

BaptistWay: The Way, the Truth and the Life

January 9, 2015

• *The BaptistWay lesson for Jan. 25 focuses on John 14:1-14.*

Remember the story about six blind men and an elephant? One blind man touches the animal's belly, thinking it's a wall. Another grabs the elephant's ear and thinks he's touching a fan. A third blind man touches the tail and thinks he's holding a rope. As each grabs a part of the elephant, none knows what it is he really feels. Supposedly, we're all grasping in the dark, just knowing part of God, but not really knowing who he is.

But there's a flaw with this story. While it's a good description of humanity's inability to comprehend God, it never considers this paradigm-shattering question: What if the elephant talks? What if he tells the blind men: "That wall-like structure is my side. That fan is really my ear. And that's not a rope; it's a tail." What would we say about the blind men who refuse to believe him?

Bold claims

Over the course of our study of the Gospel of John, we've seen Jesus make numerous and bold claims about himself. He's the "elephant" telling us who God is. He identified himself repeatedly as deity—*ego eimi*, "I Am," according to Exodus 3:14. He described and demonstrated God's character through his teaching, lifestyle and miracles. He invited us to observe and know him intimately, and in doing so, learn exactly who God is.

After Jesus warned of Judas' betrayal (13:21), his own departure (13:33) and Peter's denial (13:38), surely his disciples were unsettled. Thus, it's no surprise the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6) offered his followers comfort and

confidence. He encouraged them not to let their hearts be troubled (14:1). He's the only trustworthy solution they can look to in this moment of uncertainty and insecurity, and he will forever be their—and our—only source of power, hope and promise.

Jesus made his promises eternal, too, by preparing permanent dwelling places for them in heaven (v. 2). The imagery of this residence of many rooms “is taken from the oriental house in which sons and daughters have apartments under the same roof as their parents,” The Expositor’s Bible Commentary explains. But most importantly, Jesus’ imagery expresses his desire for an abiding relationship with his followers. He will go away, but he will come back to take them to be with him (v. 3).

He is the way

More than merely a location, Jesus’ destination is a person—God the Father—and humanity can only get to the Father through him (v. 6). This statement makes uneasy those who struggle with the exclusivity of Jesus’ claim. He is the “way” because only he—in his sinlessness—is the mediator between sinful humanity and holy God. Jesus is the “truth” because he effectively and fully reveals God’s power to make life make sense regardless of its highs and lows.

He is the “life” because he made death subject to himself, makes life more than mere existence on earth (Ephesians 2:5) and makes possible eternal life with God in heaven. By experiencing him, we experience the Father (14:7; Colossians 1:15); he is the full revelation and manifestation of God.

Jesus’ disciples likely understood Jesus’ claims to be used in conjunction with the law they’d been taught to observe for millennia. Humanity struggles to accept the truth that Jesus is enough. We either want to do something good to “earn” our place with God, or accept multiple avenues and proclaim them all equally effective at providing salvation from sin for

eternity.

A vignette from Robert Webber's book *Who Gets to Narrate the World?* explains it this way: Seated on a plane together, Hans observed Robert reading a Christian book and asked, "Are you a religious man?" "Yes," Robert said. "I am too," Hans responded. They began talking about religion, and in the middle of the conversation Robert asked, "Can you give me a one-liner that captures the essence of your faith?" Hans replied, "We are all part of the problem, and we are all part of the solution."

After discussing Hans' statement, Robert asked, "Would you like a one-liner that captures the Christian faith?" "Sure," Hans responded. "We are all part of the problem, but there is only one who is the solution. His name is Jesus," Robert said.

A desire to experience God personally

Do you believe Jesus is sufficient? Do you believe he's all he claimed to be as God incarnate? Philip's bold request to see the Father (v. 8)—even if it wasn't living by faith, but by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7)—revealed a desire to experience God personally. It's reminiscent of Moses' request in Exodus 33:18 when he asked God "show me your glory."

In that scenario, to spare his life, God let Moses see his back. Jesus' reply to Thomas, more an explanation than rebuke, was to help him understand he has seen God, by virtue of seeing the Son; the Father was doing his work through Jesus (vv. 9-10). He revealed God's character as he lived, walked, taught and performed miracles among them (v. 11).

Then Jesus suggested those who believe in him will perform, through the power of prayer, miracles with more far-reaching effect (v. 12). Believers will find incredible freedom to ask "for anything" in keeping with God's character and desire, and know with confidence he "will do it" (vv. 13-14).

Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam are a few of the numerous ways humanity seeks to know God. While some suggest all faiths are striving for the same thing, just using different words and concepts, orthodox Christianity cannot be lumped in with other religions. It is exclusive; Christians believe there is one God who reveals himself in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Creator of the world

He is creator of the world, a conscious and free being of providence, and involved in the day-to-day affairs of creation. He is holy where humanity is not, so he sent Jesus to be the perfect mediator and the Spirit to be the helper. He is personal and righteous, expecting ethical behavior from followers, and for them to live out their belief by loving him with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and by loving their neighbors as themselves.

Meanwhile, Hinduism and Buddhism may or may not believe God exists, is one with creation and takes on millions of forms. Islam insists God is one and absolute without three forms. Clearly, we can't all be on the same path to knowing God when we don't even agree on the basic definition of God or his character.

Jesus said he is the only way to truth and eternal life with God. Do you confidently trust and take him at his word? What are some of the paths people you know are taking in seeking God? Take a solemn moment to pray they will encounter Christ.