

The Farewell Discourse of Jesus

A Study of John 14:1-27

The words of John 14 were spoken while Jesus and His twelve Disciples were still reclining around the table at the Lord's Supper. Several things had occurred that kept the Disciples in a troubled state of mind. Jesus had just announced that one of their group would betray Him. Further, Jesus told them that He was going away, and they could not go along.

At that point Jesus spoke tenderly to the Disciples and said, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me." Jesus had just told His Disciples that where He was going they could not follow Him at that time, but they would follow Him afterwards (John 13:36). The Disciples finally seemed to sense that Jesus would be separated from them, and they would be left alone in the hostile world. But then Jesus made some encouraging promises.

1. The Promise of a Prepared Place (14:1-3)

The fourteenth chapter of John has been called the most comforting chapter in the Bible. One of the reasons for that conclusion is the fact that Jesus promised a home in Heaven for those who are His true disciples. In spite of what scoffers might say, Heaven is a real place.

Jesus set the record straight when He said, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also" (verses 1-3).

The term "my Father's house" (verse 2a) is a reference to the home in Heaven which is being made ready for those who embrace Jesus as Savior. There is something very comforting in the thought that Heaven is the "Father's house."

The mansions (verse 2) are not a reference to huge palatial buildings in Heaven. The word speaks of cozy resting places—"dwelling places"—in the city that is being prepared for God's people.

Death for the Christian is described in the Bible as a "departure," not the end of one's existence (2 Timothy 4:6). Jesus spoke of death as a departure. Departing from one point implies that there will be an arrival at another place. Beyond this present life there are two destinies. The one is eternal life with the God Who made us; the other is eternal damnation in the place of outer darkness.

Jesus brought words of comfort to the Disciples, and His promises apply to us as well. Even in dark hours, we need to stubbornly hold on to trust in God, for when the weak and tired body of this life is laid aside, followers of Jesus have the promise of a new body which will be provided in the eternal world (2 Corinthians 5:1-2).

Life has three phases: the pre-natal, the earthly, and the eternal. When genuine disciples of Christ have lived out their earthly span, they begin the third and final phase of life. When they leave the body of this life, they simply depart here and arrive over there on a far more beautiful shore.

In light of the promise about a prepared place, the words of John 14:27 are especially meaningful: "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

When Jesus says "I will come again" (verse 3), He is promising that (at some future day) He will come down from Heaven, raise His followers from their graves, and escort them to their heavenly home. Just because Jesus is going away does not mean that everything is all over.

Jesus will return again, and gather into His presence those followers of His who by God's grace have been born again. As the gospel song says, believers then will be in the City "*where the streets with gold are laid,*" and "*where the Tree of Life is blooming, and the roses never fade.*" Is there any human being who wants to miss it? Truly we can feel the breath of God as we read those words.

2. The Promise of a Way to Heaven (14:4-14)

Jesus introduced this section by saying (in essence) to His Disciples, "You know where I am going, and you know the way." Christians should be glad that Thomas was present, and that he asked the question recorded in verse 5: "Lord, we know not whither thou goest, and how can we know the way?" The response which Jesus gave to that question is the key verse of this passage. In verse 6, Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

The *life* which Jesus promises is for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Eternal life does not come from praying to Buddha, or making a pilgrimage to Mecca, or in honoring the gods of the Athenians. In Acts 4:12, the Apostle Peter was preaching the Gospel of Christ at Pentecost, and declared that "there is [no] other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved."

Jesus is the Way; everything else is a dead-end street. Jesus is the truth; everything else is a lie (Buddha, Vishnu, and Allah are all imaginary gods). Jesus is the life; everything else is the way of death.

People have done almost anything in an attempt to gain Heaven. They have brought gifts to witch doctors, paid money to priests, cooked for church suppers, sung in the choir, and so forth. None of those activities guarantees entrance to Heaven. Jesus told the Disciples plainly that "no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (verse 6b).

Christianity is an exclusive religion. It rules out the possibility of salvation by a means other than embracing the work of Jesus Christ as our Substitute. It is not narrow-mindedness to claim that Jesus is the only Mediator between sinful human beings and a holy God. Princeton Theological Seminary professor Dale Bruner said, "True—Christ is the exclusive way to God, but remember that Christ is also inclusive (He includes everybody) because all are invited."

Jesus is the door, the ladder, the road by which human beings can become rightly related to God. Our eternal destiny will be determined by the decision we make about a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verse 10 Jesus explained that there is a mystical union between Him and the Father. In essence, Jesus said, "He is in Me and I am in Him." The doctrine of the Holy Trinity is too deep for our finite minds to fully comprehend. We simply accept it by faith.

In verse 11 Jesus names His “works” as testimonies that He and the Father are one. We observe the mighty miracles of Jesus, and in them we see the *power* of God. We look at His sinless life, and see the *holiness* of God. We notice His compassionate concern for people, and see the *love* of God. Thus the deeds of Jesus are clear evidences that He and the Father “are one.”

Jesus had announced that He would be going away, but He made two promises to strengthen His Disciples as they set out to do His work. First, they would do greater works—greater even than He had done (verse 12). Second, prayers that were offered in His name would be answered with a response (verses 13-14).

Jesus was preparing the Disciples for His departure, and He was saying that He expected those who follow Him down through the years to continue His work, and to do even greater things!

The earthly ministry of Jesus was limited in time and space. Jesus ministered on earth for a bit more than three years, and never traveled outside the boundaries of Palestine. He had perhaps five hundred followers by the time of His crucifixion. The works of Jesus were local, not worldwide.

By way of contrast, the writer of the Book of Acts joyfully reports that three thousand souls were added to the early disciples on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). The Apostle Paul rejoiced that the Gospel was preached “from Jerusalem and round about unto Illyricum” (Romans 15:19). The conversion of thousands through the ministry of the Apostles eventually overturned the paganism of the Roman Empire! And today, each Sunday, thousands of Christian ministers, on all the inhabited continents, stand before their congregations and proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ. These are examples of greater works done by the Holy Spirit through faithful Christian believers.

Another concept related to the statement in verse 12 is that the miracles performed by Jesus during His earthly ministry were primarily temporary in nature, not permanent. Even Lazarus, who was raised from the dead, later died again. The raising of Lazarus was really no favor to Lazarus. (How would you like to face death twice?) Jesus performed that miracle for the express purpose of establishing His claim to deity. Jesus’ works were temporary, not permanent.

The “greater works” that Jesus talked about generally involve miracles that bring permanent change. When the Gospel is preached and people are regenerated, something happens that lasts on into eternity! Eyes are opened and can see the invisible! Newness of life leads to an eternity with God! When God works in human hearts to produce righteousness, He is doing something greater than is done in any physical miracle.

Jesus raised the dead from a tomb; He stilled the waves and quieted the storm; He multiplied food and opened eyes that were blind. These were great miracles. But the eyes of Bartimaeus (who received sight) were later closed in death. Lame men were enabled to walk, but the same feet were later paralyzed in death. Calming the sea was remarkable, but not as important as stilling the tempest which sometimes rages in the hearts of anxious human beings. Giving sight to a blind man was a marvelous event, but it is much more exciting to see a person who has been bound in sin, come to Christ and have his spiritual eyes opened. Raising the dead is an amazing feat, but it is much more joyous to see a person who had been dead in trespasses and sins—receive eternal life.

Jesus not only promised that “greater works” would be done by those who believe; He also promised special answers to their prayers (verses 13-14). Jesus seems to have given a blank check to believers who pray. He promised that “if you ask anything in My name, I will do it.” The phrase “in Jesus’ name” is not a ritualistic formula to add to the end of prayers, so that we are assured of a favorable response. Rather, prayers will be honored when they are made in an atmosphere of obedience to the Lord’s commandments (verse 15).

Believers are not to take verses 13-14 and build a complete theology of prayer around them. The promise about answered prayers in these verses has some limitations. Just praying “in Jesus’ name” is not a magic phrase that gets results when we pray. Not just any selfish and unworthy prayer will be answered in the way we may want it to be answered.

When disciples of Jesus pray in His name, they will ask only for that which they believe the Lord desires for them; and He will bring those things to pass in a way that is in tune with His purpose for each individual.

C. S. Lewis said that when God answers our prayers with a no, it is not because our prayers have been ignored—but because they have been considered, and refused, for our ultimate good, and for the good of the whole universe.

3. The Promise of the Holy Spirit (14:15-24)

Jesus said that He would not leave His people alone here in this world. He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to dwell within them as a Comforter. The word Comforter speaks of one who advises, exhorts, and comforts.

The promise of Jesus is this: “If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him” (verses 15-17a).

If a person really loves Jesus (verse 15), he will prove that love; not by merely speaking lofty words, but by striving to obey those mandates which He has commanded. The commandments of God are not written in the Bible merely for our consideration, but for our obedience. Our faith in the work of Jesus only becomes a saving faith when it is validated by careful obedience (Hebrews 5:9).

When the Lord says, “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter” (verse 16)—the word *parakletos* in the original Greek literally means “one who is called alongside to help.” A sign in a small repair shop reads: “We mend everything but broken hearts.” The promise in verse 16 assures believers that the Holy Spirit can even mend broken hearts!

Just as Jesus guided and instructed and comforted His Disciples during His earthly ministry, so the Holy Spirit stands by our side and brings help and comfort for the journey through life. It is God’s intent that the Holy Spirit should dwell in our hearts “for ever” (verse 16). Christians do not need to pray for the Holy Spirit to come to a meeting, or to be with us for certain duties. It is more accurate to thank God that He is dwelling within us, and will stay there—unless we choose to blaspheme Him and keep on sinning against Him (Mark 3:29-30).

Verses 21-24 are another reminder that the Lord Jesus expects His followers to keep on obeying His word. It is useless to talk about serving and loving Jesus if there is no desire to obey Him.

4. The Promise of Peace (14:25-27)

Mankind today seems to be lingering in a nervous wait for death. The world is full of cynical people whose hearts are failing them for fear of what lies ahead in the future. One philosopher says that mankind must “tremble bravely” and keep hoping for better things.

Jesus says that the Holy Spirit will teach His followers “all things” and He will “bring to [their] remembrance” those things that He had taught. Then He promised that He would let His peace with us—a peace altogether unlike the peace that the god of this world pretends to give (verses 25-27).

Jesus had taught His Disciples many truths (verse 25). In verse 26, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would continue to teach them, and would bring to their remembrance what He had taught them. In verse 27, Jesus promised a peace that would calm their hearts. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

The word peace refers to the absence of a troubled and anxious feeling. Some might ask, “How can we receive the peace that God gives? How can we find the peace that will enable us to soar above the empty feelings we experience, and the stressful settings in which we live?”

The simple answer is found in Romans 5:1-2, “Therefore, being justified [declared not guilty] by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” When persons are justified by faith in Christ, the old hostilities between them and God are ended.

We conclude with the reminder that Jesus promised His followers mansions in Heaven. Dedicated Christians can claim the promises in John 14, and therefore death is not the dreaded event that some seem to fear.

What is it like for a believer to die?

At one time you were a developing infant in your mother’s womb. Then after a period of gestation, you were born. Imagine someone had spoken to you inside your mother’s body, just before birth—“In a few days you are going to be born. A life of excitement and joy and love beyond anything you have known, awaits you on the other side of birth.”

But you respond, “I don’t want to be born. I like it in here. I’m warm; I’m comfortable; all my needs are being met. I’ve never been born before; I’m afraid to be born and face what might be out there.”

But then you are born, and you discover a wonderful world of color and sound and friends—a mother and father who love you more than could be imagined. And you soon discover that this is so much better than life in the womb.

And the years go by.

You grow up, get married, and have children. Life is good, but very soon you notice your step getting a bit slower, your memory fading, and you realize that you will likely soon die. You might say, "I don't want to die; I never died before. I love my family and friends and work. Why must I leave them and die?"

But then you die, and you discover that the experience is wonderful. It is just like being born. Jesus says to His followers in John 11:25-26: "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" *Those who have chosen to take Jesus as Savior and Lord* will do well to believe this promise and rejoice in it, because Jesus said it!

Jesus promised His followers peace in the midst of a troubled and hostile world. He promised the Holy Spirit to stand by our side and bring help and comfort. Jesus promised that He is the Way to eternal life. And He promised a home in Heaven for those who embrace Him as Savior.

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