

## MY PROBLEM WITH THE EYE DOCTOR John 14:3-11

I have a few riddles to run by you as we start today. What occurs once in a minute, twice in a moment and never in a thousand years? You're in a race and pass the person in second place. What place are you in? Johnny's mother has three children, the first is named April and the second is named May. What is the name of the third child? Sheila was born on December 28, yet her birthday always falls in the summer. How is that possible? What has four eyes but cannot see?

Here are the answers: What occurs once in a minute and twice in a moment but never in a thousand years is the letter M. When you pass the person in second place in a race you are now in second place. The name of the third child of Johnny's mother is Johnny. Sheila's birthday is in the summer because she lives in Australia. Finally what has four eyes but can't see is Mississippi.

Enough with the dumb riddles. Today I want you to think with me about an enigma. It's not really a riddle, but it is a puzzle that is difficult to work through. This is a theological puzzle that has caused a lot of people to have brain cramps. I will warn you that I am not going to solve it today, but I am going to discuss it. It also turns out that within this puzzle is some important truth that can help us as we work through the circumstances of our lives. We will see this puzzle in John 14:3-11 so join me in considering these words.

### JESUS CLAIMED TO BE THE WAY

We saw last week that in verse 2 Jesus promised to prepare a way for those who believe in him to go to his "Father's house." If you come to my house you are coming to the place where I live. If I tell you that I have made a "dwelling place" for you in my house I am telling you that I want you to come and live with me.

Jesus was saying that he made the way for us to live with the eternal heavenly Father in his dwelling place. In John 3:36 the apostle told us specifically what this means. "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life." This is the promise that Jesus will give his followers eternal life in the presence of the Father. We call it heaven. Unfortunately that term conjures up some ideas that most of us find unappealing. Maybe we picture a sort of ethereal floating around on clouds playing harps and an eternal worship service. That is a wrong image. The New American Standard translation and the English Standard Version both accurately translate Psalm 16:11, "in your presence is fullness of joy," speaking of the Lord. If we are living in the Father's presence that means that heaven will be where we experience total joy.

Heaven will be different from this earth, but not totally different. We will have bodies, but they won't decay. Those bodies will live in a place much like this earth, but better. It will be a restored creation with none of the downsides of a fallen, broken world. In this world we will find out what joy really is. All of us have brief experiences of joy and wonder and delight in this world. The experiences I refer to typically are so powerful that we cannot even fully express what we feel in them. I hope you know what I am talking about. One year ago our daughter, Carissa, married Captain Michael Townsend. It was the middle of winter but they wanted to get married on the beach at Coronado. The weather could have been miserable this time of year. Instead it was a glorious, warm sunny day that was spectacular. The whole setting was gorgeous and the day was more full of joy than I can express. I wanted to capture that moment and never let it end. But those moments are typically fleeting. Heaven will be life where we experience beauty like that in a way that is every bit as physical as that was, every bit as real. But it won't be fleeting. It will be continual. It will be the best that this world has to offer, but with none of the sadness and hurt of this world.

This was why Jesus said our hearts should not be troubled. Simon Critchley is a British philosopher who is not a believer in Jesus. He has a devastating critique of Christians in his book, *The Book of Dead Philosophers*. In it he wrote, "If proof were needed that many religious believers actually do not practice what they preach, then it can be found in the ignorance of religious teaching on death, particularly Christian teaching...Christianity, in the hands of a Paul, an Augustine or a Luther, is a way of becoming reconciled to the brevity of human life and giving up the desire for wealth, worldly goods and temporal power...(But many Christians today) are actually leading desperate atheist lives bounded by a desire for longevity and a terror of (death)."

If we really believed what Jesus said in John 14 we would not fear death in the least. Like Paul we would say that to die is gain, much better by far than remaining on this earth. Several years ago a friend told me he was taking his whole family to Hawaii for a vacation that week. I told him I was happy for him and jealous. I said they were going to have a great time and imagined his kids were excited. He said to his dismay they weren't. In fact they were grouching and grumpy because they didn't want to go. I couldn't believe it and asked why not. He said his teenage kids did not want to leave their friends. I thought that was dumb. They could have so much fun in Hawaii, but they didn't seem to realize it. That's a little like us not realizing what joy awaits us in heaven and wanting to hang on to this life.

In verse 4 Jesus said something that totally confused the disciples. "You know the way to the place where I am going." They did not understand. When Jesus said they knew the way Thomas, that very practical, seeing is believing kind of guy, blurted out, "We don't even know where you're going so how are we supposed to know the route?"

Jesus then said, “I am the way, the truth and the life.” He did not say, “I will show you the way.” He said, “I *am* the way.” When Laurie and I went to the airport to go on our trip to Mississippi to see Michael and Carissa the airline didn’t hand us a manual on how to fly an airplane along with the course to fly to Mississippi. They put us on a plane that took us where we needed to go. They didn’t show us the way, they were the way. That’s what Jesus was saying. Just like you trust the airline to get you to your destination you put your trust in Jesus and he gets you to the Father’s house.

What Jesus said here is highly controversial today and tough for many people to accept. He said quite clearly, “I am *the* way, *the* truth and *the* life.” He did not say “I am a way, a truth and a life.” In case you didn’t catch the grammar he further clarified, “No one comes to the Father except through me.” In other words, he is not just the way, he is the *only* way and there is no other.

This bothers us on a couple of fronts. It seems so narrow. What about all the sincere and good people of other religions? Let me point out that this is not my idea. I am just passing on to you what Jesus said. He also said in the Sermon on the Mount that the way is narrow and few are chosen. Why this should be I do not know. But Jesus was quite insistent that many more will reject the truth than will accept it.

We also have a problem with this statement because of our culture. Howls of protest arise from our culture at this. How can you be so narrow? It is this kind of thinking that leads to all the religious troubles we see in this world and it is ridiculous to think that it is true. We all know that all religions are like planets. They may be different but they orbit the same sun, right? The various religions are different but they all orbit the same God, right? British professor of theology John Hick wrote in his book, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, that there needs to be a revolution in theology. Hick was once an orthodox Christian, but no more. Now he says that Christians must abandon their view of other religions and the idea of the absolute truth that there is “salvation through Christ alone.”

At the heart of this objection to Jesus’ statement is the thinking that in things spiritual and moral there is no absolute truth. A claim to be “the way and the truth” is automatically ruled out. Each one, we are told, must arrive at his or her own truth. But where is the evidence that this is so? How does one know that all religions lead to the same end and there is not one that is true? In the real world we know that all versions of the “truth” are not equally valued.

Recently I did battle with the health insurance web site. The news stories about how difficult it was were not accurate. It was way worse and more frustrating than they said. However, I admit that I added to the frustration by my own stupidity. At one point I had

filled in one page of information, hit “next” to move on to the next page of the application and it wouldn’t let me. I made sure I had everything filled out and hit “next” again and once again it sent me back to the same page. I went through this four times before I noticed a slight mistake I had made. Somehow I had entered that the year of my birthday was 1850. The website refused to accept that I was 163 years old. I found this attitude to be narrow and bigoted. This was blatant bias against the extraordinarily chronologically gifted. Who are they to say that I’m not 163 years old? If my truth is that I was born in 1850 what gives them the right to deny it?

That is a lesson is about how the world really is. I have a birth date that is correct. You may choose to believe that I was born on July 4, 1776, or July 20, 1969, or January 1, 1990 (though that one might be a little hard to swallow). It is your right to believe whatever you choose. But none of those dates are correct. I am not 163 years old or 237 years old or 44 years old or 23 years old. There are millions of alternative birth dates but only one that is true. And everywhere you look in the world that’s how it is. If I write a check for \$1million our bank doesn’t care that it is true for me that we have that much money in our account. They only care about what is actually *true*, which is that check will bounce higher than the stars.

Well, yes, that is so, but in matters pertaining to religion and morals it’s different. Really? According to whom? How do you know that? What proof do you have that the realm of religion is different than just about everything else in life?

Furthermore, let’s consider that claim that in religion there is no absolute truth, that all religions are equally valid. Is that a statement about religion? Yes, it is. It is a statement about a particular religious belief system, the system that says in religious matters there can be no one truth. Does that belief conflict with any other religious statements? Yes, it conflicts with the claim that Jesus made and with some central tenets of Islam. If no narrowness can be allowed in spiritual matters then that way of thinking must also be disallowed in the religious realm and one must accept that idea that there may well be one truth.

Here is a truth that one must admit if one is honest. In his book, *The Reason For God* (p. 14), Tim Keller wrote, “We are all exclusive in our...beliefs about religion, but in different ways.” The belief that in religion there can be no one truth is in fact a religious belief that is exclusive. So the statement that Jesus made that he is the way to the Father in reality is no more narrow than any belief about religion. All of them are exclusive in their statements.

The pluralist says, “Yes, but you only believe in Jesus because you were born in a nation where the dominant religion is Christianity. Had you been born in Saudi Arabia you

would not believe what you do.” The implication is that the fact that you were taught this in your culture nullifies its validity. Again we have to make this person apply his thinking to himself. He is a pluralist because he comes from a society that is predominantly pluralist. Had he been born in Saudi Arabia he most definitely would not be a pluralist. Does this then mean that his cultural upbringing nullifies the validity of his belief? If it does not then cultural upbringing must not nullify the validity of a belief system, including Christianity.

The upshot of all this is that everyone makes exclusive claims when it comes to religion. Someone is right and someone is wrong. Is it possible the relativist pluralist is correct? Yes, but it is far from certain. In fact it is much less than likely, given that his view would contradict what we see in the rest of the world and he advances no confirming evidence for his beliefs. So is it reasonable to believe that Jesus is the way? Yes, because he gave evidence that he was who he claimed. Does this *prove* that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life? No, but it does mean we have to consider his claims as possible and even plausible. And it means we have to look at the evidence. In his case, he said he would prove his claims by dying as he predicted, then rising from the dead, then he did it. In the end, as the New Testament tells us, we must live by faith.

#### JESUS CLAIMED TO EXPLAIN THE FATHER

Jesus then drops another bombshell when he says, “If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well.” To know Jesus is to know God. This has Philip’s mind whirling so he says in verse 8, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” In other words, I don’t get exactly what you’re saying. Could you draw me a picture and just lay out for me what God is really like?

Jesus says in verse 9, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” If you want to know what God the Father is like, look at Jesus. There’s an old joke about the young boy who was something of a terror in his class at school. The teacher had a constant war on her hands trying to control him and getting him to do assignments. One day she gave an assignment to the class to draw something they thought was really important. To her surprise the little troublemaker went right to work and was totally absorbed in what he was drawing. He worked with an intensity and focus she’d never seen in him. She walked around the classroom observing what the students were doing, but intrigued she had to see what he was up to. As she stopped at his desk she asked, “What are you drawing?” He said, “I’m drawing a picture of God.” She said, “But no one knows what God looks like.” He answered, “They will in a minute.”

In John 1:18 John wrote, “No one has ever seen God, but God the one and only who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” Wait, doesn’t that sound like there are two Gods, one making the other known? That makes no sense, for we know that John was a

good Jewish man for whom one of the fundamental beliefs was that there is only one God. In fact in that verse he referred to “God the one and only.” If there is one and only one God how can he make God known?

Was John having difficulty expressing himself? Did he get confused and somehow start writing gibberish? At the beginning of that chapter in verse 1 he wrote, “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Wow, there is more of that confused gibberish. The Word was with God and was God. Well which is it? Was the Word with God or was the Word God?

I had an eye exam this week. I don’t stress over eye exams like I do appointments with the dentist. I fear dental appointments and white knuckle my way through them. I don’t fear eye exams. They’re not painful like visits to the dentist. But I do experience some stress at the eye doctor because they give you tests that cause me problems. They have one that tests peripheral vision where you look into this machine and lights flash. You’re supposed to push a button when you see one. My problem is my world becomes a universe of flashing lights. Was that a flash? It must have been. I start pushing the button like crazy. I fear they’re going to think I’m just guessing and constantly pushing the button. Then they take you into the room where they put that big machine on your face that has all the various lenses. They start flipping the lenses. “Which is better, number 1 or number 2?” There’s so much pressure. If you get it wrong you’re going to go around for the next year with blurry vision. And I can’t tell. “Uh, I don’t know. They’re the same.” The doctor tries again. He shows them both to you. “Number 1 or number 2?” So much pressure. I can’t tell. “Uh...1, no wait, 2, no 1, no I mean 2.”

It sounds like John was having that kind of experience. He’s God, no he’s with God. Wait, he is God. Oh, I can’t decide! There’s only one God, or maybe there’s two, but I know there’s only one. This same difficulty shows up in our passage. In verse 10 Jesus said, “Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?” Then again in verse 11, “Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the father is in me.” Huh? How can you be in the Father and the Father in you? We got a box of Christmas presents in the mail. Inside the mailing box was a box with a present in it. You could say box 2 was in box 1. But you can’t turn also say box 1 was in box 2. One can be inside the other, but they both can be inside each other. That makes no sense. I don’t get it. Oh no, we’re back at the eye doctor. Number 1 or number 2?

There is a reason for all of this confusing verbiage. Both John in chapter 1 and Jesus in these verses were addressing something that ultimately does not fit in any human categories and is not totally explicable in human language. In his book, *The Gospel According To Job* (p. 47), Mike Mason wrote that we need “the kind of faith whose God is so big as to be not just unmanageable, but to a large extent (as paradoxical as this

might sound to Christian ears) unknowable.” Paul asks in Romans 11:34 “Who has known the mind of the Lord?” His meaning is that no one really understands God.

Mason went on to write (p. 48) “It is much easier to use one’s mind to reduce God to understandable proportions than it is to continually accommodate oneself to the divine mystery.” In other words, it is not possible to completely comprehend God and to describe him in human terms that are totally accurate.

If we start with the concept that God is not limited, that he is infinite and eternal, we are confronted with the fact that we are not going to be able to completely understand God. When I think about the concept of eternity stretching both backward and forward I hit a wall that I cannot get over. I can’t really understand that. This warns us that we had better expect that God will exist and work in ways that are beyond my ability to figure out. That’s what we run into in this passage. Jesus gives a glimpse into God’s existence that is somewhere out beyond the limits of human language and understanding.

God can express himself in a way that can be described as both being him and being with him, as being in him while he is in the one doing the expressing. This is a reference to the doctrine that somehow God exists as one being, but in the form of three persons. How can that be? I don’t know. We can’t comprehend this or explain it. This is why Jehovah’s Witnesses exist. At the heart of their problem is they can’t grasp the idea of God being like that so they refuse to accept it.

Years ago I spoke about this aspect of God’s character and like I am doing this morning explained that it is incomprehensible. A few days later a man came to see me. I first met him while I was in seminary. We had gone through school together. Years later he and his family started coming to our church. That day he told me that he had done a lot of study and thinking about the concept of the Trinity and had come to understand it. He explained his theory to me. I was taken aback and not quite sure how to respond. Finally I said, “Uh, do you remember when we took a theology class on Christology, the study of Christ, and we actually went over your theory?” He didn’t recall it. I said as gently as possible, “I kind of thought maybe you didn’t because we learned that what you just described is a classic heresy. It was called modalism or Sabellianism and was clearly labeled a heresy by the church. Did you forget that? Do you not see that it actually contradicts what John taught in John 1:1 that the word was with God and was God?” He said he felt it explained the dilemma and left. I never saw him at our church again. He couldn’t accept that God exists in ways mysterious to us.

There are a bunch of things about God that are beyond us. I don’t understand how Jesus could be both God and man. I don’t understand how God could exist as a human infant. I don’t understand how God’s sovereignty and human free will work together. I don’t get

how prayer works. But this is the mystery of a divine being. If there is no mystery we should suspect that what we have is not a real God but some human artifice that we can comprehend because we made it.

Imagine that a 3 year old child comes to daddy and asks, “How does our television work?” Daddy begins explaining how their LCD works. You use a couple of pieces of glass, one coated with nematic phase liquid crystals and the other with a polarizing film. You have an electrode that passes electric current through them according to a signal sent by the television station causing the pixels to form so our brain can recognize the picture. How’s the 3 year old going to grasp the technology? He can’t so the dad has to come up with some dumbed down explanation that will be comprehensible to the child. He will look for something that would be true, though it wouldn’t explain the whole of the matter. That’s the situation when Jesus explains the relationship between him and the Father. Just as there is no way to explain in a 3 year olds vocabulary and comprehension the technology in an LCD television, so there is no way to completely explain the nature of God’s existence to humans.

To sum up, if you have seen Jesus, you’ve seen the Father. In John 1:18 John said Jesus has made the Father known. The New American Standard translation has that accurately rendered, “he has explained him.” Jesus has depicted for all the character of God. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. He is holy, righteous, good, full of grace, wise, powerful, just, courageous, strong, gentle and perfect in love. He cares about people to a degree that is beyond our imagination.

## IMPLICATIONS

In his book, *Letters To A Thirsty Soul* (p. xiv), Edward Miller wrote, “I long to be one of the loving hands that reaches down to others who might have become sidetracked from the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus.”

### GET TO KNOW JESUS BETTER

First if Jesus is who he claimed, it is obvious that it ought to be of great importance to us to get to know him. Philip was asking, “Please just show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” One of our biggest problems is that we don’t believe that. If we understood that at the heart of being whole and complete as a human is seeing the Father, seeing him as he is would be more of a priority for most of us.

In his book, *The Holy Wild* (p. 144), Mark Buchanan wrote, “We often fail to grasp our greatest need in times of greatest need. When we are distressed, bewildered, threatened, shaken, in those moments when we want, more than anything, God to do something; when we wonder, more than ever, if there is a God to do anything—in those moments of



greatest need our greatest need is simply to see the Lord...Nothing else can so quickly put our lives into perspective.”

Poor Moses. He had the unenviable task of leading Israel through some difficult events. He got them out of Egypt, then while he was up on Mt. Sinai receiving God’s revelation of his Law, the people abandoned their God and started worshiping an idol. This happened after repeated episodes of questioning both Moses and God and lots of grumbling against both from the people. In Exodus 33:3 God told Moses that he should lead the people on to the Promised Land, but that God would not go with them because they were so hard headed and rebellious. Moses pleaded with God to go with them. God agreed, but Moses then asked God to show him his divine glory. In effect, after all this what Moses felt he most needed was to see God. He felt if he could see God then he could handle whatever was ahead.

Our biggest need is to see God. When God called Isaiah to his role as a prophet and knew it would be a hard road for him, he gave him a glimpse of God in his glory on his throne. That was all Isaiah needed. That is what we need as well. We need to see God as he is in his glory. The way we most accurately do that is by getting to know Jesus, for as we have seen, Jesus has explained God. He has shown us what he looks like.

One of my friends in college was a guy named Pat Curtis. Pat was an all in kind of guy. He was passionate about whatever he did. I first met him when I was a sophomore and he was a freshman who came out for the baseball team. He would later tell me that at first he didn’t like me. The reason was he heard me talking a couple of times with buddies on the team about whether I should quit. I knew my baseball playing days were quickly coming to an end because I just wasn’t good enough. During the early days of that season before the games started I was struggling with whether I should admit the inevitable, call it quits and save myself a lot of time or keep trying to hang on for one more year. Pat said he wanted to have teammates who were committed, who would give their all and wouldn’t quit. He didn’t like this guy who seemed to have only one foot in the dugout. I decided to stay with it, and over time as Pat got to know me his view of me began to change. He had formed an opinion of me based on insufficient information. When he got to know my heart he decided I wasn’t so bad. In fact, by the end of that season he had become one of my best friends and he stayed that way throughout our college years, even after I did quit playing ball. Maybe seeing me play for a season helped him decide that quitting was probably a good idea for me. The point of that little story is that as we get to know Jesus more we will learn to trust him more. We will enjoy him more. And remember that trusting him is the foundation of peace!

So how do we get to know Jesus better? You get to know people now better by listening to them, watching how they deal with life and learning of them. We get to know Jesus

better by watching him and listening to him, chiefly through his letters to us, meaning the Bible. But like anyone else, we also get to know him by going through life with him. It means living each day in his company, talking to him, asking what he thinks of each situation, taking what he has told us and applying it in all circumstances.

## LOVE JESUS MORE

When we see Jesus as he is, see his character and his love for us that compelled him to give himself up for us, we will want to love him back. Our lives will be about loving him. Since today is the Super Bowl I want to tell you about a story I saw on ESPN.com this week. There is a man in Seattle named Chris Sayers whose infant daughter Abi has been in the children's hospital there. She was born 16 weeks premature, has had brain bleeds and suffered several strokes already. She has already fought through so much in her brief life. One day when Chris and his wife Mindie were with Abi they were surprised when Russell Wilson, Seattle Seahawks quarterback, walked into their room. He visited with them and signed an autograph. But that wasn't the end. He kept coming to visit them. Chris said, "He never wanted to talk about himself, he just wanted to give us a hug and ask how Abi was doing. He asked me if we could pray over Abi one day, and after that, it just felt like the lines of communication were open and we could talk about anything." He went on to say that he has never wanted to put people on a pedestal, but that Russell Wilson is genuine, the real deal. Eve Kopp who works for the hospital says she was skeptical when Wilson called unsolicited to ask if he could come visit. She said this happens with athletes. Like most she figured he'd show up once or twice, have a photo op then disappear. Not so with Wilson. He comes every week. He just goes in and visits with the families, cares about them and prays for them. Kopp said of him, "He is an avid Christian and he wants to walk the talk." The article went on to say that Wilson is an outspoken follower of Jesus. He goes and cares about those people because he wants to love Jesus.

So love Jesus. That's why we gather on Sundays. We want to get to know Jesus better and especially to express our love for him. We want to tell him we love him and learn how we can please him even more. Again I will quote Mark Buchanan in *The Holy Wild*. He wrote, "The most important thing a pastor does is stand in a pulpit every Sunday and say, 'Let us worship God.'" We are here to express our love for Jesus. Let's love our Lord by serving him and be continuing to come and express our love for him with praise and worship together each Sunday.