

How can we actually know Jesus Christ today?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 February 2022

Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[0 : 00] Today's reading is taken from the book of John, chapter 14, verses 15 to 31, and that can be found on page 1086 of the Church Bibles.

That's John, chapter 14, starting at verse 15. If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.

You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans, I will come to you. Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.

Because I live, you also will live. In that day, you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

[1 : 25] Judas, not Iscariot, said to him, Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world? Jesus answered him, If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me. These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.

Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, I am going away, and I will come to you.

If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe.

[2 : 41] I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.

Rise, let us go from here. Laura, thanks so much indeed for reading. Please do keep John chapter 14 open.

Let me pray for us. Jesus says, The words I say to you, I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

Heavenly Father, we pray to you very much that we have the words of Jesus, and we pray that you would grant us attentive hearts and minds this morning, and we pray that you would do your work amongst us.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, the question at the heart of this passage, I think it's a question that's easy to ask, but a much harder question to answer.

[3 : 51] How can you and I actually know Jesus? Jesus who is physically absent, who has been physically absent for the last 2,000 years, unlike these first disciples, we cannot see him or hear him or touch him.

So how can we actually know him for ourselves today? Now, if you're looking on the Christian faith, that may well be a question that you are wrestling with.

My mother did so for a number of years before she put her trust in Jesus. Some of you will know that. She simply couldn't get her head around the fact that being a Christian means knowing Jesus and having a relationship with him.

After all, we all know, don't we, what it is to know someone. But how can you know someone who lived 2,000 years ago and who you've never seen?

But I guess it's an issue for many of us who are following Jesus as well. Perhaps when talking to others, we feel much more comfortable talking about the fact that we believe in Jesus rather than the fact that we know him or even love him.

[5 : 02] Well, for some of us, there'll be very real issues of doubt. Do I really know Jesus? Can we really know Jesus? Or is it all simply make-believe?

Now, if you've been following this series in John 13 to 17 in what's known as the Upper Room Discourse, here is Jesus with his disciples just a few hours before his arrest. Then you'll know that Jesus is preparing them to live in a world in his absence when they will long to be with him physically but won't be able to be.

I guess it's just the kind of relationship that we have with Jesus. We long to be with him physically but we can't be. And as well, to prepare them to live in a world that is hostile to Jesus, that crucifies Jesus, that doesn't want him as their king.

And again, it's precisely, isn't it, the world that we live in. And therefore, John 13 to 17, Jesus gives his disciples assurance.

We've seen assurance about the future. Look back to chapter 14, verse 2. As Jesus assures his disciples, in my Father's house are many rooms.

[6 : 21] If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? It is the very fact of Jesus leaving to be arrested, to be crucified, dying on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, bearing God's judgments, that means that they and we can be certain of a place in heaven if we are his followers, if we're trusting him.

But also assurance, not only for the future, but for the present, as they and we follow him in his absence. And in today's passage, in verses 15 to 31 of chapter 14, that assurance about the present comes from the fact that we can indeed know Jesus.

How? Well, because of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth, as Jesus calls him. And we're simply going to focus this morning on two aspects of the Spirit's work that we see in this passage.

Firstly, the Spirit of truth and the person of Jesus. The Spirit of truth and the person of Jesus. Look at verses 15 to 17. If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father and he will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him.

[7 : 50] You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. Jesus says he's going to send another helper. The word in the original is the word *paraclete*.

It means someone who will come alongside to help. But more useful, I think, for understanding the role of the Spirit is that very ordinary word, *another*.

If you've read *Alice in Wonderland*, you may well remember that at the Mad Hatter's tea party, Alice makes the point that you can't be offered more tea unless you've drunk some tea already.

In the same way, you can't have another helper unless there's been a helper already. So who was the first helper?

Well, Jesus himself. The point being that the Spirit will effectively be another Jesus. Now that's made clear in a number of ways here.

[8 : 50] Notice the Spirit is a *he* in verse 17. He's not an *it*. He's not a kind of impersonal force or power. He's fully God, the third person of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

A person who is both with us and in us. End of verse 17. And because the Spirit is a person, we either have him or we don't have him.

We can't only have part of him or indeed have more of him than we have already. If someone suggests, therefore, that a Christian needs more of the Spirit or sort of topping up with the Spirit like a sort of spiritual booster jab, and I guess some of us will have come across Christians who believe that, then don't listen to them.

Because of course, that undermines the very assurance that the Lord Jesus is wanting his disciples to have. Not forever seeking more of the Spirit or questioning whether we have enough of the Spirit, but instead rejoicing that we do have the Spirit.

It's even clearer in verse 18 that the Spirit is another Jesus. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.

[10 : 08] Notice what Jesus doesn't say. Have a look at the verse again. Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say, I will not leave you as orphans. The Spirit will come to you. Instead, he says, I

will come to you.

Now, by which I take it he could mean he will come to the disciples after the resurrection. But the language of being an orphan is hardly appropriate, isn't it, to describe simply that period of three days between Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

Surely, much more likely that Jesus is talking about his absence after he is returned to the Father. And yet, to have the Spirit will be to have Jesus because he is another Jesus.

Imagine, for a moment, that you go and visit an elderly aunt for tea and she gets out her best china and to her great distress you break one of the plates.

Don't worry, you say, I'll get another one and true to your word you turn up a few days later with a replacement, a 99p plate from Ikea.

[11:25] Now, I imagine she might not take too kindly to your thoughtfulness. She might say something like, but I wanted another one, exactly the same kind of plate that you broke.

Well, in the same way, the first helper was Jesus and the Spirit is another of exactly the same kind, another helper.

And because the Spirit is another Jesus, it means he'll make the presence of Jesus real in his disciples. Look at verse 20. In that day, you will know that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.

I wonder if you can see how this is the most extraordinary promise. As Jesus defines the relationship between himself and his heavenly Father, notice he is in his Father and yet if we are in Jesus, then he is in us.

Is that not completely mind-blowing? The Spirit, in other words, enables us to enjoy exactly the same kind of relationship with Jesus, of being in Jesus and he being in us, as he has with God the Father.

[12:45] Just think for a moment of the intimacy of the Lord Jesus praying to his heavenly Father in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest just a few hours after this in John 14.

Or again, think throughout the Gospels of his self-conscious awareness of his Father's presence. That is the relationship that everyone who is a follower of Jesus has with him.

because, notice, verse 21, the promise of the Spirit is for whoever has my commandments and keeps them.

You get a similar thing, don't you, in verse 15, if you love me, you'll keep my commandments. And in verse 23, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word and my Father will love him and we will come to him.

Now, I don't want those of us who are followers of Jesus to be unsettled by this. Jesus is not saying that we earn his presence with us by his Spirit through our obedience and love.

[13:54] That, of course, would be to completely turn the teaching of Jesus on its head. Instead, I take it that these verses reflect the fact that once we have become a follower of Jesus, our relationship with him is characterized by trust, love, and obedience.

In other words, it's impossible truly to love Jesus without trusting him and obeying him. It's impossible to truly obey Jesus without loving him and trusting him.

And it's impossible to truly trust him without loving him and obeying him. Now, I guess there may well be one or two of us and actually this begs the question, do I really trust, love, and obey Jesus? And it may reveal the fact that actually you don't know him at all. In which case, do come and chat to me about that afterwards. But let's not miss the point of what Jesus is saying here.

he promises the Spirit, not simply to those apostles who are with him in the upper room, those eleven men, but to all disciples, all those who will follow him.

[15:12] Verse 21 is true of everyone who believes in Jesus, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

If we believe in Jesus Christ, we are loved by the Father, we are loved by Jesus, we know Jesus. Being a Christian, in other words, is not simply about having a set of convictions, but being in the most extraordinary intimate union with God the Father and God the Son because of the work of God the Spirit.

The Spirit of Truth and the person of Jesus. Secondly, the Spirit of Truth and the words of Jesus. Now, we've seen over the last few weeks that this section of the Upper Room Discourse is structured around questions asked by the disciples, and Judas is next up in verse 22.

Judas, not Iscariot, said to him, Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world? It's the understandable question.

[16:29] I put Isaiah chapter 40 verse 5 there on the outline, which is one of many Old Testament passages, showing, if you like, what the expectation would be when God's King, God's Messiah, came to earth.

Isaiah says, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. And of course, it's true that when the Lord Jesus returns at the end of history, it's true that the whole world will see him.

But until then, he doesn't make himself known in the world in some impressive display on the stage of history. Rather, he is seen in the lives of individual Christians, as verse 23, Jesus and his Father make their home in those who love him.

Verse 23, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. When I was a child, we had, when I was at school, we had a visit from the Queen Mother to open, I think it was to open a new building, I can't quite remember, but anyway, it was a wonderful occasion, the whole school was given a lick of paint, we were all inspected to make sure our ties were done up properly, and all that kind of thing.

Everyone gathered in the main assembly hall of the school, the Queen Mother was on the stage for everyone to see, and if I remember, she even spoke to one or two pupils.

[18:05] But imagine how extraordinary it would have been, if rather than simply walking up to those pupils and asking them how are you, and all that kind of stuff, and so on, if she had said, do you know what, I'm going to leave my home in St.

James's palace, and I'm going to come and live with you, it's ridiculous, it's unthinkable, and yet, where does God live?

Where does Jesus live now? Yes, of course, in a very real sense, he lives in his heavenly kingdom, and he does, and yet, in an equally real sense, verse 23, in every follower of Jesus.

It's why when we meet like this on a Sunday morning, we can genuinely say that God is present, that Jesus is present, not because he's present in buildings, whether it's a building like this one, or a fancy church building, but because he lives in his people.

But, but, I wonder if you have spotted the missing link. When you just look back to last week's passage, to Philip's question in verse 8, Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.

[19:31] And Jesus replied, verse 9, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. To see Jesus is to see God the Father, to know Jesus is to know God the Father. Why should Philip know this?

Well, because, verse 10, because he's heard the words of Jesus. Verse 10, 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.

Now, do listen to last week's sermon if you missed it, but the point is, you see, if we're to know Jesus, and therefore if we're to know the Father, we need to hear the words of Jesus, which begs the question how?

How, 2,000 years later, is that possible when Jesus is physically absent, when none of us have ever seen him or heard him?

Well, the answer, verses 25 and 26. these things I've spoken to you while I'm still with you, but the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I've said to you.

[20:45] The Spirit will bring the words of Jesus to the apostles. Notice what I've said, not to the disciples, not to every Christian here, but to the apostles.

because in the first place, this promise in verse 26 is a promise for the apostles who were with Jesus in the upper room rather than to every follower of Jesus.

Just let me explain. Have a look, will you, again at verse 26. You and I were not in that upper room with Jesus and therefore a promise that the Spirit will bring the words of Jesus to our remembrance really doesn't make sense.

And yet, of course, it makes a huge amount of sense if it's addressed simply to the apostles. After all, here in the upper room, so often they seem to get the wrong end of the stick, their questions reveal their ignorance, and yet these are the very men who are going to either write the New Testament or oversee the writing of the New Testament.

they will need the Spirit of Truth to teach them all things and to bring to their remembrance all that Jesus has said to them. Now, I wonder if we can see how massive this is.

[22 : 13] It's clear as we read through the Gospels that Jesus regarded the Old Testament, the first part of the Bible, as the Word of God. God. And now he is saying that the New Testament, the second half of the Bible, will also be the Word of God, because Jesus' words are the words of God the Father.

Now, this is absolutely crucial, because, of course, the way in which our world today rejects Jesus is by rejecting the claims of the New Testament. You know, we'll all have heard people say things like, well, the New Testament misrepresents Jesus, or the writers of the New Testament invented Jesus, that in some way the real Jesus of history, if only we could go back 2,000 years ago, is different from the one we have in the New Testament.

Not at all. The Spirit guarantees the trustworthiness of the New Testament. It's why in verse 26, Jesus says, the Spirit will be sent in my name.

because he will have the full authority of Jesus to act in his place and to teach the apostles. There was an interview I caught last week on the radio in the car with a French government minister, and she was being asked about the Ukraine.

And the interviewer was asking her questions about the French president. What does he think he's achieved? What kind of settlement is he trying to reach? And the minister responded, speaking not her own mind, not this is what I think, this is what I've said, but instead speaking the president's mind, speaking in his name.

[23 : 59] It's just what you'd expect. And it's just the same with the spirit of truth. He speaks and acts in the name of Jesus. Jesus. But notice that as well as guaranteeing the trustworthiness of the New Testament, the spirit also guarantees the sufficiency of the New Testament.

Verse 26 again, have a look at it. He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I've said to you. All. There's no need for anything else.

We don't need more revelations from God, whether it's the Book of Mormon published in 1830 by Joseph Smith or someone who claims that they know the precise date on which the Lord Jesus is going to return.

I wonder if you can see the enormous implications of that. We shouldn't expect further revelations from the spirit. Instead, we can be absolutely confident in the revelation the spirit gave to the apostles that we have in the New Testament.

It is sufficient, we don't need anything else, and it's trustworthy. It's no wonder, is it, that Jesus says what he says in verse 27.

[25 : 21] Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives to you, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

these apostles are not going to be left on their own. They will continue to know Jesus. The spirit will bring the person of Jesus to them, and the spirit will bring the words of Jesus to them.

And we can enjoy that same peace. Indeed, we have that same peace if we have the spirit dwelling in us. We have Jesus dwelling in us. He is just as present with us today as he was with these disciples here in the upper room.

And if we have a Bible, we also have the words of the apostles, which are the very words of Jesus. Now, these are two glorious things to hold on to.

Just like these apostles are about to experience, we live in a world where Jesus is physically absent. now, for some of us, the tensions that produces will be very real indeed.

[26 : 38] We feel alone. Perhaps we're the only Christian in our family, or we're married to someone who isn't a Christian, or we're the only Christian in our friendship group, or in our place of work, or in our classroom, or in our group of friends.

perhaps we long to see him face to face. And just like the apostles, not only do we live with Jesus being absent, but actually we live in a world which is opposed to Jesus, a culture where the Bible is at best assumed to be irrelevant, and at worst assumed to be a threat, a threat to so-called progressive values, where plenty of churches when faced with the choice between going with what the culture says and going with what the Bible says, sadly go with the culture.

I hope we can see what a tragedy that is, because if you turn your back on the Bible, you also turn your back on the Holy Spirit, and if you turn your back on the Spirit, then as we can see from the words of Jesus here, you turn your back on Jesus, and you turn your back on God the Father.

So then this is full of assurance. If we have the Spirit, we have Jesus. If we have the Bible, we have his words.

I take it it should give us great confidence for our guest events coming up in 10 days' time. Yes, there will be interviews, but there will also be a talk. Our guests can hear the very words of Jesus. [28 : 21] And if you're looking in on the Christian faith, why this shows how it is that it's possible to know Jesus today. And I hope it will encourage you to come to know him yourself, and to do so as a matter of urgency.

Now, I'm conscious we haven't really looked at verses 28 to 31. I think they're really a summary of the upper room discourse up to this point, and I'll leave you to look at them on your own later. But for now, let's pray.

And I'll ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever. Heavenly Father, we praise you very much for your spirit dwelling within.

Thank you that he makes Jesus real to us. Thank you for this extraordinary union, we have with you and with the Lord Jesus. And thank you too that in the words of the New Testament, we have your words.

Thank you that we can be confident in what the apostles wrote. And we pray for all of us, Heavenly Father, please would you send us into this week with a deep sense of peace and confidence and joy.

[29 : 42] And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. we were away to us in .