

Home - I am the Way - John 14:1-6 ¹

Before the lesson:

Fellowship question: (Use *one* of these to break the ice, to begin some discussion, and to lead into the study):

- Ask each class member to list three things that make for a “good home.” Jot these on the board one at a time until all qualities have been shared.

Information

John 14 begins and ends with Jesus saying to his disciples, “Do not let your hearts be troubled.” (verses 1, 27) Jesus knows that this is his last week on earth. His disciples do not understand this. Jesus is concerned for them. How will his arrest, crucifixion, death, and burial affect them? He gives them words and images that will provide comfort and challenge for the rest of their lives.

John has a familiar narrative pattern in his gospel: Jesus says something that confuses the disciples, leading Jesus to offer correction or clarification. There are three such stories in John 14. The first story features Thomas (vv. 5-7); the second, Philip (vv. 8-21), the third, Judas (not Iscariot) (vv. 22-26). We will look at each of these stories over the next three lessons.

- Have a class member read John 14:1-6.

Why will the disciples soon be troubled? (Jesus will die; they will be troubled by grief; as followers of Jesus, they may wonder if their own lives are now at risk; they will be troubled by worry and fear, etc.)

“Putting Jesus to death will be the final act of hostility on the part of the world and of Satan... Thus, the troubling of the disciples’ hearts in the face of Jesus’ departure is not mere sentiment but is part of the dualistic struggle between Jesus and the Prince of this world. In this light Jesus’ demand that they have faith in him is more than a request for a vote of confidence: the disciples’ faith conquers the world (1 John 5:4) by uniting them to Jesus who has overcome the world (John 16:33).”²

“Taken against the Jewish background, ‘my Father’s house’ is probably to be understood as heaven... The language that appears in 14:2-3 of going and preparing a place may stem from the typology of the Exodus. In Deu 1:33 God says that He will go before Israel in the way to choose

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2024. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*. The Anchor Bible, Volume 29A (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 624.

for them a place; Deut 1:29 reads: ‘Do not be in dread or afraid of them’ - a command not unlike Jesus’ ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled.’ In this typology Jesus would be going before his disciples into the Promised Land to prepare a place for them.”³

So, there we have it. Jesus says, “Don’t worry. Trust in me, and only me, and you’ll make it to heaven where you’ll get a beautiful mansion.”

Any questions? We can go home now. Lesson done.

Or is it? Some Christians are satisfied with “Faith 101.” For them, salvation is a transaction. Believe the right thing, say the right prayer, then God has to forgive you and take you into heaven. You do your part. God does God’s part. Transaction fulfilled. Salvation is completed.

But there are deeper lessons to be discerned in this text. “Higher education,” spiritually speaking, means “deeper education.” What is below the surface in this text, in John’s Gospel, and in the overall gospel message?

Thomas asked a question. How can we get to heaven? That is the question of transactional evangelism. What are the steps? What is the plan of salvation? What if someone misses a step or doesn’t know about the plan? What if they’ve never heard of Jesus or church? What if they’ve never heard anything from the Bible?

I once had those same questions. When I was a teenager, our youth group visited an institution for mentally handicapped persons. They were in bad shape. Most of them could not communicate, or if they could, what they communicated made no sense. Our group sang some songs and distributed some presents. But I was concerned for these peoples’ salvation. I had memorized Romans 10:9, “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

I asked the institution’s chaplain, “How can you win these people to Christ when they can’t confess with their mouth, “Jesus is Lord”? How can you be sure they understand enough to “believe in their hearts that God has raised Jesus from the dead” so they will be saved?” The chaplain told me I was asking some good questions and that if I kept asking those and other questions in prayer to God, God would give me an answer.

Looking back, I realize that mine were not the best questions. My questions were all about the *what* and the *how*, like Thomas’ questions. The best question is “*Who* can provide God’s salvation?”

³ Brown, 625.

Like the chaplain did not answer my questions, Jesus didn't answer Thomas' questions. Jesus answers the question that Thomas should have asked - *Who will God use to save us from evil?* Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

This is the message that will comfort the troubled disciples. Salvation is not a plan. It is not an entitlement due to heritage. It is not an accumulation of good works. Salvation from troubled times is not a *what* or a *how*, it is a *who*. Who are you going to trust? Who are you going to follow? Who's your model for loving others?

- Pause for questions and reflections.

Salvation is about *being with Jesus*. Jesus is preparing a place for us, a home for us. But again, we get trapped in the *what* and the *how*. Should the word be translated as "many mansions" or "many rooms" or "many resting spots"? Will we know each other? Will Mormons make it in? Will my dog make it in? Lots of mysteries, lots of questions - lots of "not-the-point" speculations. The point is, we will be at home because we will be in God's presence.

We will be in God's presence in eternity. We are in God's presence now. We are experiencing God's salvation now. It's hard to think of that, though. We have to train ourselves to pay attention and to see God at work reconciling the world, today.

"Being where Jesus is is not just a matter of physical proximity - his enemies as well as his friends had that. It is about the basic condition for being truly at home, for love that is mutual, for comprehensive safety: well-founded trust."⁴ Look at the list on the board. Being with Jesus is like that, for now and for eternity.

Who is this home for? How exclusive is this club?

At first reading, it is clear. Jesus is the gate (John 10:9) Jesus is the way. Without faith in Jesus, you don't have the way. It is black and white, in or out, included or excluded.

But, when we read deeper, we are surprised by all the "alls" and every "every."

"The way this exclusive 'no one...except...'" is understood depends largely on how the 'who' question is answered: Who is this 'me' [in 'except through me']? If this is, as the prologue says, the Word through whom "all things" have been created, whose "life" is "the light of all people," and who enlightens "everyone" [1:6-9, 12], then he is already in deep relationship with everyone, and 'no one' is excluded from that. In addition, there are assurances that, through his crucifixion,

⁴ David F. Ford, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 271.

‘I will draw all people to myself’ (12:32). What all this means for their ultimate relationship to God as Father is mostly a mystery. *We have no overview of it, no timetable for it, just glimpses of it from time to time, and these can come through people of all religions and none, and through experiences labeled ‘religious’ or not. Jesus is free to relate to all in both open and hidden ways.*⁵

If Jesus is preparing a place for us - the people who are reading a Bible passage and praying for one another, and serving the world as Christ would us - is Jesus preparing a place for those who have never heard of a Bible, or the gospel, or set foot in a church?

God is love. We believe this. God came into the world to demonstrate that love through Jesus. Possibly the earliest Christian hymn that we have is quoted by Paul in Philippians 2.

- Distribute the handout with song lyrics on one side and Philippians 2 on the other.
- Have a class member read Philippians 2:5-11.

This is one of the many passages that insist on an inclusive love of God. Salvation *is* through Jesus as “the way, the truth, and the life.” All people will eventually bow and confess this.

“In this God-centered, eternal perspective no one comes to the Father without encountering the one sent by the Father to embody the love at the heart of reality and to draw all people into that love. However and whenever that encounter happens for each person, its inside story is a mystery known only to God - and usually, perhaps, only partially understood by the person who has the encounter.”⁶

In the meantime, the time we have before we enter eternity, God is working on us. The church father Augustine said, “He prepares the dwelling places by preparing those who are to dwell in them.”⁷

Transformational Exercise

Jesus is preparing a place for us. Jesus is preparing us for a place. What needs to be prepared within us?

The church has often focused on purity. We need to be more holy and less sinful. We acknowledge that our goodness will not get us into heaven - only God’s grace will do that. But

⁵ Ford, 279f. Author’s emphasis.

⁶ Ford, 280.

⁷ Cited in Brown, 627.

there should be a transformation in the “saved” person’s life. There should be a growth toward godliness.

Personal preparation may also have to do with adjusting our image of God, our image of other people and our image of ourselves.

What kind of changes need to be made in our perspectives? [We move away from the images of God as a terrifying prosecutor and judge. We move more to the image of God as a loving parent. We move away from the image of other people (especially strangers and people not like us) as threats or enemies. We see them as sheep in need of a good shepherd, as orphans in need of a good guardian. We move away from the image of self as an unworthy worm to that of a beloved, if imperfect child.]

This rendition of Psalm 23 has many images that give a fresh perspective when seen through the lens of John 14. God is our kind and protective shepherd. God is our home. Note especially the last stanza. I am no longer a stranger or a guest, but a child at home.

- Play the song.

 My Shepherd Will Supply My Need (feat. Lauren Hofer)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tObpolBQcU>

https://hymnary.org/text/my_shepherd_will_supply_my_need

Close in a prayer something like this: *Gracious God. Thank you for your grace that is too large for us to fathom. Prepare us for your eternal presence. Forgive us when we center our lives around things that are fleeting and relatively unimportant. May we center our lives on you, our home. Amen.*

My Shepherd will supply my need;
Jehovah is his name.
In pastures fresh he makes me feed,
Beside the living stream.
He brings my wandering spirit back,
When I forsake his ways;
And leads me, for his mercy's sake,
In paths of truth and grace.

When I walk through the shades of death,
Thy presence is my stay;
A word of thy supporting breath
Drives all my fears away.
Thy hand, in sight of all my foes,
Does still my table spread;
My cup with blessings overflows;
Thine oil anoints my head.

The sure provisions of my God
Attend me all my days.
O may thy house be my abode,
And all my work be praise!
There would I find a settled rest,
(While others go and come)
No more a stranger or a guest,
But like a child at home.

Philippians 2

5 Let the same mind be in you that was in
Christ Jesus,

6 who, though he existed in the form of
God,

did not regard equality with God
as something to be grasped,

7 but emptied himself,
taking the form of a slave,
assuming human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a human,

8 he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of
death—
even death on a cross.

9 Therefore God exalted him even more
highly

and gave him the name
that is above every other name,

10 so that at the name given to Jesus
every knee should bend,
in heaven and on earth and under the
earth,

11 and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.