



I A M Part 1
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Last Month, a group of us went to the Jungle in Ecuador on a trip. We took a medical team for a mission trip there and to serve the Shuar tribe in the Amazon Jungle in Ecuador. It was a phenomenal trip. There is so much to tell, but I will try to tell as much as I can in a brief amount of time.

Tim and Debbie Anderson are missionaries to Ecuador that have lived and worked there for over 30 years. They've done so much incredible work with so many people. A lot of that work has been to the Shuar people, a tribe in the Amazon Jungle with several villages throughout that area. They have done so much and it's just been incredible to hear the stories and the work that they've done over the years. So many people are changed for eternity because of their work. And those communities are changed for sure.

They have changed a lot, literally, over the last 30 years. They are a little more civilized than they used to be than when the Anderson's showed up with the culture changing and the times changing, but they still live a pretty primitive lifestyle. To get their food, they have to garden and they have to hunt. They hunt various jungle animals that they can. Yes, monkey. We did not eat any monkey when we were there. We packed our own food in. And we found it ironic though that as we are in the depths of the jungle, eating this food that we packed in and you guys are back here eating shredded lettuce and we were the ones protected from diarrhea. So, thank you Lord, for the protective isolation of the jungle. What we read was pretty bad.

So, woodland Hills, you have been a part of the ministry there in Ecuador for a long time. We have had groups that have gone in for projects, particularly with the Bible school that the Andersons have built and developed and are continuing to develop to this day. That Bible School sits right on a river called the Pastaza River. That river is really a barrier to some of the resources that can go in and out of the deeper parts of the jungle there, so they have been pretty impaired from doing certain things deeper into the jungle and one of those has been medical and it has been it's been a passion and dream of Tim Andersons for years to take a medical group back into the deeper part of the jungle. So, it's exciting to get to tell you that, woodland hills, were the first medical group into this part of the jungle this part of the world, literally that area every to take a medical group, so it was quite awesome to get to do that.

We had two physicians, me, and Dr John Maul, one of our own also. We had two dentists, Dr. Rob Pulao out of New Jersey and Dr. Ryan Schere out of Arkansas. And then also, one of our own, Paul Etheradge, went along and really helped be the scout and lead the group. If you don't know Paul, if you can imagine GI Joe, Rambo, and Bear Grills all in the same person, that's Paul Etherage. Paul has been into the jungle many, many times and he was invaluable being a part of that group.

We went in specifically to a village called Momi Ock, which is about a two-and-a-half-mile hike past that river where we provided care for people. There are smaller villages throughout and a couple that we hiked through to get there. Each village has about 0 to 75 people in them. They stay relatively small for the purpose of providing for the village themselves and we provided care for about 200 people from those villages. Saw about 200 patients, providing either medical or dental care or both. Another neat part of this trip is we were able to take a kit in with us for the purpose of vision testing and for glasses. We were able to do kind of cursory vision test and from that, put specific lenses into a frame for people that didn't realize they couldn't see very well. This picture is Pastor Anesto from the Village of Momi Ock. A pastor kind of has to be able to see to read his bible, And he didn't realize how poor his vision was and we were able to provide him with some glasses so he could better see to read his Bible to lead his group and his congregation there in the village of Momi Ock

So, one of many neat stories that came out of the trip – Each person that was seen for medical or vision or dental, also received pastoral counseling because we know that we can tend to the physical, but we know that far more important and eternal is the spiritual, so each received counseling, each heard the gospel whether they had

heard it before or not and each person in each group was prayed for and with. During this time. And it's neat to get to report back that during our time there, in the end, 18 people received Christ for the first time and placed faith in Christ. So, a fruitful and productive trip. Praise the Lord. So, again, thank you for your generosity and it's exciting for you to get to be a part of such work that is being done.

Any short-term mission trip we go on is for the purpose is to express the compassion of Christ so that people can see that compassion and their hearts would be open to the Gospel of Christ and that their eternity would be changed. And we saw that happen on this trip.

Today, we are starting a new series, a three-part series called I Am. This series comes out of John 14: 6 where Jesus declared I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. And that is going to be our next three weeks. we are going to be working through that passage and that passage comes from Jesus sharing his last few moments with the disciples before the crucifixion. In the Upper Room. Called the upper room discourse. A lot took place there during that time. He's taking advantage of this time like I'm about to leave so I know I need to give you guys reinforce some things tell you some new things to make sure you know some things. So, I really need you to lock in.

So, we know that we are studying a part of scripture. All scripture is breathed out by God and important, but we are reading some things that Jesus is basically saying, I need you to look at me and listen to me very carefully here with these things.

So, a lot of big points, a lot of heavy dense material that we are going to be going through these next few weeks, but let's read John 14: 1 – 6 leading up to this passage that we are going to be studying.

Jesus said to his disciples, ***“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In father’s house there are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself.*** Those are important words, remember that. *Take you to myself where I am, you may be also and you know the way to where I am going.*

And then we hear from Thomas. Thomas said to him, *Lord, we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?* Jesus said to them: *I am the Way and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

So, Jesus is giving some very important information here. He is about to be crucified and we are going to talk about these three points over the next three weeks. Jesus is the way, Jesus is the truth, Jesus is the life.

So, today is part 1, Jesus is the way. What does that mean? Well, when we look at this word way, there are different definitions of the word way. We may think of a path or directions on how to get somewhere. How many of you remember the big Rand McNally atlas that you turn the pages and you have to kind of map out your course, and then after that, we had had MapQuest. Some of you may remember going on MapQuest. Com and printing out your directions and, depending on how long the trip was, it was just pages like turn after turn and you hoped that nothing changed in the time that you printed until you are on that path Changed.

Now we just tell our phone, take me to such and such and it tells you when to turn. Right? we've even gone so far now some can sit in their driver's seat, tell you car to take you there and you don't have to touch the wheel, which is a little spooky.

My wife Keri is unashamed that she is directionally challenged. She maps everything, even in town. and she hates it when I use complicated navigational terms, like east. I will say "When you get to that intersection, you are going to need to turn east. She will say is that left, or right? and I will say are you coming from the North or the south?

Thomas thought that Jesus was talking about a specific place most important. He said we don't know where you are going, how can we know the way, the path.

That's not *the way* that Jesus was talking about that he is. The way he was talking about and is talking about is a method or a means to an end, how to accomplish something.

What is it that Jesus is telling us how to accomplish? Well, thankfully, he follows it up in the next sentence. *He says that no one comes to the father except through me.*

I am the way; I am the means to an end. To what end? For you to come to the father. And that sound a little confusing or unclear if you are new to church or new to this concept, even if you've been around church a long time, I think it's

important for us to look at the big picture so that we can have this in context and know what Jesus means when he says I am the way, no one comes to the Father except through me.

So, let's do that. Let's look at the big picture. In the beginning, God created everything that exists, including humans, his favorite part of creation. He gave us a place to dwell with him, in his presence in the Garden of Eaden. And then temptation comes in, mankind falls to temptation and sins. And it is because of that sin that God had to cast man out of his direct presence.

We read about it in Genesis 3: 23 – Therefore, the Lord God sent him out from the Garden of Eaden to work the ground to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man and at the east of the garden of Eaden, he placed the cherubim, which an angel and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life. You see that word? Isn't that interesting, that language. The way he guards the way to the tree of life. He had to cast us out because a holy God cannot be directly in the presence of unholy people, of sinful people.

So, what we find from this is that you and I have a condition that we are born into and that condition is separation. separation from God Almighty God the creator. Separation from his direct presence.

When Adam and Eve got kicked out of the garden, we all got kicked out because they were in the direct presence of God. They got kicked out, they are not in the presence of God. And all of their descendants, which is all of us where therefore born outside of the presence of God with that condition, the sin condition that separates all from the Lord.

Romans 3: 23 says, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

You've heard that verse many times if you've been in church long. But look at the picture that paints. We fall short. We are trying to get to an end or even with a path, we're trying to get to a point and we all fall short of that point. We can't quite get to the end we want to reach

So, practically speaking then, what difference does it make that we are separated from God? Okay, we are cast out, we are separated, what difference does that make?

I want to illustrate this by looking at three places – Heaven, Earth and Hell.

First of all, let's clarify this fictitious kind of understanding that we may have had from growing up cartoons depicting these three places in a certain way, where earth is where we all are and Heaven is up in the clouds somewhere like the clouds that we can see and Hell is below the ground in this really hot place. That's not how these three places exist. They are three really distinct places and they each have an essence that defines them.

Heaven is defined and the essence of Heaven is the immediate and eternal presence of God. And Hell is the opposite of that. It's the distant and eternal absence of God. And each of us that are alive on Earth will be destined to spend eternity, after our time on earth, in one of these two places.

So, here we are on earth and when I say earth, what I mean is the created universe, astronauts going around the moon and everything, but you get it. Our existence in the universe

Earth is presence of the Lord and the presence of sin and therefore brokenness. That's the condition we are in right now. Alive for now on earth, not dead, but have a condition and that condition is a spiritual death that we have now because of our separation from God, separated from our source of life.

As we were taking care of these people in equator, the Shuar. They would come to us and they had various different symptoms. Some of them had some conditions or diagnosis already that they needed help with. One of them, we saw a few times was anemia. If you don't know what anemia is, it's a deficit in the red blood cells that are the oxygen carrying cells in our blood cells. You see, oxygen is important to have, but the red blood cells are important to get oxygen to the tissues so they can carry out the processes important to sustain life.

You've heard me talk about survival before. Paul Etheredge knows survival and he knows you can survive a few weeks without food, you can survive a few days without water, but you can only survive a few minutes without air. The important component for the air that you need to breathe is oxygen. Even if you can get oxygen into your lungs, if you don't have the important oxygen carrying capacity inside of your blood to get the oxygen where it needs to go, then that oxygen is no good to you.

So, some people have anemia at various levels. Some people have it mildly, some people have it more severely. There are things here now that we can do to treat anemia and get a person better, but really, that's kind of the condition that we deal

with spiritually in our time on earth. We are alive, but we are born with spiritual anemia. So, access to the Father is through Jesus and it's through Jesus that we can access that source of life. In the same way that someone who has anemia is lacking the source because they need a way to get that source to their tissues. So, while we are alive, we can have and we are born with a spiritual anemia here in our time on earth, Jesus is the way. He said, I am the Way, so we know we have a condition, which is separation. He said, I am the Way, which that should give us hope.

In my practice, if I have to deliver a hard diagnosis, one of the first thing someone will say is, "Is there a cure for this?" "can you fix this?" Some of you have been in that situation where you hear some news and it is pretty grim and you want to know right away, is this it? so, when we hear we have a separation condition from God, we can have hope, knowing that there is a fix for this, there is a way. It's not an incurable condition.

So, then Jesus says no one comes to the Father except through me. and when we read this, we understand that this implies action. We need to come to the Father and that is an action step that is required. We have a way to come to the Father, but action is required.

You see, a doctor and a patient can know a diagnoses, but unless action is taken, that diagnosis is not going to be addressed. The first patient that I saw that had anemia there in the jungle that I was taking care of... it was early on in one of the first days. And there were Limited resources in the middle of the jungle.

Here in the states, we can do labs, we have different ways that we can alleviate that condition, but as I'm racking my brain, thinking we've got to be able to do something for this young lady that has this relatively mild anemia, so not immediately life-threatening

. So, I thought okay, if I were back home and we had a mild anemia, I would maybe recommend some supplementation of iron, which they don't have, but I could also tell someone they need to eat more red meat. So, it dawned on me. I had to say something I never thought I would have to say. I said, you need to eat more monkey. Quite an interesting recommendation, right? so, later on that evening, as a group, we are kind of debriefing about the day and we got to talking about that. It didn't really strike me at the moment, but when we were talking about later and I was telling the other folks on the team what took place, we kind of got a little bit of a kick out of it. It was pretty surreal and humorous moment.

From that we got to talking and we came up with this slogan for our team, but we didn't stop there, we decided to make a graphic and here is what we came up with

Eat More Monkey

I think it could be a really big deal.

Can you imagine here in the states if I was to sit across from someone and say, you need to eat more monkey, they would look at me cross-eyed.

But this young lady sat there and I told her that she needed to eat more monkey and she looked at me and she stood up and went to leave and she said thank you

Truly, when I was writing this, I did not intend to make a metaphor of coming to Jesus and eating monkey but you will never forget it, will you.

So, we need to be careful about misinterpreting the fact that action is required for us to come to the father. There is a way, but there is also not a way. There are other ways that get mistaken that we need to declare are not the way. I'm going to give you a list here, but it's important though that some of these things, most of these things on the list, can be helpful in pointing you to the way, pointing others to the way. But they, themselves, are not the way. For instance, a set of behaviors, a list of to do's and rules, and a five step plan, a certain degree or education, a specific church, a specific ministry in that church. a specific pastor. Again, things that can be good about pointing you to the way, but they, themselves are not the way some online influencer, a county that you live in or visit is not the way. A political party is not the way. A specific mission trip is not the way. A set of good deeds are not the way to the father. As a matter of fact, scripture says compared to Jesus, your good deeds are filthy rags. Jesus is the way. And it's important for us to address that there is no other God and no other religion that is the way. Jesus is the way

And I want to address this post-modern thinking that may be popular among some or even many. That thinking says there is no one simple explanation for why or how things are. You need to know that Christianity is a simple explanation for how and why things are. It's very simple.

Some may say, "What gives Christianity the right to declare the only way to Heaven? The question back is What Heaven are talking about? that's because most people like the idea of this place where I get a new body. I have no pain.

I have no fear. I have no tears. I have complete joy. And we have to consider the source of this place called Heaven which is the Bible. because you see, many people love the Biblical reality of Heaven but reject the Biblical reality of the exclusivity of Christ and these are two truths from the same Bible. You can't believe in one and reject the other. Jesus is the way. He declared it when he said I am the way, but other places in scripture declare it as well.

Acts 4: 12 says, and there is salvation in no one else for there is no other name under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Scripture also says it in 1 timothy 2: 5 *For there is one God and there is one mediator. Notice that word mediator God and men, the man Jesus "Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.*

Let's look at that word *Mediator* that scripture declares that Jesus is. A mediator is a third party that helps facilitate differences in a conflict.

We often hear about mediators in some legal dispute. And unfortunately, many have been through divorce and if you have, you know that at some point likely a mediator came into play in that process. To me the saddest part about that step in divorce is that generally, when the marriage has trouble, we have a marriage counselor that is trying to reconcile the relationship then we move to a mediator that is simply dealing with the transaction. And that is a very sad time and sad thing to deal with.

But for us, Jesus is the mediator between us and the Father and remember what Jesus said. He said Father and I are one. That's what makes Jesus so unique as a mediator because you see, our mediator is not a third party. They are not someone coming in to deal with a transaction. It's Jesus, God himself coming to deal with the relationships. It doesn't leave the situation of a relationship

Come to Jesus, and you are there. you are with the Father when you come to Jesus. "The Father and I are one."

So, let's look at some application of this issue of the condition of separation and Jesus being the way, remembering that action is required for us to come to the Father.

I want to take us back to those three places – Heaven, Earth, and Hell. We are going to walk through these. First is hell. Second Thessalonians 1 : 9 says *they will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the*

Lord. Not necessarily gone from earth, but away from the presence of the Lord. And from his glory. It's not so much this fiery place that's of concern; it's away from the presence of the Lord. The practical application there is if you are listening to me and you can hear my words, then there is still time. There is still time to avoid this situation after your time on earth. You can be healed of spiritual anemia, you can have the way to the Father so that you can spend eternity in Heaven, which is the next – Heaven. John 14: 3 says, *I will come again and I will take you to my self that where I am, you may be also.* I pointed this out earlier when we read it.

So, Thomas thought that Jesus was going to a place and that was the important thing. Yes, it's a place, but what is the essence of that place? Jesus said to myself. Bringing us to him. *Where I am, you may be also.*

When Joshua was leading the Israelites across the Jordan to take the Promised Land, he made a declaration, choose this day, whom you will serve.

And we have a declaration before us today in our time on earth, choose whom you will serve because it is going to determine your eternity. Believe in a biblical Heaven, believe in the biblical Jesus who is exclusively the way for us to come to the Father to be able to be back in his presence because of his holiness. Make him Lord. That's the application for Heaven.

As for earth, as we are all today, James 4: 6-8, the application here. *God apposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.*

You remember that it was pride that got us kicked out his presence to begin with, so, it makes sense that he apposes pride. Submit yourself, therefore, God, resist the devil, and he will flee from you. draw near to God and he will draw near to you. You see that picture of presence, drawing near to him, getting near to him. Spending time in his word, praying to him, fulfilling the purposes for your life which are also purposes for our church – worship, fellowship, discipleship, evangelism, ministry, drawing near to God through those things and therefore for the Christians, we can rejoice because we know that earth is the most hell we will ever know.

Now, Paul Etheradge has been taking trips into the jungle for decades and done many different works. So, he was really good about preparing us for what we were going to be facing in the elements and the weather, and the resources we will or

won't have I thanked him several times throughout the trip. We were very well prepared, but that didn't mean we didn't have any problems along the way.

As well as we were prepared, it's not going to be a problem free trip. We know that the Father is the means to the goal, but it doesn't mean our path along the way in our life is going to be easy.

It is estimated that that about 117 billion people have lived on earth in human history. Out of 117 billion, no two people have lived exactly the same path, the same journey in their life. There are a lot of variables that factor in, such as different families, different work, different interests, different schools. People encounter different tragedies, different illnesses, diagnoses, successes and failures

Mental health. Talents, finances, hobbies, travel, relationships, experiences, all of these things make each of our path a little bit different than someone else. Not to mention when you throw in culture and technology of the time. How many of you remember life before the internet? It was a different time, wasn't it. So, you remember what it was like on a Friday night going to the video store trying to rent the movie you want to watch. Getting home and opening the case to see they put the wrong movie in the case. That was a problem. Was that the biggest problem that we faced before the internet? No. Problems have been around ever since fall.

Remember if we ever think of a problem or something that is bad in this life or this world, the answer is sin. That's why

So, I'll be 50 next year which means I'm just a couple of years away from becoming interested in birds. And in a very exciting way, declaring to the rest of the household what species is now resting on my new bird feeder. Shortly after that it will be chair yoga. I'm already getting the ads for it. The point is I've lived long enough that I can look behind me and see that there were a different time and different place where the problems were still there. and I can look ahead and the path that I expect to have and know there are going to be problems still there.

You see, the problems of this world don't know a time or place and it's foolish for us to think that any other era, any other geography has no problems.

I asked Tim Anderson at one point, what are the biggest sin problem that you see among the Shur people? And not surprising to hear that they deal with some of the deepest, darkest sin just like we do here and now such as abuse, rape, incest, and neglect and the list goes on.

All similar problems. Time and geography don't matter when it comes to problems and when it comes to sin.

Those were maniocs. The Shur had to hike two and a half miles like we did to the river and back if they wanted to get over to different resources. So for us going in, we would cross the river two and a half there and back. to get out. So, we had to hike a literal path to get where we were going and they have to hike a literal path to get out and so you can see that the group were all decked out. Paul had us well prepared. Each of us looked like we were right out of an REI catalogue. We've got all the stuff.

So, when we were hiking back out at the end of the trip, Tim hired a few of the young shura to come with us and carry some of the equipment that did need to go back out. As we were hiking, you notice something different about these maybe 12-year-olds that are carrying twice as many bags as we are wearing sweatpants and slides. That was there gear.

At first, this young man passed me on the path and my first thought was, wow, that's impressive, good for you. and I quickly went to "You little punk."

I'm sweating, I'm Thursday and this kid is just you and I walking into the store from the parking lot. He just walks right past me. and I have to confess before you and the Lord that I thought about ripping him. But he was carrying my bag, so...

The point is if we are not careful, we can be walking on the same path as someone similar to us. And we can look at them and think why are they having such an easier time on this path that we are walking? And the comparison game comes in. We can look around and see that someone else is in sweatpants and slides and just Chilin along this path while we are struggling, we are we are thirsty, we are hungry. That's when we have to remember that life is not about your path, it's about the Way. The journey is not the important thing, the road you've been given to travel, but your travel companion is. The one that you are taking the path with. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.

We were born into separation. We have all been cast out of the garden

But, Hallelujah, there is a way, there is only one way and Jesus is the way. He is the cure for our separation condition. He is perfect. This cure is complete, and it is eternal.

The apostle apostle Paul put it this way when he said, *I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels nor rulers no things present, things to come nor powers nor height nor death nor anything else in all creation, nothing will be able to t separate us from the love of God. How? Through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Let's Pray together

Father, we love you and we are grateful for the way. We are grateful for you son
""Christ that is our mediator that when we come to him, we come to you, Lord.

Lord, for those that have not placed faith in you, we pray for their salvation that they would believe and confess and be locked in for an eternity in your presence and have access to the source of life so that their spiritual anemia can be addressed.

Help us to do your will in all that do your will in all that we do. To glorify and lead us in paths of righteousness for your namesake we love you and we give you praise.

In "Christ's name, everyone agreed and said... Amen