

You have likely heard the phrase “all roads lead to Rome.” It’s based on the engineering marvel created by the Roman Empire at the peak of their power. It was an extensive system of roads that connected all Roman provinces, and included 29 great highways that all fed into the city of Rome. If you got on one of those highways, you would get to Rome. Over the course of history, it came to be used as a literary device to express that, no matter what road you are on, you will wind up at the same place. It also mirrors a belief that has existed for many years, but has recently become prolific and is finding favor with the people of God.

This morning, we continue in our series called *Hearsay or Heresy?* where we are considering different phrases or ideas that have been widely accepted by popular culture. We have looked at the misstated Scripture “money is the root of all evil” and the misunderstood words of Jesus, who said “the truth will make you free.” This morning we are going to consider the idea that “all roads lead to God.”

Now, our impulse may be to quickly dismiss that idea as a product of our culture. We live in a time of abundant diversity; diversity of ethnicities, beliefs, worldviews, and faiths. We live in a culture that elevates the values of inclusion, tolerance, and pluralism. Any time anyone gets even a hint of the possibility of someone being excluded, they object. That’s why more and more people hold the view that all roads lead to God. And while we may think that belief is “out there”, the numbers are telling us something different. A recent Pew study shows that 56% of Evangelical Christians believe there are many paths to God and to eternal life. The values and beliefs of the culture have become the heresy of the church.

This morning, I don’t want to just argue with that belief. I don’t want to give you a thirty-minute apologetic about why it’s not true. I want to really consider the heart behind that belief and why it is taking root in the church. Because I will be the first to admit this morning that I wish it were true. I have an abundance of friends, family, neighbors, and former co-workers who are not followers of Jesus. Some of them give little thought to their spirituality, some of them are devout in what they believe. But I care for them all, I want to be with them in eternity, and I understand the attraction to the view that all roads lead to God.

**In the milieu of social and legal pluralism, it is quite easy to glide into a religious pluralism which questions the uniqueness or truth claims of Christian faith. When we experience people of other religions as good, moral people, it becomes increasingly difficult to entertain any notions other than multiple paths to God and salvation. When we encounter the plurality of the public square, it becomes almost second nature to believe that such plurality must exist with regards to truth and paths to eternal life. Moreover, when we look around us, many who are exclusive in their beliefs often appear to be arrogant and intolerant. Religious pluralists appear to be kind and accepting, and exhibit a tolerance needed for a pluralistic world. –Dennis Hollinger**

I believe the caring impulse of Jesus-loving Christians who entertain the belief that all roads lead to God is a desire that no one perishes. The good news is that God has the same desire, and he’s made it possible for all to have life.

The challenge for us, then, is to base our beliefs and actions on the foundation of truth and not on the sentiments of culture. In Romans 1, Paul writes **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of salvation for everyone who believes.”** His conviction that the gospel is truth, and the action to which is compels him, is an example to us. In our pluralistic culture, as difficult as it might be, the most loving thing we can do is not get soft on the truth of the Gospel, it’s not to engage hesitantly when given an opportunity to express what we believe, and it’s not to consider ourselves warriors against the culture. It is to understand and believe with confidence that our faith is reasonable and the good news of the Gospel, while specific and unique, is a universal, loving invitation from God that we have the privilege to take to all people. And to do that, we need to get a couple things settled.

**Truth is exclusive.**

As we wrestle with the idea of all roads leading to God, we ultimately have to ask some questions. “Is everyone right? CAN everyone be right? Or is it possible that some are wrong?” Truth is defined as “being in accord with fact or reality.” Truth is exclusive because it eliminates all other possibilities of what something can be. You are sitting in this church. That’s the truth. There is no other possibility. You are enjoying this sermon immensely! That’s the truth! There is no other possibility!

But this definition of truth is challenged by two ideas, ideas that try to make truth inclusive instead of exclusive. The first is that truth is relative. This is the belief that each person has the ability to define what is truth for them. Truth is a personal choice. In fact, a popular hashtag on social media right now is #liveyourtruth. Let me tell you from personal experience how that works out, though. Last year I had my annual physical, and my doctor told me that everything looks pretty good, except for my cholesterol, which he referred to as “borderline”. He proposed I start taking medicine called a statin. But I was having none of it. You see, my truth said I was in good shape. My truth said I ate pretty well. My truth said that recently turning 40 had nothing to do with what might be happening to my health. So I said what, I’m sure, every doctor loves to hear from their patients. “I don’t think that’s true.” Yeah, I was that guy. So he suggested we run another blood test to see more stuff. I quickly agreed because I was confident it would confirm my truth. And then my doctor gave me THE truth. “THE truth is your parents both have high cholesterol. THE truth is your number is above 200. THE truth is you are over 40. Take the pill.” So I had a choice. I could live my truth, all the way to an early heart attack, or I could live THE truth, and take the pill. Guess who’s been taking a pill for the last year? Truth cannot be relative. If everyone can define truth, then there is no truth. Facts are stubborn things. Truth must be objective.

The other similar idea that challenges truth being exclusive is that all truths are valid. The idea here is that there can be any number of different, mutually exclusive propositions or thoughts about a certain subject, and all of them should be considered valid and true. All beliefs about God are legitimate because, in the end, we’re all worshipping the same God, but just getting to him in different ways.

One of the benefits of my Catholic, liberal arts college education was a heavy dose of philosophy. One of the concepts we studied was Aristotle’s law of non-contradiction. The law of non-contradiction states that contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense at the

same time. You cannot be both dry and wet at the same time. You cannot be both inside your house and outside of your house at the same time. You cannot be both bald and have a head of beautifully flowing hair at the same time. This law has implications when we try to claim all roads lead to God.

One of the most difficult and upsetting conversations I have had recently has been around this topic. I was confronted by someone who felt that I was dismissive or judgmental of her beliefs. She told me that she believed in Jesus, but also believed all other views of God were valid. I told her I disagreed and believe that Jesus is the only way. She told me it's fine that I hold that view, just like it's fine that others hold their view. I told her that, if there are other paths to God, my beliefs aren't valid, they are wrong. She disagreed, again reiterating that I am entitled to my view. I finally replied that, if I believe there is only one way to God, and that's through Jesus, and she believes there are many ways to God, we cannot both be right. One, or both of us, has to be wrong. She disagreed.

Now, if you had a hard time following that story, it's ok. This is the logical pickle we put ourselves in when trying to make rational sense of the view of many roads to God. The beliefs of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, atheism, and the rest are mutually exclusive. They contradict one another and, therefore, cannot all be truth.

So then, what is the truth? And how do we discover it? For God to be known, he must reveal himself, and whatever he reveals of himself is truth. He might reveal himself through his creation. He might reveal himself through some sort of internal impulse we each might have. And, if he is personal and relational, he might reveal himself through interacting with his creation. The beginning of the book of Hebrews tells us how God has revealed himself to us.

**[HEBREWS 1:1-3a] Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, <sup>2</sup>but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. <sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.**

The biblical narrative is the story of God's progressive revelation of truth. V1. tells us that, from the beginning, God has been speaking, his words revealing himself, his will, and his counsel. He has used individuals like Abraham, Moses, David, and the Prophets to speak on his behalf and record his words in the Scriptures. You get the sense that each of these people are witnesses, giving a report of their interaction with God, each a piece of the puzzle that reveals a little more of who God is and paints an ever-clearer picture.

The climax of God's revelation of himself, of his truth, though, is found in the Son, who is Jesus Christ. V.3 tells us that Jesus radiates the glory and majesty of God and is of the same substance as God. When we see Jesus, we see God. While the prophets passed on the words of God, Jesus is referred to as the Word of God. While the prophets revealed God in their words, Jesus reveals God not only through his words, but also by his person and work. It's the difference between everyone telling you about how great someone is and you finally getting to meet them and see for yourself. All Jesus is, all Jesus said, and all Jesus did, reveals the truth of God.

The choice all of us have to make is whether or not we will believe it. If we accept the biblical revelation of God as truth, then we must believe it to the exclusion of all other possibilities about God. Now, there may be a check in your spirit when I say that. It may make you feel a little guilty, or a little judgmental. It may make you think of someone in your life who isn't a follower of Christ, and you don't like the consequences of what I'm suggesting. But I want you to hang with me. I may have some encouragement for you.

Because, while truth is exclusive, **the gospel is inclusive**. Now, if you were to suggest that to someone who isn't a follower of Jesus, and believes all roads lead to God, they may laugh in your face. Christians are often criticized as narrow, arrogant, triumphalistic, and exclusive, expressing an attitude that we are "in", you are "out". And while that reputation is occasionally earned by some, I believe many hold that view because they misunderstand the truth. I believe we have the opportunity to take that perception, flip it on its head, and show the gospel to ourselves and others in a way they maybe haven't considered it before.

I say the gospel is inclusive because, at first, all of us were excluded. Romans 3:23 tells us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Each and every one of us are wholly unqualified to be a member of the family of God. We have no merit of our own on which to stand. We are not "in" because of who we are, or what we've done, any more than others remain "out" because of who they are in comparison to us. We can claim no superiority over anyone. We all begin at the same place, and that place is separation from God. But God initiated a way for us to be with him, and Paul tells us through whom, and for whom, that was accomplished.

**[1 Timothy 2:4-6] <sup>4</sup> [God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.**

The heart of God is that all people be saved. The heart of God is inclusive. God does not want any of his creation to perish. And he's made that possible. You can see in v.4, salvation and the knowledge of truth are inseparable. Paul continues by laying out the truth of how one is saved.

He proclaims there is one God, and one way to have a relationship with him. That is through the man Christ Jesus. The gospel is inclusive because the road to God is the same for all people. That road is paved with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom, as a payment to God for our sins, not for some, but for all. There is nothing we can do to be saved. We must only believe it to be true accept Jesus and his work on our behalf to have a relationship with God.

Because of that, there is no room for boasting. There is no room for arrogance. We are "in" only because of the merit of another, Jesus Christ. We are "in" only because we are the recipients of God's mercy and grace. And the gospel is inclusive because the offer of that grace is extended to all people.

So how should this impact us? First, if you're here this morning you are on a journey to find truth, but you're not sure what that is yet, I'm so glad you're here. Would you let us help you

with that? There are prayer rooms right outside these doors with people who would love to talk to you. We have pastors downstairs in our Hub area who will be happy to answer questions you have. You can come to our newcomer event called Launch next Sunday and hear more about what we believe to be true.

For those of us who are followers of Christ, I want to challenge you to **engage inclusively with the exclusive truth**. In a time where people are so divided, where everyone feels forced to pick sides about almost everything, we have the good news of the gospel that is available to all. In this world where everyone has their own truth, there are those who know, logically, that just doesn't make sense. And they are yearning to hear someone say "I have THE truth." Peter tells us the spirit with which we are to communicate that truth.

**[1 Peter 3:15] <sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.**

Those of us with the truth have a calling to share it with others, and Peter tells us the tone with which we are to engage others; gentleness and respect. Our culture is rife with heated and vitriolic debated, and we can get sucked in. If we are not careful, the truth of the gospel, which is an olive branch that offers peace with God, can instead be used as a club to beat our opponent into submission. We can live confidently in the truth without living in contempt of those who don't have it. Our goal is not to win an argument. It's to win others to the truth of the gospel.

But understand that gentleness and respect doesn't mean passive and weak. Peter tells us to be ready, to be prepared, to engage in these conversations. He refers to it as a defense of the hope we have. It's a legal term, which should encourage us that our faith is reasonable, it stands up to logic. Peter is trying to instill in us a sense of urgency because this might be the first time, or the only time, someone has an opportunity to hear the truth. These conversations are opportunities for us to share what traveling down the road of Jesus Christ has meant to us, and invite them to walk it with us.

I also believe we need to be ready because of what might happen if we're not; if we're quiet or unsure. If we leave people with the impression that all roads may lead to God, we run the risk of indicting the character of God. And here's why I say that. If all roads do lead to God, then the God of the Bible, the God we worship, is evil and deserves our disdain. If there are many ways to God, only an evil being would choose one that includes so much suffering and death. Just think about the story of redemption in the Bible. It starts in the Garden, when God provides animal skins to cover Adam and Eve's shame. God wipes out all but Noah's family in the flood. God wipes out the Egyptian army as they pursued Moses and the Israelites. God allows the nation of Israel to purge the Promised Land of all its inhabitants. God allows Israel to be judged and exiled to Assyria and Babylon. And God sent his only begotten Son to suffer unjustly, and to be put to death on a cross.

Think about this in terms of your own family. If your family was broken, if there was a relational divide, and that divide could be solved in many ways, one of which was the death of your child, and you chose that path, you would be evil!

If I can get to God by doing enough good things, or thinking good thoughts, or by believing in myself, or by doing nothing at all, but God decided to include a path that included all that unnecessary suffering and death, there's no way around it. He's evil.

But here's the truth. It is all necessary. All roads do not lead to God. Only one does. Without the shedding of blood, there can be no forgiveness of sins, so the road to God is one that must include suffering and death. He's not evil at all. In fact, he is a God of such goodness and love and mercy that he paid the terrible price to make us right with him. It's a road that all are invited to take. Admission is free. And it's a road that allows those of us who've already taken it to be tour guides for those who haven't. We must hold fast to the truth of the gospel, even if it's unpopular. It is the power for salvation for all who believes in the name of Jesus Christ.