

John 13:36-14:8

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[0:00] Amen. Friends, while you're standing, let me pray for us. Father, would you open our hearts to hear your word this morning.! My house for dinner with my family.

She's a single woman, mid-30s. And this is when my kids were a little bit younger. And I always warn folks when they come over for dinner, I say, listen, just dinner at our place is just madness. There's a gong show.

You know, like, there'll be people who scream at each other. They'll be fighting. There'll be food up the walls. Just like. Anyway, true to form, it was a bit of a debacle dinner.

And at the end of the night, Amy and I, my wife and I walked this woman to the door. And I said, listen, thanks for coming. I hope it wasn't too crazy for you. And she paused at the door and looked me straight in the eye.

And she said, you know, I've always had this fear of dying alone. But now I think it would be quite peaceful. That is a true story.

[1:26] That is a true story. So, it really happened just like that.

She just walked away. She just walked off. Tonight, I'm going to speak about death. And I'm going to speak about what she spoke about. I'm going to talk about the fear of dying, actually. So, let's go.

Let's go. So, if you are new, we're doing this series, John chapters 13 to 17. John chapters 13 to 17. That's our series, this term. The fancy name, the fancy name for this section of John's gospel is the upper room discourse.

The upper room discourse. Okay, what does that mean? It just means this. It means in the gospel story, in this little section, 13 to 17, Jesus is mostly talking. He's not traveling.

He's not doing miracles. He's just talking. He's not doing miracles. He's talking. And in terms of context, it's probably helpful to know that this is the night before Jesus is crucified. So, he's gathered his friends in a room.

[2:30] And he's talking to them. And what's the goal of that conversation? The goal of that conversation, his big goal is he's preparing them for what's coming.

I mean, he's already told them. I mean, he's already told them he's going away. He's going to die. And he won't be with them anymore. Well, not in the same way anyway. And that would have been devastating to hear.

And he's told them that one guy on the team is going to betray them. Another guy on the team is going to pretend he's never met Jesus. And finally, Jesus doesn't say it. But he knows all the folks around that table are going to die terrible deaths because of their faith.

Except one guy, John, who wrote this gospel, who would be exiled to an island prison for the rest of his life. So, into that context, Jesus says in verse 1 of chapter 14, he says, Let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God. Believe also in me. Which is just an outrageous thing to say in that context, isn't it? Let not your hearts be troubled.

[3 : 37] Believe in God. Believe also in me. Christ is saying, I know these are hard realities I've talked about. And it's probably a bit depressing for you. I'm leaving.

You can't trust your colleagues completely. But you can trust me. You can trust me. So, that's verse 1 of chapter 14. So, what's the rest of it about?

The rest of it, well, the rest is Jesus giving his disciples reasons to trust him. And you could argue that's what the rest of these chapters are about. It's reasons to trust him.

Or you could think of it like this. So, you could think over the next few chapters, because of what's coming down the pipeline, Jesus just lays out these treasures before them to sustain them on the journey ahead.

So, I want to talk about some of these treasures this morning, because they're treasures for us as well. So, here we go. The first treasure. The first treasure is the promise of eternal life with Jesus.

[4 : 38] That's what verse 2 is about there. Verse 2. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it was not so, would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you?

Remember, he's preparing them for the hard road ahead when he's not around. It's interesting now, isn't it? Isn't it interesting that he begins this preparation by talking about heaven, by talking about life after death?

Now, why does he do that? I'm not sure, to be honest. But perhaps God wanted them to know the end of the story before the battle started. So, before the battle starts, he announced the victory.

I mean, that's got to be helpful to know. Or perhaps he knew that his friends around the table were thinking about death. Obviously, Jesus is thinking about his own death. So, he leads with that. Now, I don't know if you've given much thought to your own death yourself.

I know in the West, anyway, we have this great fear of death. We have a great fear of aging. And we live in denial of it. Ernest Becker wrote sort of a seminal book on this, literally called Denial of Death.

[5 : 41] And the guts of it, the guts of his thesis is this. He says, we fear death because we don't want to admit we are out of control. We fear death because we don't want to admit we are out of control.

And I think he's spot on. Because you think about the so-called good life. What's the good life? The good life is all about control and choice. And that's the dream. So, we attempt to curate these really wonderful lives.

We're making a series of good decisions. But death can't be controlled. We can't control that. You can't arbitrate your way out of that. You can't negotiate your way out of that.

It will just happen to everyone, every time. So, we have this great enemy. And Jesus says, but it's not the end. There is a life after that.

And I love how he talks about it. He talks about it using imagery of a home. My father's house has many rooms. He says, it's like a home.

[6 : 41] It's a wonderful picture of heaven, isn't it? A home. I have these three kids. And even on vacation, for them, there is still this pull to their own room, their own bed, in their own home.

I remember being on a beach in Thailand like three years ago with my family. Just my family. It was the trip of a lifetime. We're eating at this restaurant.

The restaurant is literally on the beach. The table is on the beach. We're eating this incredible food that's incredibly cheap. The tide is coming in and the water is just almost coming up to the table.

The sun's coming down. It was warm. It was beautiful. And one of my kids was like, I just want to go home. And I'm like, you're so ungrateful.

You're so ungrateful. Do you know how much this trip cost us? But why does she want to go? Because home is the place of belonging and peace.

[7 : 43] It's the place of rest. It's home is the place where you can be who you really are. I love going home at the end of the day. I put my comfy pants on.

I don't need to impress anyone. You know when you're just out in the world and you're chatting to people in the office and out here. And I'm like, hello, how are you? How's the family? Wonderful. Good. You know, like, trying to be all normal.

At home, I can just be myself and just normal. Like, home is where the people I love are.

Right? The people I love the most in the world are home. It's where I feel loved. It's where I feel secure. It's the place I belong. So I think home is such a beautiful picture that Christ uses to describe life after death.

It'll be like a home. And knowing that there is this kind of life after death, it's just a great treasure, isn't it? You see, also see what Jesus says in verse 2 there.

[8 : 47] He goes, I go and prepare a place for you. Okay, now what does that mean? What does he mean by that? Does he mean that heaven is not in good shape and it needs to tidy up before people start arriving?

You know when you go to somebody's house and it always looks really clean and you feel embarrassed about your own home because it's always dirty? Like, that's just because they've cleaned it. That's what we all do when people come to our house.

We tidy it. Is this what Jesus is talking about here? Heaven's in rough shape. Tidy it up before people start arriving. No. So what's going on there? Well, there's actually a whole other layer to Jesus' words here.

But we miss it because we're not first century Jews. So let me remind you, kind of big picture again for a moment. Jesus talks about rooms in his father's house. He talks about going to prepare one of these rooms.

He says he will go and then he'll come back and he'll bring you to one of those rooms. That's what he says. What's going on there? You know, I think we get the idea of heaven as a home.

[9 : 48] I think that's a wonderful picture. But all these other details, going and coming back, what's going on there? What's going on there? Actually, Jesus is referencing marriage customs of the first century.

He's referencing marriage customs here. So stay with me. I'll explain it to you. So back in the days, if a man wanted to marry a woman, he would visit the home of the woman's father with a bottle of wine, which is smart.

And then he'd sit down with the father and they'd negotiate. They'd negotiate a deal. Because things were kind of arranged like that back in the days. He'd have a chat with the dad. And if the dad agreed, dad would call the daughter out and say to the daughter, are you into this?

Do you want to marry this man? If she says yes, they would seal the covenant by drinking the wine together. And at this point, the deal is basically done. But some other things have got to happen.

Very practical things have got to happen. Before the couple move in together, what happens is the guy says to the father something along the lines of, In my father's house there are many rooms.

[10 : 57] I'm going to prepare a place for you and then I'll come back for you. And he meant that literally. So the guy who wanted to marry the girl would go to his father's house.

And he would literally prepare a room or build an extension on the home that would be a place just for him and her. And it would take some time. The bride had to be patient.

She had to wait patiently. And when the room was ready, he would go again to the woman's house and he would bring her to this new place. And that's when they'd have the marriage ceremony and the big feast.

So in saying what Jesus is saying, he's echoing these marriage customs. So he's not just saying, look, life is hard. It's okay because heaven's coming. What he's saying is he paints this beautiful picture of these lovers who want to be together.

And the groom's working really hard on providing a place for them. And it does mean that the bride won't see him for a while. But she trusts the groom. She knows what he's doing.

[12:04] He will come back for her. Because the deal has been made with the father. The covenant has been negotiated. And it's been settled with the father.

It's beautiful, isn't it? I mean, this imagery speaks to the deep intimacy that Christ's desires with us. And to the security we have in this relationship.

So you might be sitting there wondering, does God actually like me? Does God, is he really into me? Am I going to make it, you know? The groom has sealed the deal with the father.

It's a done deal. He's building an extension on the house. Christ will come for you. It's going to be okay. He's going to take you there. He's committed to this.

So that's the whole other level in these words of Christ. Now, verse 3 again. Let me read it to you one more time. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you myself.

[13:03] And where I am, you may be also. Just one more thing I want to add to that. I think our minds naturally go to the practicalities of the situation. You might think, when I die, how does it actually work though?

You know, like, is there a light? Is there a tunnel? Is there a gate? Are there words? And what do I say? What do I do? You know. Jesus does not want us to be stressed out about this.

Look at what he says. I will come again and I will take you to myself. Like the groom coming for the bride, Jesus will come for you. Trust me. I'll get you. He will go.

He will come back. At your death, you will not get lost. You can't mess it up. He will personally come for you.

You don't have to find your own way there. He won't forget about you. He won't leave you behind. You won't get lost. Again, one more example from my kids. It's like when they were young and we're driving home from somewhere late in the fall and asleep in the back seat.

[14:06] Rather than the drama of waking them up and making them walk up the stairs into their house and get changed and stuff. My wife and I would just pick them up. Still asleep.

We'd carry them inside. We'd put them to bed. And they would wake up the next day. In their bed. In their homes. We're making breakfast for them. We just carried them through the whole thing.

So don't be troubled about your death. Jesus says he'll take you through it. I hope it's a good way to think about it is that death is not coming for you.

Jesus is coming for you. Okay. So where are we in our passage? John 14. Starts with a group of very anxious people. The shadow of death is over the whole dinner. He's reminded that the people around him are unreliable.

He isn't reliable. But he isn't unreliable. And Christ says to them, don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust me. And he gives them some brilliant reasons to trust them. There's a place for you in heaven after death.

[15:06] And I'll get you there. You don't have to worry about it. So what happens next? Well, it's great. Thomas jumps up and he shows. He hasn't really been tracking with it. Verse 5. He says, what's going on? Where's the house? How do I get there?

It's brilliant. I love Thomas. We should be grateful for him. Because of that question, we get to hear some of the most famous words of Christ. Because Thomas just wants a bit of clarity, we get to hear these really famous words.

Jesus says in verse 6, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. So Thomas wants a bit of a road map. He wants like a Google map, spiritual Google maps to get there.

And Jesus says, no, I am the way. I'm the way. I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Jesus, who's a bit confused, wants the practicalities.

Sorry, Thomas is a bit confused, wants the practicalities. And Jesus says, look, he points Thomas to himself. But what do these words actually mean? The way, the truth, the life.

[16:11] We could spend some time sort of parsing out each individual word and unpacking it all. But I think it's better to go big picture here. In responding to Thomas' question about how to get to heaven, Jesus simply says, I'm enough.

I am enough. You don't need to look anywhere else for truth, for life. You just need to know me. You just need to trust me. You don't need to supplement me with anything else. Knowing me is enough.

His spiritual search ends with me. And he's very firm here, isn't he? He says, no one comes to the Father except through me. No one. He's saying explicitly, I am the only way.

I'm the only way to life after death. And in saying that, he's laying aside all other religions, all other practices, all philosophies and rituals. Which is very controversial.

You probably know the series of books, The Chronicles of Narnia by C.S. Lewis. The Silver Chair is one of those books. And in it, there's a girl called Jill Pole.

[17:15] And she enters the strange lands of Narnia and immediately gets lost. And after a while, she becomes very thirsty. And her focus becomes, I've got to find water. Eventually, she finds a stream. But before running over to drink, she stops because there's a lion sitting beside the stream.

The lion is Aslan. You probably know that in the books, Aslan represents Jesus. And Aslan says to her, if you're thirsty, you may drink. And now I'm just going to quote directly from the book.

For a second, she stared here and there, wondering who had spoken. Then the voice said again, if you're thirsty, come and drink. It was deeper, wilder, and stronger.

A sort of heavy, golden voice. It did not make her any less frightened than she had been before. But it made her frightened in rather a different way. Are you not thirsty? Said the lion.

I'm dying of thirst. Said Jill. Then drink. Said the lion. May I? Could I? Would you mind going away while I do? Said Jill. The lion answered only by a look and a very low growl.

[18:21] The delicious, rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic. Will you promise not to do anything to me if I do come? Said Jill. I make no promise, said the lion.

Jill was so thirsty now. Without noticing it, she had come a step nearer. Do you eat, girls? She said. I have swallowed up boys and girls and women and men and kings and emperors, cities and realms.

Said the lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it. I dare not to come and drink, said Jill. Then you will die of thirst.

Said the lion. Oh dear, said Jill. Coming another step nearer. I suppose I must go and look for another stream. There is no other stream.

Said the lion. If you want to know God, if you want life after death, there is only one stream. It's Jesus. There's only one way.

[19 : 22] Jesus. And knowing this is another great treasure of the passage, isn't it? And for the folks here who are not Christians, we should be grateful that Jesus spoke so boldly and so clearly.

This is a great gift to us. So if you're here and you're not a Christian, you're sort of thinking things through, I want you to know that God does not want you to be spiritually foggy.

He does not want you to be confused. He doesn't want you to feel like you have to hedge your bets. Spiritually, you know, I'll take a bit of Taoism. I'll take a bit of Buddhism. I'll take a bit of Christianity. I'll mush it all together.

No. Jesus wants us to be clear when it comes to him. So he sends Jesus. And Jesus says, I'm the only way to God. And I'm so grateful. We should all be so grateful that Jesus spoke so definitely and so clearly about himself.

I mean, doesn't this take the pressure off? Doesn't this take the pressure off? We don't have to find our own way in the world spiritually. You don't have to go through life with some sort of internet assembled spirituality.

[20 : 28] You simply trust what Jesus said about himself and keep your focus on him. Okay, let me finish up here. To sustain his disciples when he is gone, Jesus reminds them, there is more to life than just this life.

And think about that. If there's more to life than just this life, that means you're not trapped in this life. What do I mean by that?

If this is all there is and things go wrong, it's terrible. If this is all there is and your wealth goes, your health goes, relationships go sideways.

If this is all there is, well, you're sunk, aren't you? You're just sunk. You ruined your one shot. But this is not all there is. So Jesus says to them, you can handle all the drama coming your way now because I've prepared a place for you and I will take you there.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. Take on this truth. It will comfort and it will sustain you. Friends, it's a great treasure, isn't it? Amen.