

The Reward of Faith (John 14:1-14)

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When something troubling happens, we naturally respond in one of two ways. We try to ignore the problem and hope it goes away. Or we try to fix the problem and make it go away. Whether the trouble is a leaky sink, a relational conflict, or a physical illness, most of us default to one of those reactions. Let's do a little group confession. How many of you prefer to ignore trouble? How many of you prefer to fix trouble? Sometimes we attempt a bit of both, don't we?

At the end of Jn 13, a small group of Jesus' closest followers are troubled. They've just heard two rather unpleasant announcements. First, Jesus told them he's about to leave. Jn 13:33, "Yet a little while I am with you...Where I am going you cannot come." They had spent the better part of 3 years with the Lord, nourished by his teaching, awestruck by his miracles. They were increasingly convinced he was the long-awaited Messiah who would make right all that was wrong in the world. But if he leaves, game over.

Second, Jesus told them one of their own number would betray him, Judas Iscariot. And when the ready-fire-aim member of the party, Simon Peter, pipes up and says, "I'll never do that, Lord. I'll lay down my life for you!" Jesus answers, "Actually, Peter, before morning dawns, you will deny me not once, not twice, but three times." I'm about to leave and you guys are going to stumble in spectacular fashion.

Imagine the confusion. Imagine the anxiety. To say their hearts were "troubled" feels like an understatement. Jesus perceives the fear flooding their soul. And though his own soul is even more troubled as the hour of his crucifixion draws near, he speaks a word to his disciples that meets them at the very point of their need. V. 1, "Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me."

Ignore your troubles and sing Hakuna matata? Straighten out your loyalties before it's too late? No. Jesus calls them, he commands them, to respond in an altogether different sort of way. He tells them to make a deliberate choice to lean the weight of their life on the Lord. He tells them to trust God.

Don't look for comfort in what you know about your trouble – what's happening, why it's happening, or how long it will last. Take refuge in what you know about me, about who I am, what I've done, and what I'm about to do. The blessing of faith in

Jesus is the theme of the passage. It's why the word "believe" appears 6 times in 15 verses. And though our place in the story of redemption is different, the reasons Jesus gives for why they should believe him instead of being troubled are just as true today.

1) FAITH IN JESUS ENABLES US TO BE WITH GOD

The disciples thought Jesus' departure would be to their disadvantage. To the contrary, Jesus says in v. 2 and v. 3 that he is not abandoning them. He is going away to provide for them, to "prepare a place" for them. What sort of place? A place "in my Father's house," a dwelling place for them with God the Father in heaven.

You could summarize the entire storyline of the Bible as God's pursuit of relationship with his people. Genesis begins with the mountain sanctuary of the Garden of Eden, the people of God in the dwelling place of God, and Revelation ends with the mountain sanctuary of the New Jerusalem, the people of God in the dwelling place of God. Everything in the middle is about our decision to run away and God's faithfulness to bring us back.

So why the wait? Is Jesus still in the middle of the world's biggest remodeling project? Is heaven still under construction? No. The God who created the universe by the word of his power doesn't have supply chain issues. The "going" and the "preparing" are not two separate actions. They're connected. Jesus prepares a dwelling place for us with God by going. By going where? By going to the cross, rising from the grave, and ascending to the right hand of the Father in glory.

None of us are qualified on our own to dwell with God. He's holy. We're not. It's why Adam and Eve exiled from Eden, why the Israelites were exiled from the Promised Land, and why a massive curtain separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple. When the prophet Isaiah saw the dwelling place of God in heaven he didn't say, "That's supercool, God, can I come in?" No, he crumpled to the ground under the weight of God's majesty.

So what did the Father do? Gal 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus takes away the sin that separates us from God, enabling the Father to welcome into heaven all who trust in the atoning work of the Son.



Wayward prodigals become adopted children who can draw near to the Father with confidence!

The disciples thought Jesus leaving meant they would no longer dwell with him. In reality, he left to make a way for them to dwell with him forever. V. 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."

Christian, you do not know all that will befall you between this day and the day the Lord calls you home. You do know this. At the end of your days on earth, whether they be many or few, you will get to be with the Lord. And when Jesus returns, and your spirit is united with a resurrection body like his, you will enjoy eternal life with him in the new heavens and the new earth. It's the salvation rest toward which all history is moving.

1 Cor 2:9, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him." Life with God is the only life that can satisfy your soul. It's what you were made for, my friend. And that relationship is not something you can secure for yourself. You cannot earn your way to heaven. You cannot bring yourself to God. You will never be good enough. But Jesus is.

V. 6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Notice Jesus does not say he knows the way to God or shows us the way to God. No, he IS the way. As the Son of God incarnate, the person of Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and man. There is no other way. There is no other bridge. There is no other means of crossing the great divide our sin creates between us and God. Why not? Because he alone is the truth and the life.

Jesus is the truth in the sense that he is the self-revelation of God. Truth isn't a human construct. It's not determined by what you think, or I think, regardless of our group identity. It doesn't come from within us. It's found outside of us because it's found in God. He is the ultimate standard of truth. Whatever is consistent with his character and way is true. Whatever denies the reality of his character and ways is false. In the Christian worldview, truth isn't a concept or an idea. It's a person and his name is Jesus.

Jesus is also the life. Not because he has life or can show us the path to life, but because he is the source of life, the self-existent God who created all things and

sustains all things. The life we taste in all manner of good gifts in this world is a mere echo, a signpost of the immeasurably greater fullness of joy found in Jesus and the relationship with God he alone makes possible. It's the life we receive through faith in his name.

Jesus shows us what is necessary to dwell with God because he is the truth. Jesus provides all that is necessary for us to dwell with God because he is the life. As such, he is the only way to God. Be honest, friend. How do you evaluate your standing with God? Where do you gain your confidence that he is for you, with you, and one day you will see his face? If you are looking to your performance or other people's evaluation you are not looking to Jesus. Jesus is worthy of our trust because faith in him enables us to be with God.

2) FAITH IN JESUS ENABLES US TO KNOW GOD

Have you ever heard someone say, "I think all the religions in the world are reaching for something or someone that none of us really understand. Maybe God's out there. Maybe he isn't. If he is, I guess we'll find out one day." On one level, the uncertainty sounds reasonable. I mean, if we're just dealing with different people's concepts and ideas about God, why should we privilege any one of them above another? There's a significant problem with that way of thinking, however.

What if we're not just dealing with what random people in random places and random times think about God? What if God has actually made himself known to us? And not in a hidden or subtle way, but in a public and historically verifiable way? That's the essence of Christianity. The Christian faith isn't built on a human concept of God. It's built on God's revelation of himself.

But how can we know what he's like if we can't see him? We have seen him, friend, because he came to earth as a man and lived among us. What does Jesus say in v. 9? "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." To know God the Son is to know God the Father. Is that true because he resembles the Father like my boys resemble me? No. The reason is found in v. 10, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me." Though the Father and the Son are distinct persons, they mutually indwell one another because they share the same divine nature. Where the Son is present, the Father is present and vice versa.



We are not waiting to see God. We have seen him! Men like Philip in v. 8 saw him with their own eyes. But here's the frightening thing. After nearly 3 years of physically looking at him, Philip still didn't see Jesus for who he really is. "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Implying what? That Jesus had yet to reveal the Father to them, when in reality, the divine glory of the Father was literally in front of them.

But Philip didn't see it. He didn't recognize it. Why not? Listen very carefully, friends. Because the great obstacle to knowing God is not (A) A failure on God's part to make himself known, or (B) An inability on our part to perceive him with our physical eyes. The problem for Philip and every man and woman alive today, is our innate spiritual blindness to the glory of God on account of our sinful nature.

The incarnation was necessary but insufficient for us to know God. What else is needed? Jesus must go all the way to the cross and die for sinners like us so that our guilt can be forgiven, our spiritual blindness healed, and we can be filled with the power of the Spirit necessary to see Jesus and delight in Jesus as the decisive revelation of the glory of God. We need more than a divine appearance to know God. We need divine intervention. We need God to replace our stubborn unbelief with the gift of faith, faith that perceives Jesus for who he really is and trust him accordingly.

Faith in Jesus isn't whatever we want it to be. You believe this about Jesus. I believe that about Jesus. Whatever works for you man. No. If you try that, you'll wind up "believing" in someone that looks strangely like yourself! Faith in Jesus is the genuine article to the degree we believe what he has told us about himself and call upon him accordingly.

V. 11, "Believe in me THAT I am in the Father and the Father is in me..." Believe that when I am speaking, the Father is speaking, and when I am working, the Father is working. To know me is to know him. And if you don't hear his words in mine or perceive his works in mine, then you have yet to know me or believe in me for who I really am. Jesus isn't a religious concept we customize. He's the Lord whom we trust and obey because in him, the God with whom we have to do and to whom we will all give an account has made himself known.

3) FAITH IN JESUS ENABLES US TO PARTICIPATE IN THE WORK OF GOD



In v. 12, Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do..." As the Father ordained and accomplished his work through the Son, so also the Father will ordain and accomplish his work through us as his people. The kingdom of God Christ inaugurated, we announce. The victory over sin and death he achieved, we display. Eph 2:10, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them."

If you are willing to trust Jesus and follow Jesus, you arise every morning to the privilege of participating in the very work of God himself. None of your days are pointless. None of your years are aimless. As God spoke through Jesus, he will speak through you. As God cared for people through Jesus, he will care for people through you. He's not working despite you or next to you. He's working through you – in your friends, in your kids, in neighbors, in your siblings. But it will not happen automatically. It's the fruit of sturdy faith in Jesus.

Here's how it works. We naturally devote our time, energy, and resources in suburban America to making our life as comfortable, convenient, and secure as possible. That's our mission. That's our goal. Until we encounter Jesus and realize life isn't found in comfort, convenience, or security. Life is found in him! And when our trust or hope for the future begins to shift from those things to Jesus, we discover a new freedom in serving a new Master, a freedom to spend and be spent for his mission instead of our selfish desires. Those who believe in Jesus do God's work because he sets us free from working for everything else we used to live for!

But there's more. Jesus also says, "and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father." Greater works than Jesus? How is that even possible! The final phrase in v. 12 is the key – "because I am going to the Father," because I am about to die on a cross, rise from the grave, ascend to heaven, and from there pour out my Holy Spirit upon my people in new covenant measure. Our works as believers are greater because we live on this side of his cross work, in the age of the new covenant.

First, they are greater because they display a greater glory. Does the birth of Christ reveal God's power and glory? Absolutely. Does Jesus' public ministry reveal God's power and glory? Absolutely. But nothing reveals God's wisdom, power, and glory more than the cross of Jesus Christ where he defeated the power of sin and death!



And it's that victory, that triumph, that wonder our works hold forth to the world. Because our works are the fruit of his cross work, they display a greater glory.

Second, our works are greater in the sense that they take place on a greater scale. Jesus' ministry up to Jn 14 was confined to a relatively small corner of Palestine. But what's happening today as multitudes of his ambassadors, empowered by the Spirit, proclaim the good news of his death and resurrection to the corners of the earth? Men and women from every tribe and tongue are bowing their knees to Jesus, singing the praises of the Lamb who was slain. The global work of conversion and discipleship Jesus is accomplishing through the church today is greater than all he accomplished during three years of public ministry.

So what are these good works? They are everything the Spirit empowers us to do as followers of Jesus Christ. And in v. 13, Jesus highlights what is arguably the most important and powerful among them. "Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do..." It's the work of prayer. The access to God Christ won for us at the cross gives us incredible privileges, chief among them the ability to call upon the Savior who ever lives to intercede for us.

To pray "in Jesus' name" is to pray in light of who Jesus is and what he's done for us. It's not a magical incantation we tag onto the end of our prayers to ensure their success. "Lord, please give me a new Ferrari. IN JESUS NAME, amen!" No. It means praying in accordance with his will and in submission to his wisdom. It means bringing our requests to God with confidence because he has promised to supply all that is needful for life and godliness. And it means resting content when mercies appear to be delayed or denied, knowing his ways are higher than our ways.

The phrase "in my name" necessarily informs and conditions Jesus' words in vv. 13. But don't miss the main point of the whole. It's so important, in fact, that Jesus repeats himself in v. 14. "If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it." It's a staggering promise. Consider just two implications.

First, the primary way we participate in God's work on this side of the cross is through our prayers. The most important work you will do for Jesus' sake every day is to cry out a thousand times in a thousand ways, "Lord, I can't, but you can. Help, Jesus." Laboring in prayer for your own soul, for your family, for friends who don't know the Lord, for our nation, and the advance of the gospel around the world isn't flashy. It won't garner rounds of applause. But it moves heaven.

Do not minimize, ignore, or downplay the priority of prayer, brothers and sisters. Don't think it secondary to a more public ministry role. Don't think it less effective than talking more or writing more or counseling more or preaching more. If you want to participate in the work of God, pray.

Second, when you pray, pray with boldness. The "whatever" in v. 13 and the "anything" in v. 14 are not spoken by our Lord to send us skittering into a cul-de-sac of questions about unanswered prayer. They are spoken to remind us that we serve a Risen King who is FAITHFUL to hear the prayer of his people and EAGER to answer. Let's not be a people who have not because we ask not. Let's bring great requests to our great God and persevere in asking in season and out of season that we might experience his power to save again and again.

Faith enables us to participate in the work of God. And faith for the work of prayer in particular will grow and take root to the extent the reason for bringing our requests aligns with Jesus' reason for answering our requests – v. 13, "...that the Father may be glorified in the Son."

CONCLUSION

As Jn 14 opens, Jesus is about to depart from his disciple in a physical sense. It's time for them to walk by faith, not by sight. And to strengthen their faith he lays out the precious rewards of faith. Faith in Jesus enables us to be with God. Faith in Jesus enables us to know God. Faith in Jesus enables us to participate in the works of God.

Jesus offers the same blessings to you today, friend, if you are willing to believe in him. If you're experiencing trouble, don't respond by ignoring the problem or trying to fix the problem, trust in Jesus. There is comfort in knowing WHERE God is. He's with us and will lead us home! There is comfort in knowing WHO God is. He's our Faithful Savior, our Matchless King, everything he has revealed himself to be in Jesus! And there is comfort in knowing WHAT God is doing. He's using us, sins and weaknesses included, to accomplish his work to the degree we are willing to call upon his name as dependent children.

We have exceedingly good reasons to believe in Jesus, friends. Let's ask him right now to increase our faith.

