

2. Jesus sought to calm the apostles' distress over His impending departure by explaining His purpose in leaving and reassuring them of His return. They should have understood what He was talking about because He'd always been open about the reason His Father sent Him into the world and what He was going to accomplish as Israel's Messiah. So also He'd instructed them – in word and practical experience – regarding *their* calling as His apostles and how their calling related to His own mission (ref. Matthew 10:1-42, 16:13-17:13, 19:16-20:19; Mark 3:13-19, 4:1-34, 9:1-13, 30-50; Luke 8:1; etc.). To use Jesus' present language, He had disclosed to them where He was going and the way associated with it. Yet they failed to understand; speaking for the group, Thomas objected that they couldn't possibly know the way when they had no idea where He was going. Jesus responded in two parts: First, He answered Thomas' objection and then He confronted their lack of understanding with the promise of new insight (14:6-7).
 - a. Jesus insisted to His apostles that they knew the way where He was going; they were equally adamant that they didn't. In a certain respect both were right, but there was a problem of meaning as well as understanding.
 - From Jesus' vantage point, the apostles knew the way because they knew *Him*. He had shown them by His words and works who He is, the purpose of His coming, what He was going to accomplish and the means of accomplishing it. In a word, He'd shown Himself to be Israel's Messiah, which defined Him and His work in terms of the salvation history recorded in the Scriptures and all that God had promised concerning Israel's destiny and, through Israel, the world's destiny.
 - Jesus' apostles believed that He was the Messiah, but as *they* understood that concept and its significance for Israel. Their messianic convictions had no place for what was about to unfold and so no facility to rightly interpret those events and outcomes. In that sense they didn't know where their Lord was going or the way associated with it.

The apostles were unable to *truly* comprehend the One they embraced as their Messiah because they observed, assessed and interpreted Him through a distorted lens. Jesus spoke and acted from the vantage point of an accurate self-understanding and with the goal of representing Himself according to the truth of who He is (ref. 5:19-38, 7:28-29, 8:14-18, 12:44-50, etc.); His disciples heard and observed Him from a flawed, natural perspective. And so, when Jesus spoke of the way where He was going, they thought He was talking about His departure to some place and the directions for getting there. But He wasn't referring to a destination, but an outcome – one He'd disclosed to them and discussed with them. Thus they *knew*, and yet they didn't.

Jesus was speaking about the completion of His messianic task and what was to come from it, and so when Thomas objected that they didn't know the way, Jesus replied that *He* is the way. He Himself is the path to where He was going; He is the way to the Father and to the outcome toward which He was moving (14:6).

The first thing to consider in Jesus' statement is the relationship between the three nouns (way, truth and life) as they pertain to Him. All sorts of views have been proposed through the centuries, beginning with the early Church fathers. But the immediate context argues for a scheme in which Jesus as truth and life helps explain that He is the way. The place to begin is to define the terms *truth* and *life*. And, in this context, these terms must be defined in terms of Jesus Himself.

Jesus first identified Himself as the human embodiment of truth: "*I myself am the truth,*" not "*I conform to the truth.*" He wasn't referring to the integrity of His thoughts, attitudes, words and deeds, though He could claim that (8:29, 45-47). Jesus lived a life of truth without flaw or failure, but He was here asserting that He *is* the truth. And He is the truth in three distinct but related respects:

- 1) First, He is the *truth of God*. To observe and know Him is to observe and know His Father because He is the full embodiment and consummate manifestation of the unseen, incorporeal God (ref. 1:1, 14-18, 7:18, 10:30).
- 2) Jesus is the incarnate Logos, and He's therefore identical with the Creator God who reveals Himself to His creation. But this God reveals Himself through His enacted purposes in the creation. Thus Jesus is the embodied *truth of the will of God* even as He is God incarnate: To witness Him is to witness God's person, purpose, words and works (ref. 3:34, 5:15-23, 43, 6:38, 8:42-47, 12:44-50).
- 3) But God's will for His creation has its focal point in man and his role in the creational scheme and destiny. Hence Jesus is the *truth of man*; He is Yahweh's Messiah, and so the Seed of Eve, Son of Abraham, Son of David and True Israel as Yahweh's faithful covenant Son. By taking the title, *Son of Man*, Jesus was identifying Himself as the human being in whom man finds his true identity, nature and function; He is the Last Adam in whom man becomes man in truth (3 Corinthians 3:18).

Jesus secondly identified Himself as the *life*. This corresponds with His self-identification as the *truth*: each implies, depends upon and defines the other.

- 1) Jesus is the human embodiment of the God who has life in Himself. If, therefore, He is the truth of God, He is also the life which inheres in God and defines and distinguishes Him as a being (ref. 1:4, 5:19-26).
- 2) So Jesus is True Man as "living being" – man as *image-son* animated and ordered by the life which characterizes the Living God. And as True Man, Jesus is the One in whom men obtain life: "eternal life" as the life of the eternal realm – not unending animate existence, but participation in the divine life so as to become man *in truth*. And men participate in this life by sharing in the living Son; Jesus *is* resurrection and life and He bestows them to men by bestowing Himself (6:53-58, 11:23-26, 14:16-20).

What, then, is the relationship between way, truth, and life as Jesus identified them with Himself? Once again the immediate and wider contexts are instructive.

- The way to where Jesus was going (i.e., to the Father – 14:2, 28) was the question at hand and He answered that *He* is the way, further explaining that no one comes to the Father except through Him. This contextual emphasis indicates that Jesus declared Himself to be the truth and the life in order to substantiate and clarify His claim to be the way to the Father.

And He is the way *with respect to His disciples*: By reminding them that they knew the way to where He was going, He was telling them that they were to join Him in that outcome; they, too, were going to His Father. But they would come to the Father by Him returning and gathering them to Himself. Thus the disciples' participation in Jesus' return to His Father was their participation in Him, and this participation followed upon His work of preparation accomplished by His departure. Jesus is the key to coming to the Father; He is the way because He is the truth and the life.

- The three definite articles (*the way, the truth, the life*) also support this view, for they make the ideas of “way,” “truth” and “life” identical with Jesus Himself. In other words, He is Himself the way to the Father because truth and life are bound up in Him. But He is truth and life by virtue of the relationship He has with His Father – the God who Himself is truth and life (ref. 1:14-18, 3:31-33, 5:26, 6:51-53, 7:14-29, 8:14-16, 11:25, etc.). Truth and life inhere in and are defined by the Creator God, but He has embodied them and made them fully present in His creation in the incarnate Logos; to behold and know the Son is to behold and know the Father (ref. 1:14-18, 10:30, 14:7-10; cf. also Hebrews 1:3-4).
- Coming to the Father involves *knowing* Him as He is, and such knowledge is inherently relational. It consists in sharing in the Father's life and being conformed to the truth as it exists in Him. This relational “knowing” is fundamental to becoming a *true worshipper* (4:19-24). So also it is the essence of what it means to be a *son of the Father* – an image-son in whom the life and truth of the Father are present; a son who embodies and reflects the glory of his Father. But this sonship exists in and is mediated by the singular Son who is truth and life in the same way as the Father (17:3). People become sons *in the Son*, and thus the Son is *the way* to the Father because He is *the truth and the life* (cf. 17:3).

And so, when Jesus insisted that He is the way, He was saying that He is the way to the Father. But this entails and implies more than Christians tend to think. He was speaking about salvation, but beyond the idea of personal forgiveness of sins and going to heaven. The goal of His coming and work is *new creation*: man, the image-son, sharing in the divine life and conformed to the truth as embodied in the man Christ Jesus so that the creation can itself be restored to its Creator.

- b. Thomas' question betrayed the apostles' flawed sense of Jesus' mission. Though He'd told them in general terms what was coming, they were baffled when He spoke about departing and returning. They didn't grasp the messianic work, which meant that they really didn't know Him. For everything Jesus said and did was calculated to connect Him with the messianic figure and work revealed in the Scriptures, thereby showing Him to be *that* Messiah: Yahweh's Servant-Messiah in contrast to the many claimed messiahs who'd arisen in Israel (5:39-40). To misjudge Jesus' works is to misjudge Him (cf. 5:36, 10:22-38 with 14:8-11). And to misjudge Him is to misjudge the One who sent Him (5:10-23, 10:31-47).

Thus Jesus followed up His declaration of being the way, the truth and the life with the assertion that knowing Him amounts to knowing His Father (14:7a). This statement also has textual variants indicating two possible meanings:

- One variant is a first-class condition: *"If you have known Me – and you have, you will also know My Father."* (NAB)
- The other variant is a second-class condition: *"If you had known Me – but you don't, you would have known My Father also."* (KJV, ASV, ESV)

Both variants have strong textual support, making it difficult to determine the original reading and Jesus' exact meaning. If the first reading is correct, Jesus was encouraging His disciples that they were going to know His Father even as they knew Him. The second reading, however, is likely correct in that it better fits with the context, especially vv. 9-11. The disciples' response to Jesus (13:36, 14:5, 8) showed their confusion and lack of understanding and His words here promise that that was going to change when He returned in the Spirit. At the time, and forevermore, they would truly know Him and so also know His Father. And they would know the Father and Son in truth because the "Spirit of truth" was going to enliven them to share in the life the Father and Son possess together (14:16-20).

Thus their knowledge was about to take a quantum leap into a radically new dimension: The person-to-person knowledge of their Lord which they presently possessed was to be transcended by a person-*in*-person knowledge. When Jesus returned in the Holy Spirit and received them to Himself, they would henceforth know Him in the most intimate manner by being taken up in His life – them in Him and Him in them (cf. 14:19-20, 17:20-23). And because He is in His Father, their being in Him is their being in the Father. From that point on, they would know the Father even as they know the Son; from that point on, they would fully grasp the truth that beholding the Son is beholding the Father. This, then, is the thrust of Jesus' assertion in verse 7: Even these closest disciples didn't truly know this man whom they'd embraced as the Messiah. The knowledge for which they – and all who would come after them – were destined could not be obtained until their Lord received them to Himself by His Spirit. Then, animated and informed by His life and mind, they would at last discern the relationship which exists between Father, Son and Spirit, even as they themselves would participate in it.