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## Country Roads

### Part 1 – The Broad and Narrow Roads

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're kicking off *Country Roads*. Let me ask you this question. Have you ever heard anyone say something like this: "All paths lead to God"? If you are an Oprah fan, you heard that a lot when her show was on television. Oprah said this, and you can see this on Google. A random Google search will show you video clips from her show where she would debate Christians. She said, "I am a Christian who believes that there are certainly many more paths to God other than Christianity. What is she saying? "You get salvation and you get salvation and you set salvation!" Come on, that is way worth more than a pity laugh right there. That one I worked on. So, anyway, I do a terrible Oprah impersonation.

But you've also heard this: "All roads lead to heaven. There are so many roads out there and it doesn't matter..." I had somebody tell me this week, "It doesn't matter what you believe because we all end up in the same place. All roads lead to heaven."

Willie Nelson said this: "I believe all roads lead to the same place. We're taking different ways to get there, but we all end up in the same place. It's kind of like Kinky Friedman's statement: 'May the God of your choice bless you.' That's the main thoughts I have about life."

Young people, listen to me clearly. The reason I put this up here is I want this to be a reminder. This is why you don't smoke weed. And pay your taxes. These are the two things I want you to know. He has more thoughts than that. All paths lead to God. All roads lead to heaven. I sometimes think, *Well, certainly at Woodland Hills Family Church...* We've talked about this so much and we did a message last month called *Unsettled*. You don't have to live with an unsettled faith. If your bringing your doubts and your questions here, we welcome that at this church, but we don't think you need to stay in the place of doubt. You can be settled on what you believe.

We always want to be a church where it's safe for you to ask questions and wrestle with that, but we want you to know what you should be settled on. It's kind of a sacred echo in our church right now as we look around at culture and look around at the news. You talk to Christians who have been in church their whole life and it seems that we're broadening the scope of what Jesus taught. Then we say, "Well, you know, I know Jesus taught this, but he really meant this." "I know the Bible teaches this and says this clearly, but really this is how it could be interpreted." We're taking a narrow road and we're making it broad.

According to a survey over ten years ago, from Pew Forum, *70% of all Americans believe that many religions can lead to eternal life, including 65% of self-identifying Christians. 56% of all evangelical Christians believe that there are many paths other than faith in Christ, to God and eternal life.*

**Exclusivity of Christ** – In John 14: 6, Jesus says this clearly. ***“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*** In theological terms, we call this the exclusivity of Christ. The word *exclusivity* comes with a lot of negative tones today because our culture loves to use the word *inclusivism*, the idea of exclusivism should not be anywhere in the church. But, when Jesus taught, “I am the way, the truth, and the life,” he was saying and teaching us about the exclusivity of Christ that there is only one way to the Father but, catch this, all are invited. All... everyone... It’s open to all. You can have a relationship through his Son Jesus. You just don’t get to choose it on your terms. You don’t get to say, “I did this, I stopped doing this, I’m going to start doing this, and as I get all my stuff together here and as I start doing all these great works, then I’m going to have a relationship with God.” Jesus says, “It comes through me.” The exclusivity of Christ.

In John 8: 24, Jesus said, ***“I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he (I am the Christ), you will indeed die in your sins.”*** At Woodland Hills, we believe and have for 16 years, and the elders will never sit around a table at Cracker Barrel for our elders meeting discussing whether or not we still believe Jesus is the only way. It’s nothing we bring up from meeting to meeting to figure out if we’re settled on this belief that Jesus is the only way to the Father. But I will tell you believing that and bolding proclaiming that are two different things. I just want to let you know I understand. It is a challenge to proclaim the exclusivity of Christ in our day and to share that. That’s because if you say Jesus is the only way and you exclude all of these other paths and all of these other roads, then you’re being narrow minded, you’re being closed minded. You may even get called names today such as bigot or... I could go into a lot of other names, but I’m not going to, but you know where I’m going. “You can’t be that closed minded.”

When we declare that Jesus is the only way, proclaiming that to friends and family, and when we’re asked on the spot, it can be challenging. I want to use this illustration... I prayed through it this week because I know it can ruffle feathers, but it’s the illustration of a man I deeply respect. His name is Tim Keller. He’s written great books, he’s a great speaker, he’s a deep intellectual thinker, and he’s got a great mind. He explains the scripture so well. He was sharing the gospel in an interview. What you’re going to read here on the screen are words from a transcript from this interview where he’s presenting the gospel to a British journalist named Martin Bashir.

Tim Keller gets asked this question after he presents the gospel: “So where does that leave the millions of Muslims, Sikhs, and Jews in this belief that you have that Jesus is the only way?” I pieced some of this together through a transcript, trying to do... editing can be very challenging and understand these are spoken words, not written words. Tim Keller would never write words to this... But he’s being asked, “What about all of those who do not place faith in Jesus?”

Here’s his answer, in part, not in whole: “If they die and they’ve never, if they don’t have Jesus Christ, I don’t know. People in other religions, unless they find Christ, I don’t know any other way, but I also get

information on a need-to-know bases, so if there's some trap door or something like that, I haven't been told about it."

When you read that you're like, *I don't even know what was said in all that*. The reason I don't mind sharing that is because immediately Tim Keller knew this was not good and this is why I respect the man so much. He immediately made this right.

Why am I sharing that this morning? Those who can speak in theological terms and know the scripture so well when pressed for an answer on the exclusivity of Christ, can stumble. That's what we're talking about today. This is a challenging, challenging doctrine to share and to boldly proclaim. He knew immediately this was mistaken, misleading, and unhealthy.

So now let me share with you what he wrote and this is crystal clear, coming out of that interview. *"I believe there is only one way to God and that is through conscious faith in Jesus Christ and his work. I've always been happy to say that loud and clear (when I was being recorded and when I was not) as well as happy to say it to you here and now."*

This is a man with what you would call resolve. He has call and resolve.

*"I have never believed otherwise since I became a Christian or a minister. The reason I freely confessed my mistake that very night was because I could tell that I hadn't communicated the conviction of my mind and my heart."*

For that I am grateful. Believing in the exclusivity of Christ and proclaiming it. That's what we're talking about today. So, people say all paths lead to God and all roads lead to heaven. Jesus is going to declare that for us in Matthew 7, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. I consider this the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is going to declare for us that there are only two roads in life. There are not a lot of roads. There is a broad road and a narrow road. One of these roads feels right. It's inclusive; we're loving and we're kind. You get this sometimes with artists on stage or entertainers. They'll sometimes say, "The most important thing is to just love." So, it feels right, the road that many are on, but there's only one road that is right. This is what Jesus is going to declare for us. Jesus is going to declare for us one road leads to death and one road leads to life.

We read this in Matthew 7. **13** *"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.* There are a lot going this way. Isn't this part of the problem with "all paths lead to God"? There are so many religions out there; too many to count. Not only too many to count, but they all seem to have so many similarities. If you look at this and this and this one and they have this in common. And then you add to that sincerity. Have you ever heard anyone say, "It doesn't matter what you believe, just be sincere"? I proclaim to you today you can be sincerely wrong. You can have this deep-seated belief that whatever you do and however you live and however you choose and whatever your path is in life, you'll ultimately end up in heaven. Jesus is saying, "No, this road leads to destruction. For there are many ways that seem right to a man, but in the end, lead to death."

**Pluralism** – To give you more theological terms, the idea we are talking about today is pluralism, that all religions, worldviews, paths, whatever roads you put in there, are true and valid and who are you to say otherwise. It's not me. I declare for you today the words of Jesus; what he said about himself. Maybe you've seen pluralism. There aren't many of them in Branson, but you'll see this bumper sticker around. This is a bumper sticker promoting pluralism. It says "COEXIST," promoting pluralism, multiple religions coexisting in society, but just saying all of these are true and valid whatever you choose to believe.

**Universalism** – Coming right behind pluralism, you have this idea of universalism that all will eventually be saved. I know pastors who hold to this belief. I always question them. Then what are you preaching today. The finished work of Christ on the cross for men and women whereby they shall be saved. It's appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment. But it's like all paths lead to heaven, all roads lead to God and whatever you choose, so long as it's working for you, don't worry about it because in the end we all end up in the same place?

Jesus says this, ***14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.***

We know something about narrow roads in the Ozarks, don't we? I believe this is what's happening and we're seeing it in the church. I don't think it's new, but I just feel it's escalating that this is coming at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus has taught all this truth and you can either go the way of the pharisees, that path, that road is broad. "Or, you can take what I'm saying... It's the same thing about building your house upon the rock. You can take everything I just said and build your life upon that and then when the rain comes, and the floods come, and the wind starts blowing and it beats against your house, if you're built upon the rock, you're going to stay strong. But when the rain comes, and the floods come, and the wind beats against the house and you're built upon sand – what the pharisees are teaching – you're going to experience a great crash." We talked about this last month. Jesus is saying, "You can choose, you get to choose where you build your house." It's the same conditions hitting both people, they just have different foundations. Jesus is saying, "This road leads to life."

My daughter right now... I think she's in this service. She's a permit driver. She got her permit in August. They give you these big stickers that say, "Permit Driver." They give you one to put in the back window of each car. I can't do it. I'm not a real big sticker guy on cars, but I keep them in the glove box. She hates it when something goes wrong and I just pull it out. "Hey, hey everybody, look right there." She's mad at me right now. I'll give you twenty bucks, sis. I used to give my kids five bucks when I used them as an illustration, now it's twenty. She's a great driver and I'm more relaxed now.

I like to be in my older car that still has that parking break in the middle. I hate the new cars. The new cars have that little button over there on the left-hand side of the steering wheel. I like to be able to see something coming and grab that break handle. She's doing great though, but it's like my mom said when I was learning how to drive, "Ted, I'm not worried about you; it's the other idiots." That's quoting Bonnie Cunningham, not me. I would never call anybody and idiot, okay? Moron is the term I use.

We were at Starbucks in Downtown. I'm sorry, that's one of the worst intersections. It's just congested, and they put a lot into a small space. I don't even think the lane between the bead shop and Starbucks

is big enough for two cars. When you're teaching a new driver, you have to teach them drive-thrus and parking and all of this. We're doing good. This is a couple of months in. I got my drink. I was so excited. I got a tall, flat, white. I'm relaxed. We pull up and no one is coming from Downtown or from The Landing, so those two stop signs are okay; it's a four way stop. I see a guy coming and he looks up to now good. I have my eye on him. One thing you have to teach a permit driver is you have to pay attention to other people. You can't just commit to something and then go, acting like everybody else is going to be following the laws and the rules. It doesn't work that way. That's why we call them names. They have to know they're wrong.

They other day, she honked at somebody for doing something wrong. It was actually right here. It was probably one of you coming into church here and didn't do it right. I told her, "You're not a good enough driver yet to be criticizing other people's driving. Leave that for your pastor dad." We pull up to the stop sign and we're at a dead stop. I'm teaching the four way stop, which means it's your turn to go; there's no one else here. But this guy creeps in. He ain't to a stop yet.

I can't explain it. I'm not a yeller; only really up here on the stage. I don't yell at home. I don't scream at my kids, but I'm in the car, relaxed and calm as can be. She commits to the left turn to go down to The Landing and she's fully into the turn. This guy decides he's going to gun it. The direct impact is going to be my door. I went from holding a cup of coffee and all relaxed to, "STOP!!" I was like, *Where did that just come from?* I love new drivers. When you yell at them like that, they take their hands off the wheel and throw them up. No, no, you keep your hands on the wheel, foot on the gas or the brake. I'm over there grabbing the wheel. Is that because I hate my daughter? That's because I love my daughter. I'm screaming at her, "STOP!!" Does anybody remember a parent yelling at you when you were learning to drive?

Some of you... And Mom and Dad, this is what you're supposed to do in your child's life, constantly. Don't take the illustration to far and scream at them. But when they are on the wrong road, we never stop praying for them. We never stop pleading to our Father in heaven for our children. I just want to say this to some young people right now. You have a mom and dad who may be pleading with you because you're on the wrong road. Their coming at you isn't... It may feel like their trying to control you, but I'm telling you it's because they love you. They love you and they want the best for you. They want you to walk with Jesus, your Savior. And when they see someone coming at you and they see you headed toward death and destruction, they're screaming STOP!!

A year or two ago at the Family Kamp, I had a lady say to me, "Don't you think all of us parents are on the same crazy bus. We're on a crazy bus. We're all heading off a cliff with the way we're parenting our kids, letting them have unlimited technology time and making them the center of the home and doing whatever they want, putting our marriage on the back burner. Ted, when is somebody going to get up in the bus and scream, 'STOP THE BUS! WE'RE HEADED FOR DESTRUCTION!'"

To those of you right now in here... and I'm asking that the Holy Spirit is calling many by name right now that are on the wrong road. You have people and folks from this church right now that are praying for you. They're pleading with you to get on the narrow road. I think we say today it's "Jesus said this, but boy I think he meant this." Jesus said this, and he meant this.

For you and I, how do we share the exclusivity of Christ? Please don't here that I'm telling you to go stand on the courthouse steps with picket signs and start screaming at people. That's not the point of this. The point of this is that moms and dads and grandmas and grandpas would never stop praying and pleading for the lives of our children and grandchildren to get on the right road, to get off the wrong road. Here's a video to kind of sear this into our hearts and minds this morning. [video clip from Planes, Trains, and Automobiles].

How many of you have in your mind right now the person who told you that you were going the wrong way, and they were the one that led you to Christ. You can raise your hand. You know who that person was. For many of you I pray that today would be a day that you slam on the brakes. Instead of "I'm going to choose to live however I want, do whatever I want," I pray that today would be the day of your salvation, first and foremost, that you would say, "I'm on the wrong road, I'm on the broad road, I'm on a road that I've wanted to define my way to the Father, but today, I'm going with Jesus because he's the way, the truth, and the life."

Some of you say, "**I'm too far down the wrong road.**" It doesn't matter where you are on the wrong road. Slam on the brakes. You're going the wrong way. You're on the wrong road and you need to get on the right road, the narrow road. According to Acts, salvation is found in no one else but Jesus. For there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. Jesus is the only path to life. All other paths lead to death.

Some of you are like, "Well, I've been in church my whole life," and you're using church attendance and saying, "I know I'm in because I've been coming for so long." That's your broad road.

"You should have seen me ten years ago. I was a mess. I was an addict and hadn't been to church for a long time. I cleaned up my act." That's your broad road if you're counting on that for salvation.

"I give here. Isn't that what it takes to get on the narrow road?" Jesus places us on the narrow road. When we choose and place faith in Jesus... For it's by grace you've been saved through faith; its not of works so that no man can boast about it. It's not salvation by works, salvation by addition, salvation by subtraction. It's salvation by Jesus, that you would choose that.

I always love to use this illustration. I probably used it two or three times at our church. You see this at airports. When you go to an airport and you get ready to get on a plane, there are two lanes on the way into the gate. There is Priority Access, the successful people. They've got a logo and a red carpet. They tell them, "Zones one through four board on the left."

All you people who haven't done a whole lot with your life, you get no logo; you're general boarding. I love this moment in airports when someone who travels once every ten years shows up and they don't look at all the numbers. They are actually Zone 8. I don't even look at people in Zone 8. That's a joke; go with that. But they don't know and they get in the priority access line even after all Zones 1 through 4 boarded. Zone 8 is over in the general boarding. I love when the gate agent will walk over and stop them. Here's the guy getting ready to get on the plane... And they make this guy do the walk of shame.

He's got to walk off the dirty red carpet, back around this sign and be reminded he's just a nobody...  
General Boarding.

How many of you have been on a plane lately and you've gone down the general boarding? Sorry. I wish you greater success in life. I'm convinced though there are so many Christians that believe this is it on the path to heaven; there are two lanes. There aren't two lanes. There's one lane and his name is Jesus. There isn't a lane for superhero, cape-wearing Christians... and then ordinary people. No. You have the exact same access to the Father through Jesus that Billy Graham had. The exact same. No different. Think of the most famous Christian you can think of. *Famous Christian* doesn't even sound right, does it? But think of it. "Oh, boy, he knows the Bible and he led many people to the Lord, did crusades, he's definitely on the red carpet, Zone 1." You have the exact same access to your Father in heaven through Jesus. Not through a path that you've designed, and you've created, and you've chosen, and you've established and "Hey, I'm just going to live this way and in the end it will all work out." It comes through no other name, but the name of Jesus Christ.

That Irish lady we met in Copenhagen last year, our family still thinks a lot about this lady because she was in the Irish Pub in Copenhagen. I decided to take my family to it because we like pubs. It was the only thing open and we wanted lunch. It was lunch hour and she had been in there for quite some time, several Corona beers in front of her. She was listening to our family. Our family and this woman were the only ones in the restaurant. She came over with four Corona beers and offered them to our family.

I had to tell her, "Hey, we really appreciated it, but I don't drink beer and neither does my 11 year old, but we appreciate the offer."

She went back and put them on her table and then she came back over. It was a great ministry moment for our family because this lady needed help. She had just divorced her husband, her mom had just died, and she had promised her mom forever that they were going to take this trip through Europe and never had a chance to, so she was wearing her mom's coat through Europe. At the end of our time talking to her... Amy was the one really witnessing to her. She was just sharing with her, "You know you have a great purpose in life." She just couldn't get over the brokenness and the hurt, but she was open. The name of Jesus... Just saying the name of Jesus.... I love dropping the name of Jesus into conversations. She was intoxicated and just wouldn't stop. As soon as the name of Jesus was mentioned, she stopped.

I've told you I've seen pastors do this. Demon possessed people walking into the church and a pastor saying... This was in Chattanooga, Tennessee. A woman walks down and stands next to the pastor. He says to her, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, shut your mouth," and she shut up. I always remind husband that is not at all the application of this story. But I watched the name of Jesus and I watched the Holy Spirit at work in her life. And that's what the name of Jesus does.

I asked the Irish lady, "Where does your journey take you next?" She said, "I'm going to Amsterdam."

I said, "Our family was just in Amsterdam."

She handed me her journal and I wrote down Hillsong Amsterdam. I said, "Would you go visit them when you get there?"

She said, "Are they Lutheran?"

I said, "No, they're not Lutheran."

She said, "Are they Catholic?"

I said, "No, they're not Catholic. Ma'am, you're only going to hear one name declared at this church and it's the name of Jesus and it's the name that's above all names. And it's the only name whereby man is saved."

Many of you need to hear that today. But for many in here, I know, and you can call this in Branson, Missouri, I'm preaching to the choir. But for many of us, we have to stay on track with the theology we're talking about today and the exclusivity of Christ. We have to know and be settled on this belief. But not just settled on it; we need to be ready to give an answer. You're like, "So when I'm asked what I think about Muslims, Jews, Sikhs. Where do they stand with all of this?" You can simply again lean on the name and the words of Jesus. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me, period."

This week I loved being with you at the RV Park. Treasure Lake asked me to come and do comedy. I've never done comedy in an RV Park and so I said, "Let's do it." It was a great time. I've still been thinking a lot... A lot of the folks there ministered to me. One lady came up to me. I hope she's in here right now. I could tell she wasn't really tracking with a lot of the stuff I was saying, and I tend to zero in on that person in the middle of the talk.

She came up to me afterwards and hugged me and said, "It doesn't matter what we believe, right? We can completely disagree on all this because we're all going to the same place." I just had this moment. You know when you hear this or any sort of version of this... There were other people there to talk to; there were boxes of donuts to get to, but it's in those moments right there it's easy to give a quick answer and walk away, but I'm just going to ask that you, the next time you're in that moment, would not rush to the next conversation or the next person, but pause and minister right there. I could have kept talking... I hope my new friend is in here. I invited her today. But I just want you to know Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through me." Those are his words, not mine. And your path that you've chosen is not the way. The way is Jesus. And all God's people said... Amen

Father, in the name of Jesus Christ, we pray to you, thanking you that we can have a bold relationship with you, that we can approach you at any moment because Jesus is our mediator, our intercessor; he goes before us on our behalf. We're declared righteous when we place faith in Jesus, declared righteous because of what Jesus did on the cross for us, not because of what we are able to achieve or do to earn or to keep salvation. You have made it clear that it's by faith alone in Christ alone and so today, we're grateful for the relationship we have.

For those who are on the wrong road today, I pray that they would repent of their sins, that they would slam on the brakes of their life and get onto the right road. I pray that they would meet with someone on our prayer team.

Before we say amen, if that's you and you've never placed faith in Jesus, I pray that right now, in this moment, you would just confess that you've been the boss of your life on a road that you have created, on a path that you think is the way. Confess that before your Father in heaven and cry out to the name of Jesus. For if you will confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus has been raised from the dead, you will be saved.

We pray all of this in the authority of the name of Jesus and through the power of the blood of Jesus. And everyone agreed and said... Amen.