

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Jonathan Pokluda
Series: I Am
March 26th, 2023

I AM: The Way, The Truth, and The Life

John 8:32, John 14:1-6, Colossians 1:16

John 8:32 – “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

John 14:1-6 - “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Jesus the Way to the Father

⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?”

⁶ Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Colossians 1:16 - For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.

Good morning, Church! Yeah, good morning, good morning! We have a complex relationship with exclusivity. We like it when we're included in it, but we don't like it when we're not a part of it. And so, there are different kind of flavors of this. Some of you have exclusive memberships. You have a membership to Ridgewood. You can play on a course, or eat at a restaurant that others can't play and that feels special, and you pay to have that relationship. Or maybe it's Baylor Club. It's a club ... you're a part of the club! Maybe it's fraternities or sororities. Or maybe you're a member of CVS. You ever been in that aisle, and they're like “Do you have the card? Do you have the membership number?” And if you're like me, you've got six of them. Because, I'm like, I know I've got several of those little keychains somewhere, but it's like \$17 without it or \$2 with it. And so, I'm like, go ahead and give me another one. Let me sign up one more time. Maybe one of the most obnoxious or prideful members that I've come against is Costco. You go to Georgetown; I know you know - you get your groceries in Georgetown. I get it. And you can get a hot dog for a \$1.50 and a drink. I get it. You get 720 chicken nuggets for \$2.99 and a trampoline. You're super cool.

We have this weird relationship with exclusivity. I can remember being invited to an exclusive Club. This was B.C., before Christ, before I was following Jesus. A friend said, "Hey there's this club that not a lot of people know about, and I can get you in. Why don't we go there?" And I'm like "Oh that's cool. Where is it?" They begin to tell me where it is. "Oh, I know that area. I've never seen it there." "I know. It's just a door in the wall. And there's like this awning and whatnot." And so, I go over there, and they are like "I got you on the list." And so, there's the door in the wall, there's the awning, and there's the velvet red robe, with the brass. There's the bouncer, and he looks like he's playing a bouncer in a movie. He's sitting in the chair. and he's got his list, and there's a line of people. I go, I get in line, and I'm excited. I'm on the list. I get to see what's on the other side of that door. And a guy that was in line about three people in front of me, he gets up there and he hands the bouncer his ID, and the bouncer looks at his ID and looks at the list, and looks at his ID again and looks at the list, and just looks up at him and shakes his head. And the guy goes, "Am I not on there?" He goes, "No you're not on here." The guy just hangs his head and walks back to his car. Does the Walk of Shame. And then I think, what if I have to do the Walk of Shame? What if I'm not on there? I begin to think about that. What if I'm not on the list? What if I can't get in?

I think a lot of us think about Heaven like this. If we get up there to the Pearly Gates, and whether it's St. Peter or Jesus at the door, He's got the Book of Life, and your name is in it or not. And He says, "Name please ... Just kidding! I'm all knowing; I know who you are." And He says, "Hey, let's talk about prom night. You remember that?" "Yeah, I have those friends." "I got your tithe right here. That's interesting." He just starts kind of running through your life, and we think, for a lot of people, hey, if it doesn't measure up, then it's like, hey, pull the lever, the cloud opens up the trap door, you fall out, right? Wake up somewhere else like "Oh no!" I think we think that, and there's some of you hearing me right now, well, doesn't it kind of work like that? Well, isn't it you get in or you don't?

I want to talk with you about the exclusivity of Jesus or the exclusivity of Christianity. As we talk about this, we're going to talk about something called religious tolerance. This is a very prominent, fast-growing idea, in our culture. Is Christianity an exclusive religion, and if it is exclusive, how does it compare to other religions? Are they just as exclusive or are they more inclusive? What does that look like, and how do we interact with such things?

We are in a series called "I Am," where we're moving through the seven "I Am" statements of Jesus. We talked about Week 1 – "I am the bread of life." That is Jesus, He sustains us. He is our provision. Week 2 we said – "I am the light of the world." He pushes back darkness. It is by our relationship with Jesus that which we see. We can see because of Him. We see the world through that lens. As we continue on that path, we talked about "I am the gate" - which is almost to say, I am the bouncer. My sheep come in through me. I get to determine who gets in the pen and who goes out to pasture. And then last week, "I am the good shepherd." He's watching over,

protecting, and providing for the flock. And this week would be – “I am the resurrection and the life.” We’re going to push that one out a couple of weeks until when we celebrate the resurrection and the life.

We’re going to jump to John 14. If you have your Bibles, turn with me to John, in the Gospels, that’s what we’re moving though, these seven “I Am” statements. In this one, we are talking about exclusivity because he says **“I am the way and the truth and the life.”** And he follows that up with this statement **“No one comes to the Father except through me.”** Then that seems to put Jesus in this bouncer position checking the list saying who gets in and who doesn’t. But as we move through this, you might learn something. I want you to see that it’s a little bit different than what the world wants to portray here.

I think this is so important, because a fast-growing idea amongst people today is that everybody gets in. It’s a Universalist worldview. Tim Elmore’s research said this - although 65% considered themselves Christians, 43% said it doesn’t matter what religious faith you follow, because they all teach the same lessons. Don’t all religions teach the same thing? It’s pragmatism. “I’m just looking for how to live life, and doesn’t the Quran and the Bhagavad Gita and the Bible all essentially teach the Golden Rule?” Maybe you’ve heard this. USA Today reported 70% of all major Christian and non-Christian religious groups say many religions can lead to eternal life. They say, “Hey, we’re all going up the same mountain. God’s on the top of the mountain and wherever you start out at the base, maybe you started a Jehovah’s Witness, or maybe you started Buddhism, or maybe you started Islam, the Muslim faith, maybe you start as a Hindu. But as we move up that mountain, we’re all going to get to the same destination.” I’ve heard these arguments. I want to show you today from the scripture why that breaks all logic, and why it is not true.

There is a new flavor of Christianity that is growing that does not require Jesus to die. But what Jesus said about himself, and why this series is so important, is lots of people can tell you who Jesus is. You can go to lots of places to learn about Jesus. Read lots of books and talk to many people. But we get to look at the words that Jesus describes himself as, and when He was here, He chose to say, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.”** But let’s figure out what He meant by that. As we move through this message, I’m going to set up context in which He said that. And then we are going to look at those labels: The Way, The Truth, and The Life, and ask the question - “What did Jesus mean when He said that?”

We’re going to be in John 14, but you actually have to start in John 13, because that sets up the context. Jesus is with His disciples and He’s been trying to explain to these guys - who just haven’t got it – “I’m going to die. I’m going to be crucified, tortured, and left on the side of the road to asphyxiate. I’m going to be placed in a tomb. Three days later, I’m going to rise.” He

says, "I'm going somewhere that you can't go." Peter speaks up, and Peter is so confident. He says, "No, no, Jesus, I'm going to go anywhere with you. Wherever you go, I'll be there." And Jesus says, "Well, that's interesting Peter, because, you see, before the rooster crows, you're going to tell others that you don't even know me three times."

And everybody says, "Wait, what?" This is a really sad, really heavy moment in the scriptures. They're starting to get it – "Wait, you're going to die?" All of their dreams and their hopes are fading and crumbling before their eyes, and Jesus says this, "Hey guys, come here, come here, come here. Alright, listen, circle up. **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."** This is a very intimate metaphor. I don't have a lot of time to explain what He's saying. But I will just tell you, at a high level, when a Hebrew young man was of age to get married, he would leave his father's house and go into a foreign land. He would choose a wife. He would pay a dowry for the right to marry her. He would return to his father's home and begin to build a room on it called the bridal chamber, where they would then live. But at a time and an hour when no one knows, he will return to that foreign land and look for his wife and take her home to be with him for the rest of the rest. And this is the verbiage that Jesus uses right here when He says "Don't you understand that I've got to go to build on to my Father's house, a place for you. And don't you know that if I build a place for you, my bride, the Church, I'm going to come back for you?" And this is what he's telling these guys. So, Thomas, this is Doubting Thomas, he's about to speak up. Jesus says, Verse 4, **"You know the way to the place where I am going."** ⁵**Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"**

And this is the question that Jesus answers with this statement: **"I Am."** – 'That I Am' in the Greek is 'I and only I Am', which is a nod to Exodus 3 where Moses said, "Who should I tell them you are?" and God says "Tell them I Am. Tell them I Am sent you." Jesus, now claiming to be God deity, God in the flesh, God's Son, says, "I and only I am the way, Thomas. I am the way. You know the way because you know me. Not just the way, but I am the truth. And not just the truth, but I am the life. No one gets to the Father except through me." So, what do these labels mean? First question is:

1. *What does Jesus mean when He says, "I Am the Way?"*

Well, He's answering the question. How do we get to God? How do we get to Paradise? How do we get to Eternal Life? How do we get to Heaven? And Jesus is saying, "I Am the Way." Your friends, the world, or maybe you, would say, "Well, you just have to be good." If you just had to

be good, this would be a great place to put that. "I Am the Way, unless you can just be good." It's right before He's going to be crucified, killed, murdered, tortured. He says, "I Am the Way." And so, if we could just be good, you know it seems like that would be a great time for the Father to reveal to the Son, "You don't need to die. They can just be good." People who say, "I'll just be good. I just want to be moral. I just want to follow moral standards, or always get there, are essentially saying, "You wasted the death of your Son on me. You wasted the death of your Son on me."

Maybe you've heard that all religions essentially lead up the same mountain. They're all true, and they all essentially say the same thing. Let's just inspect that. Let's learn for ourselves. In Islam, the Muslim faith, from the book of the Quran, the holy book, says this: (This comes from the Ali Imran, Chapter 3, Verse 85, "Whoever prefers a religion other than Islam, it shall definitely not be accepted from him; and in the Hereafter, he shall be among the losers." Another one, and this gets very specific in the Quran, listen to this: "They have certainly disbelieved who say, 'Allah is the Messiah, the Son of Mary' - Allah has forbidden him Paradise and his refuge is the Fire" from the Ahmadiah in the Quran. You have Jesus saying, "I Am the Way to the Father. I Am the Messiah." Over here, you have, "Anyone who says they are the Messiah, born of Mary, has denied the faith, and it's not going to go well for them." "Those can both be true!" Show me how. It's a statement of ignorance. It's a statement of ignorance.

Hinduism, known as a really broad, accepting, inclusive faith. This comes from the Bhagavad Gita, the Hindu holy book, Chapter 9, Verses 3-4: "Those who are without faith in my teaching, cannot attain Krishna (enlightenment). I permeate all the universe in my unmanifest form. All beings exist within me... If you do not accept this view that you do not exist... you will never achieve Hindu salvation." Not only do they believe in a different way, but they believe in a different ending, a different Eternal Life. Not Paradise with God, but actually reincarnation. That if you live, depending on the kind of life you live, you may come back as a rat, or a cow, or someone, a human in a position of power, depending on the good things that you did. But you'll never really know. Every religion has you working your way up to God for a *chance* to be with Him.

Buddhism, also widely accepted as an inclusive religion, it says this in the Dhammapada - oddly enough a passage entitled "The Way." It says "[Buddhism] is the only path; there is none other for the purification of insight... Walking upon this path you will make an end of suffering."

In the Jewish tradition, exclusivity appears as Jews being God's chosen people. Jehovah, monotheistic, God's chosen people. Every religion has a statement of exclusivity. To say that they're all right is really to imply that they're all wrong. And in fact, it would be insulting to any singular world religion that you would say they could all be right, because it really is a position of not understanding what those specific religions teach. Every religion has a statement of

exclusivity, including Christianity. The difference? Christianity, being an exclusive religion, is the most inclusive of all religions in that Jesus stands there, with His arms stretched wide saying, “Come, look I did this for you! You want to know how badly I want a relationship with you? Look at me hang here!” Because the Father wants a relationship with you. I think in the name of love and religious tolerance, when we say things that feel loving, but in reality and practice, it's extremely unloving.

My oldest daughter and I, within the year, went to Zambia. Challenging place to get to. You have a layover there in Qatar. If you're not familiar with Qatar, you're surrounded by Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. Tiny little country tucked away right in the middle. And I'm there with my daughter, and I'm in a foreign land, and I don't speak the language. I'm like “Hey, you stay close to me.” We're navigating, and it's a giant airport. And you can imagine, if we've been overseas for 12 days, we just want to get back. I want to get my daughter home safely. She had been sick, she got sick over there. We just need to get home! And there I am in the airport, in Qatar, and I'm like, “How do I get home?” I can't find someone that speaks English. I'm trying to figure out which gate is going to take me there. And I'm distressed, because airports are stressful. Imagine if you see me, and you walk up to me, and you're like, “What's wrong, JP?” And I'm like, “Man, I just want to get home! I want to see my family. I want to go home.” And you say to me, “Good news, my friend! Any of these gates, any of these planes, will get you back to Waco. Any of them! Just choose one; it'll get you back.” Now, if I believed you, I might be like, “Oh wow! Gosh.” High five and a hug. “That's some good news right there. That is exactly what I needed to hear, because I was really confused. Oh, so they are all going to Waco? Great, let's go!” And I get on a plane, and it drops me off in Ukraine, and Presley and I are dodging bullets, or missiles. Or we get off in some war-torn country, or someplace where she's not welcome. Now, all of a sudden, I'm going to be hit with the realization that what you said was not loving, because it was not true. And it *didn't* get me to where I wanted to go. And you did *not* help me. You made me feel good in a moment, but you have given me great distress and trouble, because your words were not built in the truth. And imagine if, in that conversation, you *did* have a heart to help me, and you said, “Oh, man, okay, let me see your ticket. Alright, yeah. You need D18.” And I said, “What's D18?” “It's a gate, D18. There's going to be a plane there, and that plane is going to get you back home. It's D18.” What I'm *not* going to do is be like, “Who do you think you are? D18. Oh, you're so narrow-minded like that's the only way that I'm going to get home. You're going to come up to me, and talk about D18. What's that? Your favorite letter or something? D18. Oh, that's the only one I can get on? There are lots of planes here, do you not see that? There are lots of planes. I could get on any of these. Why can't I just get on any of these planes? You come at me with your narrow-mindedness. D18.” I'm not going to do that, because what you said was helpful. It's the information that I needed. I want to get home. If that's the one that's going to take me home, thank you. Thank you for telling me the truth.

I think we sit there, and if there was another way to God, and Jesus, He's in the Garden of Gethsemane sweating blood because the pressures of what's about to happen to Him. It would be a really great place, where He's like, "Father, would you let this cup pass from me?" and for God to be like, "Hey, it's all good. They can just be good. You know what, they can just follow any religion according to its rules, and they'll get here. You don't need to do this, Jesus. You don't need to die." That would have been a really great time to insert that narrative, but that narrative is not the truth. So, what does it mean when He says, "I Am the Truth?"

2. What does Jesus mean when He says "I Am the Truth?"

We know that Jesus is historically true. There's really not a credible atheist today that denies the existence of a historical figure named Jesus Christ. And even go as far as to say that many believed he was the Messiah. We have the Bible, the 66 books, that are pointing to this narrative of God rescuing us through his Son, Jesus. But there's actually writings outside the Bible. You have a Jewish historian, named Josephus Flavius, who wrote about Jesus Christ. You have Tacitus, you have Pliny the Younger, you have Suetonius. All of these are first and second century writers who included at least a sentence about the existence of a man, Jesus Christ. These are not in the Bible. These are historical books found outside the Bible that reference this character named Jesus Christ. Because there was a big wake, a big commotion around Him. "Hey, this guy is creating quite a stir!" So, they write about Him. So, we know that Jesus is historically true, but that's not what He said. He said He's the truth. And what I want you to know about the truth, being the truth, is something can be truth, and everyone in the world can deny it, and it would still be the truth. You can build a boat in the desert and say the rain is coming, and everyone in the world can say you're crazy. But they would be swept away by the floods. He says, "I Am the Truth." What does this mean?

Here's what I want you to do. I want you to take a good pointer finger, would you? (JP holds his right index finger up.) Unanimous participation here. Just take a good pointer finger, keep it up right there, like this, and this is not a time to be meek. Everybody's got one. Just grab your finger, and I'm going to ask you to close your eyes. I'm going to watch your purse. It's fine. Most people can be trusted here. Close your eyes. Now all I want you to do right now. The only thing I want you to do is simply, a simple task, is just point north. Point north. You can think about it for a minute if you want to. Point north. Everybody's pointing north? Okay. All right, now open your eyes. (Fingers are pointing in many different directions.) Wow! I'm glad we can agree on something. Wow! Listen, north is right there, okay? (JP points north.) Hold on, because a lot of you are pointing straight up. And I'm just so glad that you came to visit us from TCU. That is amazing! We are great to have a ministry to you. We are great to help you in that endeavor. And when I said that, when I said "Hey, north is this direction," many of you thought, "Oh look, I got it right." No, you don't understand. There's due north, it's a really narrow line, a very specific

line, that if you travel across that line, or through that line, in the direction of that line, you will go through Fort Worth. You will go through Oklahoma. In fact, as you continue due north, you will split Winnipeg, Canada in half. But if you're off two degrees to the left, to the right, you may miss Canada altogether. It's narrow, and you can say, "Well, north is this way." And you can travel that way with all your heart, with all your belief. "I believe it's this way!" And you walk that way, and you're not going to get to where you're going.

People have *their* truth. *Your* truth might be, "Well, I can fly. I have been watching birds, closely studying them, even big ones. I see how they flap their arms or wings, and I have determined, I have learned through them, that I can fly." And you can say, "I'm going to go to the top of the Alico building, and I'm going to show you." And you jump off that building, and you're going to head toward the ground at over a hundred miles an hour. And the reality of the truth of gravity is going to win. And you are going to be badly hurt. And if I love you, if I care for you, the kindest thing that I can do is say to you, "Your truth, your little 't' truth, is not the truth. And it's going to hurt you. And you can hate me, but I love you, so I'm telling you that's not true."

I don't think we realize that all things were not only created *by* Jesus, but *for* Jesus. Colossians 1:16- **"For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him."**

So, your Atheist and Muslim and Hindu friend were created to be in right relationship with Jesus Christ. And that's the truth. And everyone has a truth that they're fine with. For example, if you don't eat, you will starve. You have to eat, right? And we all say "Oh yeah!" Nobody today is like, "Hmm, not me. No you can't just put me in a box. I don't need food." No, you would be like, "Oh yeah, I need to eat." Or if you don't breathe. You need oxygen. You need oxygen for life. And no one here is like, "How dare you? I don't need, I'll go without it. Watch me." No, that is not going to go well for you. And likewise, what I am saying is you need Jesus. For you to live life as it was intended, you have to be in right relationship with God through his Son, Jesus, and that's the truth. And what we want is we want freedom, but there's no freedom apart from the truth. In fact, in John Chapter 8, Verse 32 says, **"Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."**

Let me explain. There has been a battle in our house for as long as I can remember. It got especially complicated when we had children. I've been on an island. I have been Team No Pets, right? As we began to have children, I quickly got out-numbered. I saw this is not going to go well for me because they are being raised to oppose me on this issue. So, at that point, you have to begin to think through, 'Okay, what compromise? What can I give? We are at war here. What can I offer the enemy?' I'm just kidding, not the enemy. I love you. A while ago, I have my daughters and we're getting in the car, and we go to the pet store. I'm like "We're going to the

pet store.” And they’re like, “Oh, we’re gonna get a pet!” I’m like, “We’re going to get a pet. It’s gonna happen.” So, we get there to Petco, and I take them to the fish aisle, and I say, “Choose one.” There is this wall of betta fish, beautiful fish, I mean bright reds and purples and blues. And I’m like, “Choose one.” And my daughter, she’s three at the time, says, “Daddy it’s not fair.” I said, “Sure, it’s a pet. It is fair.” And she says, “No, why does it have to be in that bowl? That’s not fair. It’s contained to the water. Daddy, I’m gonna set it free.” And I say, “Whoa, whoa, whoa. Calm down. Calm down. Don’t do anything crazy. What do you mean by that?” She says, “I’m gonna take it home...in my pocket.” And I say, “First of all, that’s stealing. Second of all, let’s talk. That fish was made to be in right relationship with the water. You take that fish out of the water, even with the best of intentions, it’s not going to go well for that fish. That fish is going to die.” God made you to be in a right relationship with Him, through his Son. Jesus is saying, “I am the truth that leads to life. You can’t find life apart from me.” And so, my third question is-

3. What does Jesus mean when he says "I am the Life?"

What does Jesus mean when He says, “I am the life?” Jesus made life, and so He knows how it is best lived. He knows where life is found. We talked about that even in the “I Am” statement. John 10, He says **“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”** If you want a full abundant life, that’s going to be found in Jesus Christ. And so, Jesus calls us to Himself, and when He calls us to Himself, He calls us away from sin. Sin is not just a bad idea. Sin will kill you. It will kill you spiritually. It will kill you emotionally. And it will even kill you, or can kill you, physically. One day, certainly, kill you physically. God who loves you, is not trying to keep you from good. He is trying to call you to life in saying, “Hey, life is found in Christ alone.” This is why a message about tolerance towards sin is so unloving. Because what happens is those who want to sin will say, “Hey, your message of intolerance towards my sin is causing me harm.” Not, my sin is causing me harm, but your message against my sin. Now lean in and let me explain.

I recently read an article about how people who are addicted to pornography are more prone to depression, anxiety, and suicide. They’re literally dying because of their addiction. And then in the comments you have those people who are pro-pornography. They are pro the freedom to make and look at pornography and they say, “Hey, it’s because of your intolerance toward our sin that is causing our depression, anxiety, and suicide.” But it’s not. It’s because of the sin itself. God created the world, and He tells you how to find life in it. And when you’re given to an addiction of that kind, you find death. Spiritual, emotional, and often physical death. Certainly, you can understand, or maybe even mentally right now, you’re making the jump to sexuality or gender, and you’re kind of building your argument. But what we need to do is say, “Okay, what is that sin that we hold God is more tolerant to? Or that we are passionate about a message towards intolerance to? And maybe that sin is materialism. Maybe that is the sin of drunkenness.

Like you've been in church, and you're like, "But it's okay if, you know, God's fine if I get drunk." He's not. He's not. And maybe it's the addiction of gambling. Or maybe it's pride. What is *yours* that you are hoping or propagating a message of tolerance toward? Because it always brings death. And God loves you.

This word 'tolerance,' I want to make sure you understand it's been redefined in our lifetime. Like old tolerance, the definition that has existed since the word was born was – "I need to tolerate, I need to be tolerant toward the idea that you have a belief that's different than mine, and so, as you vote different or believe something different about the Bible or about God altogether or whatever that is, we can still be together. We can still share a meal. I can be kind to you. If you have a need, I can meet that need. You can love me; I can love you. I am tolerant toward the idea that you believe something different than me."

New tolerance, as it has recently been redefined, is "I have to believe that your idea, which is different than mine, is right." And that is crazy. It checks logic at the door because those two beliefs might be a complete contradiction to one another, so you can't just check logic at the door and say, "I believe you're right. To each his own. That's your truth. Here's my truth." No, there's big T 'Truth.' You want to know what *THE* Truth is, right? Because sin always leads to death. Jesus is the life. He's the life, He's the truth that leads to life.

I was in a green room once, and I was leading a church different than Harris Creek. I was in a green room; that just means like the room backstage. There's a young woman there, and I know her, and I know her story well. She has just faithfully followed God. God has just protected her and preserved her faith for as long as she can remember. She just followed God, and what that looked like in her life is a righteous life. She's never been drunk, she's never done drugs, she's never kissed a boy until her husband at the altar. It's that kind of life. She dated one guy in her whole life and married him, and she grew up in the church and has always loved Jesus. I sat there, and I was being provocative. I knew she was up for the challenge, and I just said to her, "Hey, why is your life better than mine?" And she said, "What do you mean?" And I said, "I've done all of those things in reckless proportion, right? Whatever, I have been so great at sin. I've experienced life. You've never been to Vegas. I have been to Vegas many times, and I have experienced all that Vegas has to offer. So why is your life better than mine? Because let's be honest now - I'm a Christian and you're a Christian, and we're both going to Heaven. Right? We both get the reward. And here, under the sun, you work for somebody who works for me. So why is your life better?" She didn't hesitate. She looked at me, and we had a crowd, we had an audience. She said, "I've had more fun, and I have less scars." I said, "What do you mean you've had more fun?" She said, "Oh man, I have laughed until my stomach hurt; milk's come out my nose!" She said, "Surely, you've experienced temporary pleasures, I get that. But the fun that I've had, has been detached from a hangover, from a pregnancy scare, from shame, from the fear of getting caught. It was just pure fun. There was nothing negative attached to it. You, before Jesus,

had never experienced that fun. I don't have the scars that you have. The memories that you can recall at a moment, that will trip you up, or to push you toward temptation." Not that she's never sinned, but she's saying, "Hey, the things that you have in your mind, the memories that you have, the scars that you have, I don't have them. God's protected me from them." And I want you to know, she's right. She's absolutely right, and she was ready. If I had a redo, I would do what she did. That's better. That will get you to a better place.

And so, in summary, Jesus is the only way to God. He's The Way. He's the only way to God. Jesus is more than true, He's The Truth that leads to freedom. And life is found nowhere else. It is not found apart from Jesus. A right relationship with God through Jesus. Christianity is exclusive, but it is the most inclusive of all the exclusive world religions.

I don't know that we ever settled the bouncer story. Is He not like a bouncer at the door determining who gets in and who doesn't? I present to you a different image. A bunker. A bunker is somewhere that people go for safety when destruction is coming. They say, "Hey, you will be preserved in here." And so, you can imagine if there is a missile headed for the world, and it's going to destroy the world by fire, and Jesus says, "In here! In here! Safety's in here! Come in here!" And we're in the world and we're like, "What? Build a bigger kingdom for us? And go here, and experience life where? And drink this, and snort that, and smoke this, and what?" And He says, "No! In here. Life's in here. This is the way." And we say, "What about *this* religion? And can I just do good? And I'll read *this*. And study *this*. I want to learn about *this*." And He says, "No no no! In here! This is the way to life! You want to live forever? It's in here! Get in here!" And finally, the Spirit of God says, "Oh, I think it's in here. Oh, we will go in here." And He say, "Stop! Go back out and get more! Tell them this is the way to live! Bring them in here!" So, we're going back out, and we say, "Hey, come on! Hey, come in here with Jesus! Jesus is the way! This is the way! The missiles are coming! The bomb's coming! The world's going to burn! Safety's in here! In here!" And people can say, "I don't have to follow that. D18." "No, no, you don't understand! That's how you get home! That's the way to home!" And they say, "I don't have to follow your guy, He sends people to hell." No, he's inviting you to Heaven. He's inviting you to Heaven. There's something else I want to say here. But for the sake of time, I'm going to say it after this song. Some of you that may need to leave, and if you do that it's fine. But if you can stay, there's one more story I'd like to tell you. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, you've given us life and your Son, Jesus. You've invited us to know You through Him. And there are people here who've run from you who've gone their own way and done what they've wanted to do. And in your love and kindness, grace and mercy, you invite us back to You, through your Son. So would You, even as we sing this, just solidify in our hearts and minds, that truth. Help us to know who You are and what You've done for us, in Jesus' name. Amen.

When we moved to Waco, I had heard about a firework show that took place on Harris Creek Road. We didn't go, but I saw it from afar, and I thought, "Man, that looks amazing!" Even from far off, not too far off, right by the church, and I would really like to go. I had heard it's so much fun, and there's families, and things to do for the kids, and it's just in this person's backyard. I was like, "Man, that sounds awesome!" I always wanted to be invited. "How do you get invited?" Get close to people, and be like, "Hey, so you know them, huh? Y'all are friends? You go to the firework show? Oh, you do? That's cool. I would really like to go to that sometime." I finally got the invite; it took four years, but I got the invite. And so, this New Year's we went, and it was the most amazing fireworks show I have ever been to. And I've been to Kaboom Town and Disney. And you know, Disney has its cool thing that makes it that. But this was, I timed it on my watch, it was forty-six minutes, beginning to end, set to music, and you're right up on it. I mean, they're falling on you, which is awesome. Contrary to what you might think, it was awesome. And they had refreshments. They had food, and snacks for the kids, and things to do, and all these families. I'll tell you, the invitation I got, I said, "Yeah, I've always wanted to go, but I never came." And they said, "Oh, everyone's invited." And I said, "But, I thought there was an invitation?" And they said, "Oh, well read it." And it says, "Oh, here's your invitation and feel free to invite anybody." That's what the invitations said - anybody can come. "Hey, there's this so you know where and when it is, but you can turn and forward this to ten friends or twenty friends. And in fact, I was even telling somebody this week about that. We were talking about fireworks, and it came up. And they said, "Well, why didn't you invite me?" And I said, "Well, I didn't think about it." I was so excited that I got invited, that I forgot to pass it on. And it was just amazing! I thought that's what Heaven is like. Like, you get invited. You have an invitation. But then you can turn around and invite everyone. And at some point, in this narrative, the Enemy is so crafty that he's like - "Oh, that's going to be awkward and weird, and I don't know, and I'm nervous." How easy is it to invite someone to a fireworks show? Like, "Come to the fireworks show. It's going to be amazing! It's a party. And there's fireworks. Come on!" And how much easier is it to say, "Hey, do you want to be in Paradise forever with God?" I mean that's the most loving thing you can say to somebody. "I want to spend eternity with you. I've been invited, but the person throwing the party has told me I can invite whoever I want, and so, I want to invite you." That's it. It is that simple. Jesus paid a great price not only to invite you to His party, but so that you can invite whoever you want. And someone said, "Well, your God sends people to hell." No, you don't have to come to the party, but make no mistake about it, I'm inviting you right now. You've been invited. You can go some other way if you want to. But God invited you. You got the invitation. Ironically, not by coincidence, but not Kingdom coincidence, you have invitations on your chair. And that is not for your refrigerator; that's not for you. You got all the information you need in the Creek Connection. That is for you to hand to somebody else. Even if you're going out of town, just say, "Hey, I can't be there. You don't have to deal with the weirdness of running into me, but I want you there." Or, "You know what, here we will pick you up. We'll take you with us." Whatever that looks like. You have an invitation; I hope you pass it on. You'll always have the invitation of the Gospel. I hope you'll pass that on. If you're a young

adult here, kind of post-College saying, “Hey, what does Waco have for us?” This Thursday at 7:00 p.m. in Stage 2 here, we will have our Young Adult gathering. I hope that you'll join us. If you want more information on that, you can look at the Creek Connection. I love you guys! If there's any way we can serve you, please let us know. Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.