

JOHN 14:1-14

BROADER CONTEXT

The gospel of John includes a number of signs – miracles which point to who Jesus is and what he came to do. After each of the signs there is a long sermon where Jesus explains the sign (e.g. chapter 6 – feeding of the 5,000 and the following explanation). However with the final sign (the cross) the pattern is reversed. The discourse/explanation comes first – that is part of what Jesus is doing in the upper room in chapters 14-17.

Jesus is not just giving a theological explanation of the cross in these chapters. He is also preparing the disciples for their role once he is gone – after he has been raised from the dead and returned to his Father. He assures his disciples that they will be better off, not worse off, without his physical presence, as their salvation will have been accomplished, and he will be present with them by his Spirit to fulfil the task he has called them to do.

In these chapters Jesus also draws together some of the key themes of the gospel of John, not least the fact that our only access to knowing the Father is through him. This is something that John has made clear in his prologue (1:1-14), it has been a common theme in Jesus' encounters with the Jewish people throughout the book, and Jesus draws all this together as he applies it to his disciples. In these first 14 verses those themes begin to come out.

THE PASSAGE

It is deeply moving that on the evening before he is about to be arrested, tried and crucified, when he is about to be betrayed by one of his own disciples, when he himself is "deeply troubled" (13:21) and knows that his hour has come (12:23), Jesus turns his attention to comforting his disciples (14:1).

The troubling thoughts the disciples are having at the start of chapter 14 are likely to be confusion rather than grief. They still haven't grasped the enormity of what is about to happen, and are continuing to rebuke Jesus for talk of his death. However Jesus is preparing them for what is about to happen.

Jesus comforts his confused disciples by speaking of the great benefit to them of his going away. They are to trust that it is for their good. He has to go to prepare a place for them in his Father's house. Don't get too distracted by misleading translations of verse 2 (is it a mansion etc). The emphasis is on the security of the disciples in the Father's presence. The truth of verse 3 is that (as D.A. Carson emphasises) it is by Jesus' going that he prepares a place for us – not that he goes and when he gets there he prepares a place, but that as he goes (via the cross) the place is prepared. The disciples have nothing to fear. This trust should be further bolstered by the fact that Jesus promises to return to take his disciples to be with him (in his Father's presence). This is most likely to be a reference to his second coming when he comes to rescue his people finally and fully.

There is confusion though. Thomas still thinks Jesus is talking about a journey they have to make – vocalising a still common view today that to get to God we need to do something rather than simply "trust" (verse 1). Jesus then pulls together all he has taught them in the greatest of the I AM sayings in verse 6. There is not a way to God we need to go, no – Jesus is the way to the Father. The disciples

know the way because they know him. He is the way, because he is the truth (picking up on previous discourses in John such as in 1:8,14) – he truly reveals the true God. He is life (again, this refers back to 1:4, 5:26). If those two things are true, then he is also the way. The Father is not a mystery to the disciples as they have a relationship with Jesus who truly reveals him and is our only way to him.

Philip still has not grasped the importance of what Jesus is claiming, and like many still today demands unmediated contact with the Father. It is hard for him to grasp that a relationship with Jesus means he already has a relationship with God. It is understandable that Jesus is exasperated (verse 9), but it is loving frustration. It is as if Jesus is saying “Philip, you HAVE seen the Father!”, and Jesus then goes on to summarise the gospel of John so far as it relates to the relationship between Jesus and the Father. They dwell in each other (verse 10), not that they are not distinct but that as Jesus acts and speaks the Father acts and speaks. What the disciples have seen and heard has been the actions and words of the Father through Jesus. Jesus calls Philip to believe him on this – and to cast his mind back to all the miracles he has seen e.g. the raising of Lazarus, the feeding of the 5,000, the healing of the sick. They are all things the Old Testament makes clear is God’s work. Jesus has come doing them. Therefore they give evidence that Jesus is revealing the Father. These original miracles of Jesus are still the ones we look back to, to confirm our faith – we do not need any new signs.

Then Jesus gives a great promise to his disciples in verses 12-14. His work will continue even though it comes to a climax in the cross. The disciples themselves will do what Jesus has been doing, and indeed will do “even greater things than these”. It is important to notice why – because Jesus is “going to the Father”. Just as the smallest believer is greater than John the Baptist the works of the disciples once the new covenant has been inaugurated are greater than all the works and miracles prior to the cross. This is true because redemption has been won, the new covenant is established and Jesus is proclaimed to all nations – therefore the way to the Father is revealed in greater clarity and with greater results. Although Jesus won’t be physically present he will be equipping his disciples to do this (verse 13-14) through prayer, to do what he has always done “bring glory to the Father”. It is important to see that great promise in verse 14 in the context of the whole discussion. It is clearly not a blank cheque for our personal desires, but it is a great promise for the glory of God.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

(I realise there are a lot so pick and choose a bit)

What is troubling about the situation of Jesus and the disciples at the end of John 13? See John 12:27-28, 13:1, 13:18-20, 13:36-38.

What command does Jesus give to his disciples as an alternative to being troubled?

What reasons does he give for trust in verses 2-4? Why must Jesus leave his disciples?

How do you understand the phrase “I am going there to prepare a place for you”? What is significant about Jesus’ going? (*see the notes above – it is the going, his death and resurrection that prepares the place, not that he goes and then prepares the place*)

What is certain to happen after Jesus has prepared a place for us? (*He will return and take us there*)

If you knew someone who was struggling with worry about death and the future, what would you encourage them to do?

Does Thomas understand what Jesus has just said? What is he confused about? Is this still a common confusion?

How can Jesus say Thomas knows the way to the Father (verse 6)?

Look up John 1:18. What is Jesus the truth of/about? Look up John 5:24-27 How can it be said that he is the life? If those things are true, then does that help you to understand how he can say that no one comes to the Father except through him?

What does Philip want? In what ways do we (or other people today) want this? How does this show a misunderstanding of who Jesus is?

What does Jesus say about the relationship about him and the Father in verses 9-11? Why do his miracles give proof to his claims?

If someone said they wanted to know God, what would you say to them and why?

What promises does Jesus give his followers in verses 13-14? Why will they do “greater things”? What is their purpose? How will Jesus equip us for this?