been carrying for years. Or, for some, you're just starting to feel it. Either way, you should join us, at the end of the year, at WHCC for CMC Global. It's a missions conference where, I pray, the Lord will give you greater clarity on the next steps to take.

- ❖ And here's the third implication: **Because Jesus is the Life of God, he has the right to impart this eternal life to whomever he pleases.** In John 5:21, Jesus says something that could be interpreted as extremely exclusive, *“For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.”*
 - That might discourage some people. So this eternal (*zoe*) life is all up to Jesus? It's only available to those whom he is pleased to give it? That so exclusive! But stop and ask: **If Jesus only gives eternal life to whom he is pleased to give it – then to whom is he pleased to give it?**

- ❖ And here's the good news. Three verses later, in v24, Jesus goes on to tell us. It says, *“I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”*
 - **So apparently, Jesus has determined that he is pleased to give eternal life to whoever hears his word and believes in him!** I don't know about you but *whoever* doesn't sound very exclusive to me.

- ❖ The Christian gospel is only **exclusive** in the sense that the means of salvation is exclusive to faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. But it's actually **inclusive** in the sense that anyone – regardless of their background or their past – anyone can receive eternal life. **No one is too sinful, too far gone, too different, to receive the Life of God.** You just have to put your trust in the Truth of God, relying on Him as the only Way to God.