

# The Unique Christ in Today's World

by John Vissers

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*The sermon emphasizes the uniqueness of Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, and challenges listeners to confess him as Lord in today's world.*

**Duration:** 39:34

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:8, Matthew 6:33, Luke 15:11-32, John 14:1-9

**Topics:** "Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker highlights the challenges faced by the church in a world filled with suffering, evil, and death. The main focus is on pointing to Jesus Christ as the life giver and the hope of the Gospel. The speaker emphasizes that Jesus gives people a reason to live and promises a life for the future. The sermon also includes a story about a skydiving photographer who tragically forgot his parachute, illustrating the importance of having a life-saving device. The speaker concludes by urging the audience to be united with Christ.

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## Transcript

Turn with me in your Bibles tonight, if you will, to the 14th chapter of the Gospel according to John, and let us hear together God's Word as we read the first 14 verses of this chapter. Let us hear God's Word tonight. Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you.

I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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. You know the way to the place where I am going.

Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? 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. I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.

And I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it. Amen, and may God bless to us this reading from his holy word this night.

I should like to begin this evening by saying how much I am enjoying my time here at Knox Church over this weekend. It's been a real privilege to see friends and people whom I know as well as to renew acquaintances and meet new people as well. During my time with you, we've been looking together at three different parts of our Lord's teaching.

On Wednesday evening, last Wednesday at the midweek service, we considered one of the Beatitudes of our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. And then this morning we looked together at the parable of the prodigal son in Luke chapter 15.

And tonight I should like for us to think together about one of the great I am sayings of Jesus. The text from John chapter 14 and verse 6, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

And I want us to think together about what it means to confess Christ as Lord in our world today. What does it mean to trust Christ as Savior and as Lord in an increasingly complex culture? And what should the Christian Church be saying about the changeless Christ in these changing times? And so these are the questions that I should like for us to bring to this text, John 14, 6, as we consider it together tonight. And as we do so, let us bow in prayer and seek God's blessing as we look to his word tonight.

Let your gospel come now, O Lord, not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with deep conviction. Amen. Amen.

As we drove through Manila last June, I noticed how little had really changed since my first visit in the summer of 1989. At stoplights, little children would still knock on the windows of the cab and ask for money. Those riding motorbikes were wearing masks to protect them from the smog and from the pollution of the city and the emissions of the traffic in the city.

Thousands, literally thousands of people still lived on Smoky Mountain in a community built around the city garbage dump. And there was still a great deal of political uncertainty as the Congress was trying to still sort out the results of the recent presidential elections. And there I was, having just come into the country and in the cab on my way to a conference being sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship, who had invited me to give a paper on the Lordship of Christ in the church in today's world.

But I must confess that as we drove into the hotel in Manila that afternoon, I was reminded about how little I really knew about the world of the average Filipino. What did it mean for the Christians in the Philippines to confess Christ as the unique Lord of the universe in their world? What did it mean for their church to take seriously the claims of Jesus Christ? We confessed the same Lord, the same Savior, the same

unique Christ, but the challenges of Manila are not exactly the same challenges of Toronto. And it set me to thinking, what are the challenges that we face today? That we face as Christians in Canada, in this city, in Toronto, what does it mean for us to confess the Lordship of Jesus in our world? To say that we live in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing and incredibly challenging world is perhaps to state the obvious.

Our world is the world of computer bits and bytes, the world of the CD-ROM, the world of routine space shuttles, the world of cellular and satellite phone systems, the world of genetic engineering. Our world is the world of religious pluralism in which many different spiritual paths are offered to people in their journey to find the divine reality. Our world is a world in social and political transition, as the events of the last few years have in fact indicated, and those events continue to unfold even as we meet here this night.

It is a world of economic oppression where many people are homeless, even in this city, and hungry and unhealthy. And in this world, in our world, many so-called modern people in Canada think of the Christian church as a tired and worn-out religious institution. Which perhaps should be set aside, like an old threadbare sweater handed down from an elderly uncle.

At one time perhaps it was new and useful, but now it's just old and worn out and of no value whatsoever. And I suspect that's how many people in our world today think about the church and look at the church. And so we need to ask, what does it mean for us as Christians here at the heart of this great city to confess Jesus Christ as Lord in our world? In our world today, and in our personal lives day by day, as the macro world, the global world, the larger issues impact our personal lives.

And in order to explore this question, I think we need to turn to what the New Testament teaches us concerning the identity of our Lord. And in particular tonight, I want us to focus on these well-known and seemingly scandalous words of John 14, verse 6, where Jesus says, I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me. Because here, in this very text, we meet the heart and the scandal of the gospel and the challenge of the gospel in today's world.

These words, as I'm sure you're familiar with, these words of Jesus were spoken not long before he was betrayed, not long before he was arrested, not long before he was falsely accused and unjustly tried and mercilessly executed on the cross. They are part of what is known as the upper room discourse, which goes from John chapter 13 through to the end of John chapter 17, where we have given to us our Lord's teaching with his disciples in those days leading up to the events of the cross. Jesus spent time with them, teaching them about the kingdom of God and about what was to take place.

And so it's natural, in a very real sense, as we look at the opening of John 14, we should read the words of Jesus reassuring his disciples. He begins by assuring them that they should not be troubled, because as the events of the next few days were going to unfold, they should trust in God. God's will was going to come to pass.

They were to have faith in Jesus and his word. Jesus was going to his Father's house to prepare a place for them so that they might be with him. And in verse 4, then, he says to them, you know the way to the place where I am going.

And it's almost as if he was saying to them, here, you've been with me for three years. I've been teaching you and preaching to you. We've been ministering together.

And now it is all coming to a climax. It is culminating in the events of this week. And you know the place to where I am going.

But Thomas, dear old Thomas, asked Jesus, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? We often berate Thomas for being the doubter, for being the one who speaks up. But here, as in other places, he usually asks the question which was uppermost in the minds of the other disciples as well. Lord, what are you talking about? We don't know where you are going.

We didn't know, in fact, that you were going anywhere. None of this makes any sense to us, so how can we know the way? And Jesus says to Thomas, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

And it's important to realize that embedded within this text is one of the great I am sayings of Jesus. Ego eimi in the original Greek. I, I am.

It is emphatic. It is one of the great I am sayings of John's Gospel. I am the resurrection and the life.

I am the bread of life. But deep within these words is an echo of the great revelation to Moses in Exodus 3. For you remember, when God reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush on the mountain and asks Moses to go to the people of Israel, Moses responds with a question, who should I say is sending me? And God says, tell them, I am is sending you. I am who I am.

And Jesus in this text is identifying himself with the God of Israel. No one comes to the Father except through him. This is the covenant name for God, Yahweh, Jehovah, the great I am.

Anyone who has seen me, Jesus says, has seen the Father. Show us the Father. I am in the Father and the Father is in me, Jesus said.

The claim is unmistakable. Jesus is identifying himself with the God of Israel, with God the Father of Israel. He's identifying himself in union with God, his Father.

He is revealing himself as the one who truly reveals the Father. And he says to his disciples, if you've seen me, you've seen the Father. There's nothing more really to see.

He is the one and only begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. Therefore, he is the way to the Father. He is the revelation of the Father's truth.

He is the one who brings life into the world. And it's the meaning of this claim, as scandalous, as difficult, as incredible as it is, it's the meaning of this claim by Jesus that we need to think about in terms of our world today. And let's do that as we take very briefly each aspect or part of verse 14 in turn, seeking to identify the uniqueness of Christ in terms of our world tonight.

First of all, Jesus says, I am the way. Very simple, I am the way. If you want to know the way to the Father, Jesus says, I am the way.

I am the way to the Father, and no one comes to the Father except through me. Now, notice that Jesus does not simply say, I will show you the way. But he says, I am the way.

There's an identification here. Now, we live in a world in which it is suggested that, in fact, if there even is a God, there are certainly many different ways to that God. Many different spiritual journeys to the same

destination.

Many diverse pathways to the same ultimate divine reality. And one of the challenges facing the church in the modern world in the West is the resurgence of religious movements, is the reality of religious pluralism, which has come to mean in the West that there are many different ways to God. We live in Newmarket, just about 55 or 60 kilometers north from here.

And every day, I have about a half hour drive from my home in Newmarket to my seminary office in North York. And every day on that drive, I pass by a United Church, an Islamic mosque, a Hindu temple, a Jewish synagogue, a Chinese religions temple, an Eastern Rite Catholic church, a Lutheran church, a Chinese Baptist church, and a Christian and missionary alliance church. No Presbyterian churches on the pathway between my house and the seminary.

But it's a virtual religious smorgasbord. Now, a great deal could be said about the challenge of other religions for the Christian church today. But the thing that strikes me is this, that one of the interesting things about today's world is that this resurgence of religious interest and this incredible pluralism indicates that there is still an incredible spiritual hunger and spiritual challenge in our world today.

You see, the fact of the matter is that people still have spiritual needs. And there is still a spiritual appetite for spiritual things. And despite the claims of the modern world to try to press that part of reality and suppress it, the fact of the matter is that we live in a world where people are crying out to have spiritual needs met.

There is a sense that the modern world in which we live increasingly is being found wanting. And people realize that the world in which we live, with its materialism, with its technology, with all of the things that are a part of our Western culture, simply have not delivered what they have promised, a kind of utopia on this earth. And in fact, many are suggesting we're now moving beyond a kind of modern world where people are beginning to wake up to these realities.

Last year, I had a very interesting conversation with a young man in his shop. He was tired, at least he seemed tired to me and preoccupied when I first went into the store. He was maybe about 30 or 35 years old.

And a friend and I were in Budapest. And this shop was in downtown Budapest in Hungary. And we were there looking for gifts to bring home to our children and to our families.

It was early September 1991. And in fact, it was just about two weeks after the failed coup attempt in the former Soviet Union. And I was in Hungary for a meeting of the Lausanne Committee of World Evangelization.

And on a free afternoon, one of the free afternoons of the week, we went wandering around the markets of downtown Budapest. And so we got into a conversation with this young man. He seemed interested that we were Christians.

And he seemed interested in the fact that we were interested in Christian missions and that we were attending a conference being held at the theological seminary. And so I said to him, I asked him if he was a believer. And he kind of looked at me with a smile on his face and he said, no.

And I asked him, why not? Why are you not a believer? And he said he'd been raised in the church but that he couldn't believe any longer. And without any prompting, he went on to tell me that so many terrible things had happened to him and to his family that he felt maybe somehow that God was punishing him for something he had done earlier in his life. And when he had finished speaking, I looked at him with a kind of smile on my face and I said, so you really do believe in God, don't you? Because you see, deep within him, he still had some faith in God.

The fact that he indicated that he thought God was somehow mad at him, was angry with him. And that led us into a wonderful conversation about the meaning of the Christian faith and about the significance of Christ for our lives today. Yes, we live in a challenging world, a world of competing religions and competing ideologies.

But what it means for the Church of Jesus Christ today is simply this. We are called to confess, not arrogantly, but humbly, that Jesus Christ is Lord and point people to him. It means to point people to the Lordship of Jesus in an age of spiritual hunger.

It means realizing that while some of my friends may say that they believe there are many ways to God, they may say that they don't believe at all, nevertheless, they have spiritual hungers and spiritual needs that only Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe, the one who has revealed the Father, can ultimately meet. Perhaps there are some people that you know tonight who are working out of this kind of a worldview. What does it mean for you to humbly, by word and deed, point them to Jesus Christ tonight? But secondly, we need to move on, and let's quickly move on to the second aspect of this text, where Jesus says, I am the truth.

If you want to know the truth, Jesus says, I am the truth. And again, notice that Jesus says, and it's in this form that this text finds its way into our minds, that Jesus does not simply teach the truth, he doesn't simply kind of reveal some truth to us, but he is himself the truth. The Bible declares that Jesus is the truth.

Now you need to meditate on that for a moment and let that sink into your mind. Because what Jesus is saying here, and what the Gospel writer has recorded for us in these words of Jesus, is that he is the touchstone by which all reality and all truth is measured. If truth is correspondence to reality, then Jesus is both that truth and that reality.

Jesus is that truth by which all reality is measured and interpreted and understood and made comprehensible. It means that there is not some abstract ideal truth to which Jesus himself must bow, but Jesus himself is the truth. In chapter 8 and verse 32 of John's Gospel, we read these words of Jesus, then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.

And later in the Gospel, with Pilate, rather with Jesus standing before Pilate, with Jesus standing before him, Pilate posed the question which has haunted humanity ever since, what is truth? What I want to suggest to you tonight is that Christians are called to make this claim that Jesus is the truth in a world of intellectual confusion. Intellectual confusion. In the opening sentence of his book, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Alan Bloom says this, there is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of.

Almost every student entering the university believes or says he believes that truth is relative. You see, the real question for many people in our age is not whether even there is, where is this truth, but whether there is even any such thing as truth. But the interesting thing is that the Bible does not talk about truth in the context of truths or relativism.

And while one could go off in that direction and consider a whole host of issues, let me bring you back to how the Bible deals with truth. The Bible sets the question of truth in the context of lies, of untruth, and of deception, and that which distorts the truth. Satan is described, for example, in one text as the father of lies, as the counterfeit king.

And think for a moment of our first parents in Genesis 2. What happened there? They were deceived into eating the fruit. They were deceived into thinking that reality was other than what God had said it was. Did God really say that you could not eat from this tree? And what I want to suggest to you is that the real issue in our world is the question of truth versus deception.

Truth versus the lie. We live in a world in which we are constantly being confronted with claims that the world is other than the way in which the Bible describes it. This is the great battle for truth in our culture, whether one thinks of the media, whether one thinks at the intellectual level in the university, whether one thinks about our consumer-driven culture with its advertising.

I mean, what is advertising? It is the big lie to try to portray life in a particular way, to get you to buy into a particular lifestyle so that you will live in a certain way. The big lie. And in the midst of the confusion and deception, Christians are called to point to Jesus as the truth.

And again, we don't do so arrogantly, but nevertheless, we point to Jesus who is the truth, against which all truth is measured, a truth which does not need updating. There's a wonderful story about a student who came to his old music teacher, and when he had been a student in this music teacher's class, the first question that was always asked to open the class was this question, what's the good word for today? And so this student, in coming to the teacher, said, hadn't seen him for a while, and said, what's the good word, what's the good news for today? And the teacher was silent as he stood up and walked across the room, and he picked up a hammer and struck a tuning fork, and as the note sounded through the room, a pure note, he said to his student, his former student, that is A. It is A today, it was A 5,000 years ago, and it will be A 10,000 years from now. The soprano upstairs may sing it off key, the tenor across the hall may make it flat on his high notes, and the piano here may be out of tune and distorted.

And then he struck the note again, and there was this pure note of A, and he said, this is A, my friend, and that's the good word, the good news for today. And the Bible says that Jesus is the truth. He is the truth yesterday, he is the truth today, and he is the truth forever.

The world may deny it, the church may be less than faithful in declaring it, but Jesus is the truth. And the fact of the matter is that Christians are called in an age of relativism, in an age of deception, in an age of untruth, to themselves tell the truth about the gospel, and to tell the truth about the world in which we live. What will it mean for us, as the Church of Jesus Christ, and as individuals, to be truth-tellers in our culture, not necessarily to hammer people over the head with the truth, but nevertheless to be truth-tellers.

And then finally, as we conclude, we need to see that Jesus also declares in this text that I am the life. Jesus said, I am the life. Life is an important theme, of course, in John's gospel, and you can hardly read through the gospel without noticing how frequently it comes to the forefront.

Already in the opening chapter we read, And him was life, and that life was the light of men. And in John 3, For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Whoever has the Son has life.

Whoever does not have the Son does not have life. Or in John 5, Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned. He's crossed over from death and into life.

Or think of some of the other great I am sayings. I am the bread of life. I am the resurrection and the life.

I have come that they might have life and have it more abundantly. I am the way and the truth and the life. But the sad reality is tonight that we live in a world where suffering and where oppression and where death abound.

We live in a culture where unbridled self-interest and an unleashed consumerism have resulted in suffering for many people. We live in a world where the modern tools of economics and politics and technology have been used to marginalize and oppress people and contribute to death and not to life. It's difficult to look at our world tonight through the lens of a Manila or a Somalia or a Bosnia or a South Africa or a Mexico City or a Guatemala or even a Toronto and not see that our world is far from a place of life.

You see the challenge which confronts the church in today's world is to hold up and point to Jesus Christ, the life of the world, in a world where death abounds. The challenge which confronts us is to point to Jesus as the life giver in the midst of suffering and evil. In the midst of oppression and finally in the midst of death.

And that's the real hope of the gospel. That people can be given life in the midst of those realities in our world. Nietzsche once said, he who has a why to live can bear with almost any how.

In Jesus, in this text we are reminded that Jesus gives people a reason to live. For Jesus gives life in the midst of this world and finally Jesus promises a life for the future. Without him, only death.

Only that which brings life to an end. In April of 1988, the evening news reported on a skydiving photographer who had jumped from a plane in order to film other skydivers as they fell and as they opened their parachutes. And suddenly as the last parachute opened, the picture on the telecast went black.

And the announcer reported that the cameraman had fallen to his death. It wasn't until he reached down to look for his own ripcord that he realized he had jumped out of the plane without his parachute. He was so intent on filming the other skydivers, on doing what he felt he should do in this life, in terms of what he was doing that day, that he neglected something crucial for saving his own life.

And most people in our generation are jumping out. Jumping out without a life in which to fall. A life-saving device.

Are you united to Christ tonight? The one who can save you? And what does it mean for you to confess Christ as the life, as your life tonight? And how can the promise of life touch you and touch those whom you love? You see, we are called to live for, to follow, to point people to Jesus Christ, the unique Christ in today's world. We are called to refocus our attention on the one who is the way and the truth and the life. In a world of religious pluralism and spiritual hunger, we are called to point to Jesus as the way.

In a world of intellectual confusion and epistemological relativism and cultural deception, we are called to point to Jesus the truth. And in a world of suffering and death, we are called to point to Jesus as the life. And as I conversed and interacted with the colleagues and friends that I met in Manila last June, I began to realize that we did indeed worship and serve and follow the same Lord.

And in a very real sense, we both had the same challenge to preach and proclaim and follow that Jesus, that unique Christ, in today's world, in our world. A 15th century monk wrote these words, Without the way, there is no going. Without the truth, there is no knowing.

Without the life, there is no living. May we go Christ's way, know Christ's truth, and live Christ's life in the challenges which confront us in our world. Amen.

Let us pray. Lord Jesus, when we look out at our world, we are overwhelmed by the challenges. And yet, when we look to you, we marvel at your grace and your love.

We confess your lordship tonight, your uniqueness, you who are the way, the truth, and the life. And we pray that this text, which is so familiar to us, may strike us in a fresh way this night, and challenge us, and by your spirit, go deeply into our hearts, so that practically day by day, we might know what it is to love and follow our Lord Jesus in our world, day by day. Amen.

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