

Amazing happens here.



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## Friendly Freethinker: A Greater Way, Truth and Life?

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As a young evangelist, I truly believed I carried the greatest message the world had ever \*not\* heard: that my Lord and Savior was the only way to God, the only truth anyone ever needed, and offered the only life with meaning. The first verse we ever memorized was John 14:6: "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus was responding to Thomas, a disciple who had spent many hours with Jesus. Thomas was confused when Jesus said he was leaving but would come back to get his followers—those who knew the way to the place he was going. Thomas didn't know where Jesus was going, so he confessed: "How can we know the way?" We might guess the answer was even more confusing to Thomas, and perhaps all the disciples. His Lord says HE is the way, truth and life. Nobody can find God at all, unless they follow Jesus ... to Jesus. He even takes this further to proclaim that his friends have not only known him and seen him, but they have known God and seen God. The writer of John leaves only one conclusion: Jesus is God, so the way to God is to follow God. That's all you need to believe, all you need to do.

As puzzling as this is—and theologians are still puzzled by it—the Gospel of John leads us deeper into a labyrinth of belief. Jesus tells his close friends they should believe in him, but if they don't, then: "believe me because of the works" (presumably his amazing actions). Yet, even this isn't enough motivation to believe. In my view, one of the most extraordinary statements Jesus ever made comes next (no wonder it is rarely, if ever, the subject of a sermon). "Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and will do greater works than these." How is this possible? Because Jesus is going to be with his Heavenly Parent, and he will do "whatever you [disciples] ask in my name ... If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it" (John 14:13-14). Quite a promise, and from the lips of God!

Not only does Jesus claim to be "in God," but he is "in" his followers and they are "in" him. It's as if the original Holy Trinity was actually God/Jesus/Followers. This would be the answer to Jesus' own prayer in John 17 when he asks himself (that is, God) that "they may all be one, as you Father are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us" (17:21). There's nothing Jesus/God can do that his followers can't do, because they are one with God/Jesus. Astounding.

Jesus had just given them a new commandment, the capstone of all commandments: to love one another (John 13:34), confident that "everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (13:34-35). This leads to a major question that has persisted for a long time: Since followers of Jesus are one with Jesus and God, they surely exhibit great love for all other followers and all the rest of the world, and they obviously do greater things than even Jesus did, so ... where is that love, where are those "greater things"? Many would say the greatest things Jesus did were his miraculous acts of healing, even raising people from the dead. Do we see those things, or even greater things today? What if the "greatest thing" he showed was love so the "even greater" thing for believers to show would be "even greater" love? Is this what we see among his followers today?

Billy Graham once claimed that more people heard him preach in just one of his crusades than all the people who ever heard Jesus in his whole ministry. That sounds rather arrogant, yet no doubt he was completely correct (compare this claim to John Lennon's statement that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus, which was equally true). Jesus probably never traveled more than a hundred miles or so from his home, and those "crowds"—even if they were as many as 5000— couldn't compare with the crowds who hear the preaching of believers any given Sunday.

Here's what troubles me. With all the emphasis on believing in Jesus as the top priority for so many Christians, what happened to the "greater things" of love? If a believer was "one with Jesus/God" they ought to be the highest example of the "way and truth" of a loving life. Wouldn't that be the greatest miracle of all?

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