

Listen: What did Jesus Say?

Preparing a Place for You

John 14:1-14

Mark Vroegop

¹ “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. ² In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. ⁴ And you know the way to where I am going.” ⁵ Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” ⁶ Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.” ⁸ Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? ¹⁰ Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. ¹¹ Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. ¹² “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it” (John 14:1–14 ESV).

I’ve always found battle-line speeches fascinating and inspiring.

Part of the reason is because I studied rhetoric in college. I’m intrigued by the way human words have the ability to inspire action and bring change. Edward Murrow, a journalist in the United States, said this about Winston Churchill, the Great Britain Prime Minister during World War II: “He mobilized the English language and sent it into battle.”

Churchill’s words inspired and comforted the English people during traumatic and frightening times.

Perhaps you can think of a scene in a movie where an army has lined up for battle across a desolate field, facing a fierce, enemy horde. One of my favorite speeches is from *The Return of the King* in *The Lord of Rings* series. King Aragorn rallies his forces as they approach the Black Gate of Mordor. He rides up and down the grim-faced army line. His speech turns the tide:

I see in your eyes the same fear that would take the heart of me. A day may come when the courage of men fails, when we forsake our friends and break all bonds of fellowship, but it is not this day. An hour of wolves and shattered shields, when the age of men comes crashing down!

But it is not this day! This day we fight! By all that you hold dear on this good earth, I bid you stand, Men of the West!

They march into an epic battle.

Last Words Matter

Final words before a battle are important. But they are also clarifying. The last words of a commander aim to inspire the troops as they face danger. These are the words designed to triumph over the debilitating effects of uncertainty. They are words intended to stoke the flames of courage.

John 14:1-14 is not written in the context of a physical battle, but the words do reflect the need for courage in the face of uncertainty. Remember what has taken place in this upper room.

Our text is set during the last week of Jesus's life. He is sharing a meal with his disciples. Jesus has demonstrated what true humility looks like by washing their feet. He's also identified that there's a betrayer in their midst. And he has told Peter that he would deny Jesus three times before the sun rose.

What's more, Jesus told them "where I am going you cannot come" (John. 13:33).

Jesus is going to leave them. This bombshell news creates all kinds of questions and concerns. And that's why Jesus gives these disciples these last words.

This passage helps us see some of the truths that followers of Jesus cling to as they live in the gap of waiting for Christ's return. These words are not just for the disciples—they are also for you, if you are a follower of Jesus. And if you are not yet a Christian, this will help you understand what it means to become a Christ-follower.

Let's look at three words or concepts that are essential for disciples as they live in the "gap."

1. Assurance (vv. 1-3)

The first concept is connected to what Jesus promises to his disciples in the future. He is leaving them, but his departure has purpose in it. Jesus wants them to know about the divine plan behind what is happening.

One of the reasons that the Bible talks about the future and eternal life is to provide assurance to the followers of Jesus. We may not be able to put all the pieces together right now, but we know the trajectory of God's plan for redemption. And knowing what is going to happen provides a deep level of assurance.

Imagine if the storyline in the Bible ended with uncertainty. Imagine if Revelation said, "And no one knows the future or who will be victorious. The destiny of mankind hangs on a thread that blows in the wind. Choose a side. And pray you choose correctly." Can you imagine?

Thankfully, that's not what the Bible says. It ends with these words:

² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:2-4).

Well, in John 14 Jesus provides the same kind of assurance and hope. Verse one begins with Jesus instructing his disciples to not allow trouble to conquer their belief. The word *troubled* means "to be in distress, disturbed, confused, or distressed." You might think of this word as *fear* or *anxiety*.

It's important for you to know that Jesus is saying that these disciples should not allow trouble to overwhelm or hinder them. The structure of the original language indicates that they are to stop doing what they are already doing. It's hard not to feel troubled or fearful. Sometimes people think that the mere presence of these emotions means that they have failed or sinned. But Jesus was troubled (13:21). Sometimes it would be troubling if you *weren't* troubled!

The command here relates to what disciples are to do in their trouble. Jesus is trying to help them not stay in their troubled condition. And he doesn't want them to be hindered for following his mission because of their trouble. Mark it down: disciples will face trouble. The question is what you do with it.

How considerate it is on the part of Jesus to give them this instruction. He's about to die and be separated from the Father. Yet he cares for the disciples. He wants to give them assurance.

What does Jesus tell his disciples to do in their trouble? Believe! Jesus calls upon these disciples to believe in God and believe in him. The word for *believe* here can also be translated as "trust, to put one's faith in or to rely upon." In the midst of their trouble, disciples of Jesus double-down on the trustworthiness of Jesus.

We're not very far into this text, but I think it's worth noting that here, Jesus prescribes what disciples are to do when they feel troubled. They are to trust. They trust while they are troubled. They believe as they are battling discouragement and anxiety. Faithfulness is not merely the absence of feeling troubled. It's living in the assurance of who Jesus is when your whole world is giving way.

The second assurance relates to the future. John 14:2-3 is a familiar passage. You may have heard it spoken of at a funeral service. Or maybe, if you are into Southern gospel music, you know some songs about mansions on a hilltop. A few things to note here:

- Jesus's departure is advantageous to them. We'll hear this again in John 17, as Jesus prays for his disciples. But here Jesus tells them that he's leaving to prepare for their future. More to come!
- The assurance is connected to the disciples being with Jesus "in the Father's house." Jesus uses this metaphor for the heavenly dwelling place of God. The promise here relates to the fact that there are many rooms in this house. They are going to be with Jesus in the house of the Father.

- Some of you may be familiar with this being called “mansions.” Older Latin translations rendered a Greek word that means “to dwell or to remain” as *mansio*, which led to the English word “mansions.”
- Jesus tells his disciples that the time of separation will not be forever. Jesus is leaving but will “come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also” (v. 3).

The assurance point here is simply that the departure of Jesus is part of a bigger plan that ends in joyful reunification and fellowship with the Father. Where Jesus is going, they will follow. He’s not abandoning them. His departure is part of a bigger, divine plan.

But they have to trust him and believe.

Some of you need to be reminded today that this is the plan. Perhaps this week you’ve thought a lot more about what isn’t right in your life than about what God has promised. Or maybe you are emotionally dependent on circumstances changing in order for you to faithfully follow Jesus. Perhaps you’ve given in to despair this week and have not believed what is true. Or maybe it was just helpful to be in church today in order to consider the unchanging truth that you let slip in your soul this week.

Maybe you are not a Christian, and this text is asking you to consider what you place your hope in when the bottom falls out. What is your life based upon? What is your assurance? What do you trust in?

Christians place their hope in Christ. We live through that assurance. Disciples of Jesus desperately need this hope.

2. Conviction (vv. 3-11)

The second resource that the disciples need is conviction. They must believe in the teaching of Jesus and his exclusive claims. What follows in this section is a core doctrine of Christianity, and it is a teaching that frequently has led to persecution. Let me explain.

In verse 3, Jesus simply tells the disciples that they know the way to where he is going. By now, given Jesus’s teaching and what he has previously said, they should know the path which Jesus is talking about. But this is not clear to them.

Thomas speaks up (v. 5). Here’s a disciple in the biblical account who regularly wrestles with doubt. He says that he doesn’t know where Jesus is going. Therefore, how can he know the way? In Thomas’s mind, if he doesn’t know the location, he can’t know the way. And that’s his mistake. Thomas is so concerned about the place that he misses the person of Jesus. He only heard “I go to prepare a place for you” and apparently he didn’t hear “believe in me.”

That’s why Jesus says “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (v. 6). What a statement! Jesus says that he is both the sufficient and the exclusive means of coming to the Father.

He's sufficient because he is the path. He is the revelation of the Father. And in him is life. Jesus is everything! Thomas á Kempis (1380-1471), the author of *The Imitation of Christ*, explains the message of Jesus like this:

*Follow thou me. I am the way and the truth and the life. Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou must follow; the truth which thou must believe; the life for which thou must hope. I am the inviolable way; the infallible truth, the never-ending life. I am the straightest way; the sovereign truth; life true, life blessed, life uncreated.*¹

Troubled hearts need to be reminded about the conviction of the sufficiency of Jesus. But he's also exclusive—there's no other way to the Father.

This is what has historically created problems for Christians. Our culture supposedly values tolerance. But it doesn't tolerate exclusive claims like "there's no salvation apart from Jesus" (v. 6). This means (and I say this as compassionately as I can) that Jesus is the only one who can grant you forgiveness and reconcile you to God. There are not multiple paths to reconciliation. Islam, Hinduism, Mormonism, and Secular Humanism may share some common tenets or beliefs with Christianity. But Jesus makes a very critical claim: no one comes to the Father except through him.

Why? Because no one else was able to provide a sufficient sacrifice for our sins. No one else was fully God and fully man. No one else died and rose again. You must trust in Christ for the forgiveness of sins because he is the only way. This is why John wrote the gospel of John.

³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (John 20:31).

But Jesus also is the exclusive revelation of the Father. In verses 7-11, Jesus not only tells the disciples that he and Father are one, but he also reaffirms the connection between his authority and the Father's. Everything these disciples need to believe is found in Jesus.

Everything you need to believe is found in Jesus. Disciples of Jesus need to embrace the conviction regarding who Jesus is. In order to share Jesus with others, you need to know who he is. In order to read the Bible correctly, you need to know who Jesus is. Christianity isn't about joining a religion. It's not merely about a set of doctrines, as important as doctrine is. Christianity is based upon a conviction of what you believe about Jesus—about his sufficiency and his exclusivity.

Polycarp (69-155) was the bishop of Smyrna and a disciple of John. At the age of eighty-six, he was arrested and hauled before the city of Proconsul. Under threat of death, he was told to renounce Christ.

¹ D. A. Carson, [*The Gospel according to John*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 492.

Here are his famous words: “Eighty-six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?”²

Disciples of Jesus need conviction.

3. Power (vv. 12-14)

Jesus concludes this section with a promise about how the disciples will continue his mission. He’s leaving them, but he will send the Holy Spirit. The book of Acts records how the gospel spread through the whole known world.

In verse 12, Jesus promises that the disciples will be the recipients of the power. Now, Jesus is not saying that the disciples are going to do more spectacular works than Jesus. They not going to “out miracle” him in what they do. Jesus is promising both a continuation of his ministry and a greater scope than what his ministry involved. That’s why the Holy Spirit came. And that’s why Jesus says this in John 16:

⁷ Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:7–8).

The cross and the resurrection will usher in a new day of grace and multiplication of the church—from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. We share in that mission today. And we go in the power of the Holy Spirit to live out the mission of Jesus.

So, realize that if you are a disciple of Christ, you’ve been given the presence and power of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that grants and empowers our gifts. It’s the Spirit who works mightily through us. It’s the Spirit who guides our words. It’s the Spirit who directs our steps. It’s the Spirit who creates important moments and connections. It’s the Spirit who brings conviction of sin. We need the power of the Holy Spirit upon our lives so that we can fulfill the ministry of Jesus in the world.

Jesus also calls his disciples to embrace the power of prayer. Jesus gives his disciples a sweeping promise:

¹³ Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it (John 14:13–14).

When you hear this verse, do you think it says that everything you ask, Jesus will do? Jesus is not giving you a guarantee that whatever you pray for, you will receive. Rather, you need to read it with a focus on the personal engagement of Jesus. We ask in his name. He does it. Jesus is still intimately involved in the activity of the church and in the life of individuals as we pray.

Disciples need power—both in the Holy Spirit and through prayer.

² <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/study/module/polycarp/>

When you think of what it means to be a disciple, which of these three do you need to embrace more today?

- Assurance: trusting in the promises of God and the person of Jesus
- Conviction: courage to trust in Christ alone and bear reproach
- Power: confidence in prayer or boldness in actions because there's a mission to fulfill

Jesus gave this upper room address to a group of troubled disciples. Yet, these words are written for our help and encouragement as well. They are for any disciple in any age who is attempting to faithfully follow Jesus as we wait for his return.

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