

“I AM THE WAY, TRUTH AND LIFE”: UNCOVERING REALITY IN A PERPLEXING WORLD

You've spent the evening amongst friends – accompanied by good food, laughter and conversation. It's an evening you know you'll look back on in the future.

Then someone gets a message from home. It's bad news. The buzz of the evening is suddenly interrupted, dominated by this bombshell.

It's exactly the sort of gear-change moment that provides the backdrop to Jesus' latest 'I am' claim.

Jesus and his disciples have gathered to eat the Passover.

Passover was an annual celebration in which the Jewish people remembered how their ancestors were freed by God from slavery in Egypt. It also reminded them of God's promise to make his people his own by one day sending his Messiah.

There's excitement in the air. The disciples have seen what Jesus can do. Might *he* be the Messiah, the one who fulfils these promises?

But then, at the height of the evening, Jesus makes a bombshell announcement. He will be with them only for a little longer. He's going.

The sense of expectation is replaced with urgent questions. "Where are you going, Jesus? How can we follow you, if you're not here with us?"

It feels like everything the disciples have known to be true is being challenged.

Jesus' response is to make another 'I am' claim:

I am the way, and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.

In this emotionally-charged moment, Jesus takes his disciples' fears and anxieties upon himself, asking them to find reassurance in *him*.

Throughout time, humans have asked questions about the meaning of life. To live in a way beyond just surviving, we need to know why we're here, and what life's all about.

But finding secure answers is hard. It's difficult navigating the competing opinions.

The disciples had come to think that Jesus was a dependable source of truth. That's part of the reason they were so troubled by the news of his departure.

Now Jesus knows that the disciples are feeling unsure where to look for truth; that they suddenly feel alone. But he insists: as you look for truth, continue to look to me, even in my physical absence. For I not only *tell* the truth; *I am* the truth.

Jesus isn't talking about truth in an abstract way. He won't provide the disciples with a map of reality, or even a set of ideas or answers. Instead, he offers *himself*.

Listen to what he says next:

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

Throughout his life, Jesus refers to the one true God as his 'Father'. Now Jesus is claiming that we can know the truth as we look to him – because he reveals the Father.

In other words, Jesus shows us God.

It turns out that what Jesus wants the disciples to know is not a set of cold, hard facts. Instead, he invites them into the truest relationship there is. Not only does Jesus claim to make God *knowable*, but he says we can *know him* personally and dependably – in all of life's uncertainties.

This claim seems to stun Jesus' disciples. Yet Jesus reminds them of what they've seen:

Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.

Look at my works, says Jesus – remember what I've done! Remember how I fed thousands. Remember how I restored life where there was death. My actions testify to who I am.

Jesus' miracles say: this really is the one we've been waiting for; the promised Messiah, sent by God the Father. Jesus has gone around acting and speaking as if he was God, bringing his people freedom.

So Jesus is saying: if you want to know truth, look to me. Everything may feel as though it's uncertain. You long to hold onto something steady. But don't mourn my physical departure, as if that's end of the story.

You can keep looking to me for truth and life, even when I'm gone – for I am your God.

Where does that leave Jesus' friends?

Well, Jesus will indeed soon depart. Within twenty-four hours, he will be crucified. He still has his final 'work' to do.

But none of this undermines Jesus' claim to be the way, the truth and the life.

In fact, Jesus consistently said that his death would be the *ultimate* expression of truth, revealing with clarity what God is like and the way to know life with him.

Here's the truth: there was no way other than Jesus' death by which we could be brought back into relationship with God.

That means Jesus' death shows us the truth of God's love: he would rather die than condemn us to a lost eternity. And as he rose, he showed that nothing can get in the way of his commitment to us. He truly is the way to life.

Jesus allows us to know who God is, what he's like and what he offers. As we believe the truth and surrender our lives to him, the way to life with God our Father is opened. The living God becomes someone we can know and trust. Rather than being a distant and unknown entity, we can depend on him – even when life feels uncertain: in our sin, our fears and our failures, and in all of life's ups and downs.

Even as we face the ultimate uncertain moment – our moment of death – we can have confidence.

History tells us that Jesus' anxious disciples became some of the bravest people in the ancient world. What made the difference?

Part of the answer is: they knew Jesus to be the way, the truth and the life. In him, they found security for the present and the future.

And perhaps as Jesus' claim grips our hearts, we might know a similar sense of calm and courage as we follow him... in our time and in our universities.