

Is our Christian experience enough?

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[0 : 00] Our reading today is John 13, verse 36 through to chapter 14, verse 14. You can find that on page 1086 of the Church Bibles.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus answered him, where I am going, you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterwards. Peter said to him, Lord, why can I not follow you now?

I will lay down my life for you. Jesus answered, will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow till you have denied me three times.

Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. 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?

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. And you know the way to where I am going.

[1 : 07] Thomas said to him, Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Philip said to him, Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us. 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? 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. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

[2 : 14] 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.

Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it.

Why don't I lead us in a prayer as we begin. Dear Lord, thank you that in your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have seen you.

Please, Father, would this morning be a real time of assurance to us that we have everything we need in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The question I want us to think about this morning is, is our Christian experience enough? Is our Christian experience enough? I don't know if you've ever had this conversation.

[3 : 16] I had it many times whilst at university. A friend would say, who's not a Christian, if God would just reveal himself to me, I would believe. If God would just reveal himself to me, I would believe.

We'll do a miracle, see all these things in the New Testament. Why can't God do that now? And of course, we might despair of that question. We might think that the Lord has done everything that he needs to in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

But we might also be left thinking, yeah, I would want that too, actually. Why can't the Lord just reveal himself to me?

Why can't I have a vision or some kind of dream or some kind of charismatic experience? Is my Christian experience enough? Is it enough? Since Azusa Street in the early 20th century, Pentecostalism and its second wave sister, charismaticism, has exploded across the globe.

I was doing a little bit of research on this and was surprised to find that soon, charismaticism will be the dominant denomination on every continent in the world. And it already is in Africa, soon

America, and also soon Latin America.

[4 : 27] Brazil, in fact, is now the largest Pentecostal nation on earth. And certainly, experientially for me at least, I found this to be the case.

I used to work in student ministry, as some of you know. And steadily over the last few years, student ministry has been declining in Bible teaching churches. It used to be the case, 20 or 30 years or so ago, that students, when they came up to university, would make their way to conservative evangelical churches.

But that is no longer the case. Now the norm is that they go to a charismatic church. And one of its main appeals, I think, is its claim to authentic Christian experience and spirituality.

A new outpouring of the Spirit. A return of apostles. Acts from Acts. Miracles and heavenly languages. All of these have held immense appeal, I think, under the suffocation of formulaic religion and maybe Victorian England.

Now, I want to stress that this sermon is not a critique of charismaticism. I have many friends who are definitely wonderful believers who would go to charismatic churches. But rather, I think its growth is symptomatic, isn't it?

[5 : 41] Symptomatic of a deep desire for authentic experience with God. Is my Christian experience enough? And really, I can't blame them.

It's been 2,000 years since Jesus. And with every year that goes and Jesus hasn't returned, at least for me, it can feel somewhat distant, can't it?

I think for us as Bible people, the sense of loss of true Christian experience can feel acute. Reading the Bible, whilst we're told, you know, the classic Sunday school answer, read your Bible, say your prayers.

Well, it can feel a little bit cold, can't it? Sermons, and I won't ask you to comment on this one, well, they can feel dull and a little bit detached and academic. And the fact that we are meant to have our hearts moved towards God, that we're meant to have true religious affections.

Well, when was the last time that we could honestly say that our hearts were moved deeply by our relationship with God? And in those dark nights of the soul, or even just the cold Monday morning, we can find ourselves looking enviously over, can't we?

[6 : 52] At our charismatic brothers and sisters, thinking, why is it that they seem to have such authentic relationship with God? Why is it that they seem to have such joy? Why can't we have those experiences to reassure ourselves that God is real and he is for us?

We find ourselves longing for a euphoric spiritual experience, or as one person that I was reading with this morning, the glowy effect. An encounter with God or witness to a miracle, because our current Christian experience, well, it just feels lacking.

Lacking at best, or at worst, we doubt his existence altogether. Well, my goal this morning is a simple one, it's reassurance.

To reassure us that we have deep spiritual communion with God now, that we have seen him, that we do see him, and that we have deep spiritual experiences.

I want to reassure us this morning that our Christian walk is not lacking. We do not need to look elsewhere. That the disciples would have needed reassurance that they can continue to commune with God and relate to God is certainly true.

[8 : 03] They've spent three years with God himself, Jesus, and have seen his mighty works. They've seen Lazarus raised from the dead. They've seen water turned into wine.

They've daily sat at his feet and heard his teachings. They've eaten with God himself, and now Jesus has told them he's going away. And with it, you can imagine them thinking, my connection with God is going away.

Jesus has told them he is the way to the Father. He is the only way to God. Have a look with me at 14, verse 6. This is, in many ways, the key verse of this section. I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me, but he is now leaving. If no one can come to the Father except through Jesus and he is now leaving, well, where does that leave the disciples?

Their spiritual lifeline is going to leave them on their own. They are going from having God in their midst to being left by themselves with nothing but a promise of his return.

[9 : 04] We can certainly see why the disciples might want more of God to reassure them as Jesus goes away. And this is exactly how our passage starts.

We're actually, we had a lot of verses read for us. We're actually focusing in on 14, verse 8 to 14. So have a look with me at 14, verse 8. Philip, this is upon just hearing that Jesus is the way to the Father, says, Lord, show us the Father and it is enough for us.

Philip, you can hear the anxiety in his voice, can't you? That Jesus is leaving and he asks for just one more experience of the Father, one more spiritual encounter, one more miracle to give him the reassurance he needs to cope with Jesus' leaving.

And here we get Jesus' answer to that request. And this leads me on to my first point. We have already seen the Father. We have already seen the Father.

Verse 9 again. Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen the Father, sorry, whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

[10:21] How can you say, show us the Father? You can hear the sadness in Jesus' voice, can't you? Really, Philip, do you still not realize after all this time and all you've seen, that by seeing me you've seen the Father all along?

How can you still be so blind, Philip? How can you still need more spiritual experiences than you've already had? How can you say this? And Jesus goes on in verse 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.

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. How can Jesus make this claim that if you've seen Jesus, you've seen the Father?

Well, it is because the words of Jesus are the work of the Father. Verse 10. Now, originally when I was preparing this verse and thinking about this, I really didn't understand verse 10.

[11:31] I didn't really understand why we've moved from talking about Jesus' words. Do you see that? Verse 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.

It seems like a bizarre non sequitur. We've gone from talking about Jesus' words. Suddenly we're now talking about the works of the Father. You would think, wouldn't you, that verse 10 should read something like this.

The words that I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me also speaks. But instead we get works.

But that is to misunderstand, I think, how Jesus does the work of the Father. Because it is through the words of Jesus that the Father works.

It's through the words of Jesus that the Father works. And if we think about the things that we've seen in John, that makes sense, I think. In John 5, Jesus spoke and the disabled man walked.

[12:33] In John 6, Jesus prayed and then he fed 5,000 men. But have a look with me at John 11, 40 to 44, to really see that it is at the words of Jesus, at his words, that the Father works.

John 11, verse 40. Jesus said to her, this is Martha, did I not tell you if you believed you would see the glory of God?

So they took away the stone, this is Lazarus' tomb, and Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around that they may believe that you sent me.

When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, Lazarus, come out. The man who had died came out, his hands and his feet bound with linen strips and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, unbind him and let him go. Do we see how this works? God hears Jesus, Jesus speaks, and Lazarus the dead man lives.

[13:48] And notice that Jesus didn't even see Lazarus. Jesus didn't even go into the tomb. Jesus didn't even touch Lazarus. He just calls out and the dead live.

It is the words of Jesus that the Father uses to bring death to life. So Jesus' answer to Philip, Philip is asking Jesus, please show me the Father.

Well, Jesus' answer is, Philip, you've already seen the Father. Because if you've heard my words, you've seen the Father work over and over and over again.

And the same is true for us, might I suggest. We're going to see next week how this is the case, but we have the words of Jesus in our Bibles. Every time you open the Bible, you are seeing the Father. You are seeing Jesus, and therefore you are seeing the Father. 18 months ago, I was speaking to a dear friend of mine. He is the head of graphic design for a very successful charismatic church in Nottingham.

[14:53] I won't name the church. And I remember chatting to him about some of the ministry things that they were working on and that he was working on at the moment. And he told me all about how in the next six months, the whole church, and this was dominating most of his work, was trying to create this big push to recreate Acts from Acts.

That was the big tagline. We want to see Acts from Acts. And what does he mean by that? Well, he's saying we want to return to all the miracles and all the things that we saw in the book of Acts. And he was really excited about this, and he was telling me about all the videos that he was doing and all the cool graphic design stuff that he was doing. But he was also telling me, I don't understand, Benji, why your churches don't do similar things.

I don't understand why you fight us on things like this. Why don't you want to see Acts from Acts? But it made me pause, because what is it that he's saying about his relationship with God by saying we need to return to Acts from Acts?

Well, he's saying that his relationship with God now is deficient, isn't he? He's saying that what he has now isn't enough, that we need to return to Acts from Acts. And for myself, I definitely felt that temptation when I first heard it.

[16:09] But then I realized that for anyone who has the words of Jesus, for anyone that can open their Bible and hear Jesus speak, well, they see the Father every single time. What do you mean, Acts from Acts?

You can see the Father speak now. Or to put it another way, if we want to see the Father, all we have to do is open our Bibles.

So Jesus' answer to Philip's question is that, Philip, you've already seen the Father, because you've heard my words. And this brings me on to my second and final point.

We've already seen the Father, and you even do, we even do, the great work of the Father. Verse 12 to 14, have a look with me.

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'm going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

[17:11] If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. For the longest time, again, these verses felt to me like some weird diversion. We're suddenly moved from reassuring Philip that he's seen the Father in Jesus, and now we're suddenly talking about the works of Jesus and the fact that we get to do them too, even though we don't really understand what great works are at this stage.

But then I realized that Philip, who was nervous and anxious at Jesus leaving, looking for reassurance, well, Philip had asked for something far too small.

Philip had asked for something far too parochial. His desires are far too small, because Jesus promises him something far greater than just seeing the Father.

Jesus' response to Philip's worry of not seeing the Father is to reassure Philip that not only will you see the Father, but you will even do the work that the Father himself does.

In other words, Philip, you're just asking to see the Father. How small? How pathetic? I'm telling you, you will do the very works that the Father does.

[18:21] Verse 12 again. 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.

Now, this term, greater works, it's caused a huge amount of debate, and I'm not going to go into the various different things that it could mean here, but wonderfully, I think John actually defines it for us, and it's the verses on your handout, and I think it's on the slide.

Have a look with me at John 5, and you can look up on the screen, so you don't need to turn to it, and this is what the greater works are. Halfway through verse 20, and greater works than these will he show him so that you may marvel.

For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son.

In other words, the greater works that Jesus is doing, and the greater works that he will give to Philip and those who believe to do, are giving life and judging.

[19:25] And Jesus is saying, Philip, you, and anyone who believes in me, will do the work of life-giving and judging. And that makes sense, right?

Jesus is returning to the Father. He's been giving life and judging, so this work of judging and giving life, which is the work of the Father, well, it's been given to Philip and anyone who believes in

Jesus.

Philip, you ask for far too little. Not only have you seen the Father, you've now been given his work. You asked only to see Philip, but Jesus reveals that Philip and anyone who believes will do far more than just seeing.

Now, I think the best way to illustrate this is to ask yourself, if you're a Christian, what you think is happening every time you share the gospel with a friend, family member, or encourage a Christian brother or sister with it.

What do you think is happening every time you do that? As you share the words of Jesus, the judging and life-giving words of Jesus, you are either bringing someone to eternal life or they are being judged by them.

[20 : 41] But it is not as though that God's words can fail because any time you share the life-giving, judging, and Father-revealing words of Jesus, it will not come back empty.

That is why Jesus can say, verse 13, whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

And I think this has to be the case because we see all throughout John's gospel that Jesus was rejected over and over and over again. Did he fail? No, because he predicted this would happen, predicted that his words would either lead to eternal life or lead to judgment.

So just as we, now believers in Jesus, share his words, we either give life or we bring judgment.

There is no in-between. So Jesus' answer to Philip is that he asks for far too little.

Philip, not only do you see the Father all the time, you will be given the work to do of bringing life to this world and judgment. Philip, you ask for too little.

[21 : 57] To conclude, as I said at the start, we can well imagine why the disciples might need spiritual reassurance. They've been kicked out of the synagogue for following Jesus, they've given up their lives to follow him, and they've been told that Jesus is the only way to the Father, yet Jesus is about to leave them on their own.

You can well understand why they might want some kind of reassurance. You can imagine asking that question yourself. Okay, Jesus, you're going. Can you just give us one more mammoth spiritual experience to reassure us?

Yet Jesus says the mammoth Christian experience they're asking for is not only too small, but they already have it, and much more besides. they ask to see God.

Jesus tells them you'll do the very work of God. I mentioned that my friend before worked for this very impressive and large church, and it was very impressive.

It was growing 20% year on year, and they just built a three million pound facility for their children's work that had things on the wall that you could walk up and touch, and it was meant to be a century experience.

[23 : 08] And we all got to go look around. They saw many converts. They would have baptism services every two weeks, and there'd be at least 30 or 40 people there. And I felt that my Christian experience up until that point was lacking.

Everyone was euphoric. We would have 30 to 40 minutes of singing. People were speaking in tongues. It seemed that God was really there. And I went for six months hoping for some kind of religious experience.

But I did not find it, and it's because I realized that that entirely misses the point. Because every time I've opened my Bible since when I was little and my dad had read it to me, I had seen the Father over and over and over again.

And every time I shared the gospel at CU at school or with my friends at university or encouraged my wife with the message of Jesus, I am doing the work of God, giving life and judging.

For us, we might feel as though God is distant. We might feel that suffering has meant that we question whether he is for us. We might feel that constantly doing our quiet time and saying our prayers and going to church, well, it's just so boring, isn't it?

[24 : 23] It's just so cold. And we might long for that charismatic experience or that glowy feeling. We might long for speaking in tongues and feeling like we've got a connection to God.

We might long for that spiritual dream that predicts the future or we might even long for that we hear him ourselves speaking from the clouds. But Jesus says if you have his words, then you've seen the Father.

Next week, we're going to see exactly how that is the case, but I want to reassure you this morning that if you have the words of Jesus, then you've seen the Father. Father. But I want you to compare those experiences that I just listed to what you get to do as a Christian every single time you read the Bible with your children, share the gospel with your non-Christian family members or at CU or at work.

The words of Jesus bring the dead to life. Why would you want a charismatic experience when you can share the gospel with a colleague and offer them eternal life?

Why would you want to speak in tongues and have a charismatic experience when you can reveal the darling of heaven forever to someone who is lost?

[25 : 42] Why would you want a charismatic experience of meeting God in a dream when you can show Jesus to your children just by opening the Bible with them? And why would you feel the need to hear from God yourself when the Father has spoken to you and has written an entire love letter to you in his word to know you and reveal himself to you?

In other words you cannot get friends a more spiritual experience. You cannot be more spiritual than when you are doing the very great works of the Father than when you are talking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no more spiritual experience than that. And can I say this is such a relief. It's a relief. We don't need to pursue these things.

We don't need to look over at other churches and think they have something that we don't or what is wrong with me or why do I not feel a particular way? We have everything we need in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And can I just say to those who wouldn't call themselves a believer here today it's wonderful that you're here but you are without excuse. Jesus has revealed everything to see God in his words.

[26 : 54] There will be no more revelation. There won't be an answer to the question oh I would believe if God would just show himself. Why won't he show himself? Because he has fully in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And to the Christian if you're a Christian today you have seen God and you see him every time you open his word and not only that you do the works of God every single time you share the gospel.

I would never want to swap that for the cheap thrills of religious experience. We have seen the father and he has given us his precious work to do.

Why don't I lead us in prayer as we close. Dear Lord I thank you that we have seen the father because of your words. Lord please in your great mercy would you give us the boldness to engage in your great work.

Thank you for the almighty privilege it is that you have given the work of bringing life and judgment to this world to us. Please help us not to have jealousy or envy but to trust in the fact that what we have in you is enough more than enough.

[28 : 11] Amen.