DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
7643 Huron River Drive
Dexter, MI 48130
734-426-8480

I Have a Friend Who… believes Jesus was a good teacher, not the Only Way

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by Matt Hook

Today we begin a series titled "I have a Friend Who…" Today you may have a friend in your life who finds it too difficult to believe in God, who feels distant from God, who feels God is irrelevant, who feels organized religion (or in our case disorganized!) religion is a crutch and a crock. Please turn your bulletin over to the sermon notes page and write their name down. We're asking you to invite them over these next 3 weeks. In our sermons, we are going to explore some of the common issues they raise. Here is one of the biggest ones, right off the bat:

"Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? 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 that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. 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 miracles themselves." John 14:6-11

"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by Me."

Jesus often surprised people with teachings that cut across the grain, like: "Lose your life to save it;" "The first will be last;" "The meek will inherit the earth;" "Rejoice in persecution;" "Pray for your enemies;" "It is better to give than to receive;" and "Turn the other cheek." Revolutionary teachings. But by far the most outrageous assertion He ever offered, the most politically incorrect words that He ever spoke, were recorded in John 14:6. *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by Me."*

Most people even if they don't believe Jesus was the only Way believe that Jesus was a "great human teacher" who was given "God-status" by his superstitious followers. This is the view of much of the media, science, and the public education system. It leads to two questions: first, how reliable is the Bible (specifically, the Gospels – the 4 books about the life of Jesus)? And second, are we taking this one verse out of context? Let's look briefly…

First, when you look at the gospels as religious propaganda or eyewitness accounts, the majority of experts note that they resemble more eyewitness accounts than well-thought out dogma. They bear marks of accuracy, using specific names and places. Within the first 2 years of his death, significant numbers of Jesus' followers seemed to formulate a doctrine of atonement (bringing us back to God), were convinced that he had been raised from the dead, associated him with God, and believed they found support for all these convictions in the Old Testament. The Gospel writers preserve reliable history (remember Caesar Augustus and Herod and the census?), they include difficult to explain material, and agree with each other on all the essential facts, diverging on some incidental details. (If they all lined up without question, they would be more suspicious). Another biggie is that the church couldn't have taken root and flourished right there in Jerusalem if it had been teaching facts about Jesus that people could have exposed as exaggerated or false.

Compared with other ancient documents, there is a much greater number of New Testament manuscripts that can be dated fairly close to the times they were recording. There is outside evidence that supports than many people believed Jesus performed healings and was the Messiah. Modern archaeology supports the New Testament, early traditions show Jesus had an understanding that he was the Son of God, without any evidence of mental illness. (He exhibited no inappropriate emotions, was in contact with reality, was brilliant, and had amazing insights into human nature, and enjoyed deep and abiding relationships.) AND this Jesus said "*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by Me*."

Second, this one verse was what the disciples heard. In the book of Acts, Peter, the leader of the first church, is asked about Jesus. In a short defense of how that led to the healing of a man, Peter says, "*know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. He is "'the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.' Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved*." The leaders saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were ignorant, ordinary men. They were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus. Many of them were killed because they wouldn't shut up about this idea, that as far as they knew, Jesus was the Way of salvation.

Point Number One: Use the right map. (I got lost going to the Kuhn's house, well, I didn't get lost, I just drove back and forth on Mast Rd. for 45 minutes trying to find Lucy Rd. because Mapquest said it was there.) Had I had the right map, things would have been different. If someone challenges you and you don't know the hermeneutical ramifications of the substitutionary view of the atonement, tell 'em, "Just read it for yourself." The Bible speaks for itself. Whether you believe it or not, use the right map in your search for the truth.

C.S. Lewis: "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: "I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God." That is the sort of thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse."

"You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill him as a demon, or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

It is not his teachings which make Jesus so remarkable, although these would be enough to give him distinction. It is a combination of the teachings with the man himself. The two cannot be separated.

Jesus claimed to be God. He didn't leave any other option open. His claim must be either true or false, so it is something that should be given serious consideration. Jesus' question to his disciples, "*But who do you say that I am*?" (Mt 16:15) has several alternatives:

Suppose his claim was false. If false, then he either knew it was false or he didn't know: Liar or Lunatic? **This is point number two: Consider what the man said. Live by it. Die by it.** Whether you've put your trust in him yet, or not, realize the magnitude of what he said. You can base the rest of your life around resisting him and his followers until you're an old man or an old woman, or you can base your life around him, and let him lead you into lives of people and places and conversations you never dreamed of.

JESUS'S TEACHING IS THE WAY OF…

1. **Character.** "*but the Lord looks at the heart.*" 1 Sam 16:7. 1 Peter 3:4 Beauty comes from the inside.

2. **Esteem**. In God's eyes, we are twice loved and twice owned. God made us, and bought us with a price.

3. **Needs**. God promises to meet our physical and financial needs. 1 Tim 6:17 "*God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment*." NOT health and wealth. The call to follow Christ is an invitation to submission, obedience, service, suffering, and glorifying God. God's concern is to make us rich in things that matter to him: trust, humility, integrity, thoughtfulness. DON'T put your hope in wealth.

4. **Money**. Our money is not ours, but God's and we're his managers. Our responsibility is to faithfully use, invest, share, and give money as he directs us, consistent with his purposes.

5. **Concern for others**. The view of money spills out of the Christian view of people. God calls us not to selfishness, but to "otherishness," thinking first of others and their needs. Phil. 2:3-4. Acts 20:35.

6. **Service**. People are not things to be had but individuals created in his image for us to respect and honor. We are called to serve those God has placed in our midst. Eph.5:21.

7. **Joy**. Joy remains through all the bumps and pain. Ps.126:3.

8. Freedom. Let's distinguish between freedom and accumulation. Freedom comes not from way of endlessly chasing more but in a contentment in what one has. The Bible's invitation to step out of the pressure of upward mobility and accumulation into a life of simplicity is an invitation to step out of a trap into freedom.

9. **Right focus**. Let's quit focusing on accumulation! All our stuff/things tend to stand in the way of looking to the Lord single-mindedly first. When we feel need, face insecurity, struggle through pain, or lose our way, we so often turn to all our junk. I know – I've got plenty of it! Because of that, Jesus, the great Teacher, often warned about the danger of relying on things and more than once told people that their accumulations prevented them from faithfully following him. "No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve both God and money." Mt 6:24.

10. **Contentment**. Is not predicated on what we have. Disappointment is not the automatic result of failing to get what we want. Rather, contentment, that confident quietness of spirit in the face of what life brings upon us – comes from being rightly related to God. Phil 4:12-13.

To know Jesus from history is to know him from a distance. It's only to know about him rather than to actually know him. Yet the historical record reveals that he intensely desired "all humanity might know him personally." On the eve of his crucifixion, when he knew death was imminent, he prayed in front of his disciples:

"*Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all humanity, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You sent* (John 17:1-3.)"

Either Jesus was hugely egotistical or He was revealing the whole purpose of His life within human history: that <u>anyone</u> from <u>all humanity</u> might come to know him. Not just know about Him, but actually know Him in a personal way. Like me trying to get to the Kuhns. If I'd have had one of them in the car with me, they'd have been my map. That's how Jesus wants to be your way. Let him in. Each time there's a decision, or a turn, if you're with him, he'll let you know. **That's why we say Christianity's not a religion, it's a relationship!**

One of the most powerful evidences that Jesus lived, died, and rose from the dead is the changed lives of His disciples. This is a proven historical event. Hundreds of millions of people throughout history have been able to say that they have come to know him and that he has changed their lives.

If you are still exploring this way of Jesus, I realize you can walk out of here today and not come back. You have options. But when it comes to making spiritual decisions, our choice is not between competing brands of religion, but between submitting to God or denying him, between taking God at his word or rejecting him.

To say "Jesus is the only Way" is really hard to swallow. It cuts out a lot of people. And Jesus couldn't have meant that. Jesus died for the whole world.

- Does the Bible say what Jesus meant? (If so, we'd better get to know it better!) Why would God give the life of His Son if there was more than only one way to do it?

- What about all the faithful believers of other religions? What about all those who never heard the name of Jesus? (We'd better love them and share what we believe with them – in deeds, words, and signs). So if they don't know Jesus by name, they could know him by his person.

- But if you're holding out because you don't like the idea of Jesus being the only way, let me tell you, if I'm drowning and somebody throws me a rope, I'm not going to hold out for a life vest, or a preserver, or a scuba suit. I'm going to grab that rope and hold on for dear life! I'm being rescued!

The issue isn't there's only one way. The real issue is there's a way! There's a way! There's a way to God! There's a way out! There's a way through this life! Jesus is the way. With the world the way it is, one thing you can say is that everybody's looking for a way: a way out, a way through, a way to go, a way to live, a way to be successful, a way to be the best husband, wife, brother, sister, son, daughter, friend. Even if you've found the "way" in one area of your life, chances are there are other areas of your life in which you are still looking for the way to do things. Let Jesus be your Way, and he'll show you the way to the Father.