

One way

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[0 : 00] I am a friend to all who fear you, to all who follow your precepts. The earth is filled with your love, O Lord. Teach me your decrees. Do good to your servant according to your word, O Lord.

Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I believe in your commands. Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good.

Teach me your decrees. Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart. Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law.

It was good for me to be afflicted, so that I might learn your decrees. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.

And the second reading is John chapter 14, verses 1 to 17.

[1 : 00] Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me.

In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I'm going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am.

You know the way to the place where I am going. Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Philip said, Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us. Jesus answered, Don't you know me, Philip, even after I've been among you such a long time?

[2 : 11] Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?

The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father living in me who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.

Or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves. I tell you the truth. Anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father.

And I will do whatever you ask in my name so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name and I will do it.

If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another counsellor to be with you forever. The spirit of truth, the world cannot accept him because it neither sees him nor knows him.

[3 : 16] But you know him for he lives with you and he will be in you. Good evening everyone.

Great to be here. Let me pray that God would help us understand his word tonight. Father God, we do pray for your spirit to be with us now.

Your word says here in John that your spirit will come and lead us into all truth. And so we ask that you might do that for us now.

Lord, you know the wrestle that has happened over this passage. And so Lord, I pray that in spite of my inadequacies that you would pour out your spirit to help us to understand it.

Bring us clarity as you promised you will by your spirit so that we might see the glory of Jesus and love him and love his word and seek to obey him. And we ask it for your sake.

[4 : 19] Amen. The departures level at an international airport is very different than the arrivals level.

In departures, if you've been there, you'll notice that there are tears, apprehension, uncertainty, even fear on some people's faces.

But on the arrival level, there is joy and hugs and kisses and balloons and gifts and all sorts of other stuff like that. What I've noticed is on the departure level, just before you go through into customs where only those who hold tickets are allowed to go, people tend to linger in that area, making it very frustrating for people like myself who just want to go through.

People linger and there's just hugs and there's tears and the last sort of hugs. And we come back and we have another hug and it's like, oh, come on, you know, just get on with it. But it's particularly, in fact, last time I went there, there was customs guys shooing people out who decided they're going to follow their family in.

It's particularly disappointing or heart-wrenching, I suppose, when you see children saying goodbye to mum or dad or someone like that and just tears running down their face and they just can't go through that door and follow them through into the building.

[5 : 38] However, there's not the same kind of lingering at arrivals. You don't want to get to the doorway to walk out of customs. Go, let's get a last glimpse of customs before I cruise on out into the arrival hall.

It's like, no lingering, get my bag, you know, get out of the way, dogs. I just want to go straight through. No lingering, get straight to the people who are awaiting me at the other end. Well, I don't know, I'm assuming you've picked this up in the last couple of weeks, but when we look into John 13 to 17 as we are at the moment, we are in the departure terminal.

That's where we are. Jesus is spending the last few hours with his disciples before his departure, before he's arrested, his trial and his execution.

And so the atmosphere in the large upper room is tense. It's unhappy. It's uncertain. The news that Jesus was leaving was the worst possible news for the disciples.

The thought of life without Jesus was almost too much for them to bear. Of course, the irony is on this night that it is Jesus who is about to go to the agony of the cross.

[6 : 49] And as it says in chapter 13, verse 21, it is Jesus who is troubled in spirit in this moment. But on the night where it would have been appropriate for the disciples to comfort Jesus and to give Jesus some kind of support, they can only see their loss.

On the night that he's going to taste death on their behalf, he speaks to their confused bewilderment, their fickle faith, their dim vision and their self-absorption.

He begins in verse 1, Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. To demand untroubled hearts would be cruel and it would be empty advice if Jesus hadn't also spoken on the basis of which such untroubled hearts could be accomplished.

And he says it there. It's trust. He says, trust in God the Father. Trust in himself. Trust in God. Trust in me. Is what he says.

And it is a massive claim. Jesus is saying something very significant about himself with that statement. But I suspect it has slipped right by the disciples.

[8 : 07] And so what Jesus does is, in these first few verses of John 14, is he reviews some of his earlier teaching on who is Jesus for the slow learners, which is basically all of them.

Which is quite comforting for people like me, that there are others out there as well. And so in verses 2 to 7, Jesus lays out three great truths that must be believed if the disciples have any comfort at all with the departure of Jesus.

Three big truths about Jesus and what he will achieve. So firstly, that Jesus isn't just simply going away, but that his going away is to his Father's spacious house and in getting there to prepare a place for his disciples.

So it says there, In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you I'm going there to prepare a place for you. So that's a verse which, most often than not, it's used in funerals to bring some sort of comfort.

But the bottom line here of Jesus' assurance to the disciples is that although he is returning to the Father, he will one day be united with his disciples again because he goes to prepare a place for them, a permanent dwelling in the presence of God.

[9 : 30] Well, why does he need to do that? Why does he need to clear off? Why does he need to depart in order to go and do that?

I mean, at the beginning of John's Gospel, it says that Jesus is God's agent in creation. He speaks and worlds come into existence. So why is it taking so long to fix up a few rooms? Or maybe quite a few rooms. 2,000 years at the moment. The key is this. The departure of Jesus in John's Gospel is referred to a number of different ways, but it all refers to one event. His return to his Father by way of the cross and resurrection. So Jesus is not saying, I'm going back to the Father's house so that after I get there, I'll be able to get some rooms ready for you, make up some beds and put out some flowers or whatever it might be. Instead, he's saying, I'm returning to the Father's house in order that the very return may be the way I prepare the place.

[10:47] It is the way he departs which prepares the place for us in the Father's house.

The rooms with God are prepared via the cross. That is the truth of his departure. And if it is believed, then their trust in God and in Jesus will triumph over doubts and troubled minds. That's the first thing they must believe. The faith of these first disciples will be stable and strong in proportion as it rests in Jesus, as it does in God, believing that Jesus' departure via the cross was a return to the Father's presence, a return to the Father's presence, which has opened up the presence of God to them.

There's 12 guys sitting in a room with him. 11 now, actually. The faith of 21st century disciples of Jesus will be stable and strong in proportion as it rests in Jesus, as it does in God, believing that Jesus' departure via the cross was a return to the Father's presence, a return that has opened up the presence of God for us.

The second truth that must be believed that the disciples have any comfort is in verse 3. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am.

[12:33] So what the promise here is, Jesus will return and he will fetch his own and take them to be with him. It's an intensely personal promise. I am going to prepare a place for you.

I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also will be where I am. What troubles the disciples here is the sense of abandonment.

But Jesus makes it clear that his departure is the necessary preparation for them joining him. He assures them that they are not losing him, they are in fact gaining him.

He will come back and he will take them to be where he is. It is the supreme hope of the church. That Christ will come back and he will take us to be with him.

But in waiting for him now, we must never lose sight of the most blessed thing about the second coming of Christ. It is to be with Christ. That's the best bit.

[13:42] It is true that when Jesus comes back, this world as we know it will wind up. History will end. Moral chaos and human rebellion will cease. It is true that the second coming of Christ means that this world is not out of control.

It has a future. It's heading somewhere. It has purpose. It has meaning. But the greatest thing about the second coming of Christ is it means that we will be with Christ. We get Christ.

We get Jesus, the presence of Jesus. It's not even that we get heaven per se. It is not the arrival of final and decisive judgment. It is not the end of disease and sickness and pain.

It is Jesus to see him face to face. The third truth that must be believed if the disciples did have any comfort with Jesus' departure is in verse 4.

You know the way to the place where I'm going. Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way? Jesus answered, The third comfort is that Jesus' disciples know the way to the place where he's going.

[15:03] But apparently they don't. You see, you're confused Thomas pipes in, although the others are probably thinking it, in verse 5.

Lord, we don't know where you're going, so how can we know the way? There's something very attractive about this Thomas. He doesn't bluff.

He doesn't sort of sit back there and, you know, rub his chin and nod wisely as if he knows exactly what Jesus is saying when he's got no idea what he's saying. But he's actually probably more ignorant than he thinks.

Notice what he says here. Have a look at it. Verse 5. We don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?

Not only does he not know the way to the Father's presence, but he's making the assumption that the way that Jesus gets to the Father's presence is the way that the disciples get to the Father's presence.

[16:13] If Jesus had gone that way, then we would naturally just follow Jesus. And so Jesus, sensitive to Thomas' misunderstanding, stops talking about his own departure and way to the Father and starts talking about the way Thomas and the disciples must travel.

Verse 6. I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. The way of Jesus to the Father's presence is via the cross and the way of the disciples to the Father's presence is Jesus.

It's Jesus. He is the way. He who was betrayed by an apostle, disowned by another apostle, abandoned by the rest of the apostles, condemned by lying witnesses.

This Jesus is the truth. It's not just that he speaks truth, but that he is truth. He is truth in bodily form just as he was loving bodily form and holiness in bodily form.

He unveils the truth of God. He reveals God to us. And he who died condemned through his death allows others to have life.

[17:33] The triple claim here is staggering. He is not saying that he is another way to the Father's presence. He is saying he is the way and the truth and the life.

There is no other option. This is the answer to Thomas' question. He is the way. Jesus is the way to the Father for the disciples. And with that statement, we have now gone back to verse 1.

Trust in God. Trust also in me. Stable, serene, triumphant faith between the first and second comings of Jesus has Jesus as its object.

But is that enough comfort for the disciples? Great to know Jesus.

You're going to depart. You're going to open up a way. We're going to get to the Father's presence. You're preparing some rooms for us. Fantastic. But it all just seems so distant.

[18:45] It seems so future. What about now, Jesus? The reality is we're still sitting in the departure lounge and you're going to leave. You're still going. What about now?

Verse 16. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another counselor to be with you forever.

The spirit of truth. Jesus says to his grieving disciples, I am going to the Father and he will send you another counselor.

Another, meaning literally, of the same kind. Doing just the work that Jesus was doing. Just like Jesus. And according to verse 16, this other counselor is going to come and be with them forever.

This other counselor will not depart like Jesus has departed. Is that not what you need when you're feeling abandoned?

Is it not what you need? Is this not a comfort to the disciples, do you think? A permanent counselor? Any ideas?

[20:00] The odd nod of a head would be great. Is this not what the disciples needed? I don't think so. I'll tell you why.

I'm standing at the door in the customs. I've got my ticket. Nat's got her ticket. And we say to Isabel and Phoebe, we're going away.

We're going away for a while. We just got some business we need to attend to. We'll sort it out. And when we come back at some point, we'll take you with us and you'll come with us. But we don't know when that will be, but it'll be sometime in the future.

What do you mean? They're going to be staggered at that point. But don't worry. We're going to... We've already asked a relative who you've never met before to come in and look after you until we're gone.

Oh, fantastic. Do you think that's great news for them? They want... Jesus is what they want.

[21:15] And so it's not a comfort until you get verse 16 and you match it with verse 23 and the staggering implications. If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching.

My Father will love him and we, Jesus and the Father, will come to him and make our home with him. Notice the word home here.

Let's just hone in on this. If you haven't got a Bible open, you really need a Bible open. Seriously.

And because I'm going to get to a point later in the sermon, you're going to feel guilty if you haven't got a Bible open right now. Notice the word home in verse 23.

It is a rare word in the New Testament. In fact, it is only used in one other place in the New Testament. And it's used in verse 2 of John 14 where it is translated rooms.

In verse 2, Jesus says that by going to the cross, he is preparing a room, a dwelling place with the Father. But in verse 23, Jesus is saying that he's going to prepare in us a home, a dwelling place, a room for him and his Father.

[22 : 35] The departure of Jesus to the Father via the cross is going to prepare two things. A room for us with the Father and the Son in heaven in eternal bliss and a room for the Father and the Son with us here on earth now.

That is good news. That is what they wanted to hear. Not just a place with God at some point in the future, good thing, great thing to look forward to, but a place for God with us here right now.

The coming of the Spirit who will never leave will unite the Father and the Son with the disciple.

Jesus is not distant.

His disciples have not been abandoned. I actually think that Jesus is saying here to his bewildered disciples when the Spirit comes it will in fact be better.

He actually says before you're good that I depart. And I think he's saying the reason is because when the Spirit comes it will be better. It's not going to be as good as when we get to heaven. That's going to be fantastic.

[23 : 57] But it's going to be better than what it was for the last three years. His presence will be permanent with us is what he's saying.

And so how do we, how does the Spirit do that? How does the Spirit connect us so that we have the presence of Christ and the Father now? Well, now that we know the way to the Father's presence is Jesus and for the Father's presence with us is Jesus.

we also need to remember the Holy Spirit has come so that we will not forget that Jesus is also the truth. Verse 26, the Counselor, the Holy Spirit and the Father will send in my name will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I've said to you.

The Spirit will teach the disciples referring specifically to these 12 dudes, 11 dudes sitting with Jesus in his upper room teach the disciples all things and remind them of everything that Jesus said.

See, and this is fantastic because up until this point these blokes have been basically quite confused. They have been characterized by misunderstanding as to the person of Jesus.

[25 : 13] We even see it at the beginning there of John 14. And all of this is going to change when the Spirit arrives. That's one of the reasons it's going to be better when the Spirit comes because there will be clarity on the person of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit will come and will teach from exactly the same syllabus that Jesus has been teaching from. He will, as it says in verse 26, remind them of and take them back to the teaching of Jesus.

The Spirit would ensure that these original disciples would not forget Jesus, would ensure that they have absolute clarity on Jesus, on his life and his commandments and his teaching.

salvation. Well, that's great for them but what about us? I mean, I wasn't there when Jesus taught. I didn't walk with Jesus and eat with him and listen to him and how do we know the presence of Jesus now?

How can I get his comfort while I wait for him to return now? Well, I think it's verse 21 of 14, Jesus says that he will show himself and in chapter 17 verse 20, Jesus prays this prayer.

[26 : 28] My prayer is not for them alone, talking about his original disciples, the ones that are sitting there in the room with him. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.

Jesus reveals himself to us through their message. The same Holy Spirit that helped them to remember Jesus is the same Holy Spirit that helps us to see Jesus in what they have written.

We experience the presence and the promise and the comfort and the truth of Jesus in what they have written. The Word of God.

The Spirit takes the Word of God and makes it come alive. That is one reason.

In fact, I would suggest it's the main reason why we have Christ-centered Bible saturation as one of our core values. Jesus. Why do I have that?

[27 : 40] Because I want Jesus. I want the presence of Jesus. Preaching, journaling, quiet times, Bible study, whatever you want to call it, they are all the backbone of stable faith.

Bible study. The Bible is our standard of faith and conduct and leads us to know Jesus and see Jesus and believe Jesus and trust Jesus and treasure Jesus and experience the presence of Jesus.

you see, we don't just gather here week after week just to have the Bible explained. It's not just about gathering knowledge. I mean, I used to do that for many years of my ministry. I'd get up and I'd pray, Lord, help me to explain the Bible. Well, that's good, but that's one step back. I mean, you explain the Bible so that you might see Jesus. That's the point. that's why you've got to work hard to explain it well so that you might see Jesus. Explaining, it's not just the end.

[28 : 38] That's not the end of it. The work of the Spirit is not simply the revelation of truth to be known, but that this clarity might lead us to something so that we might love Jesus and treasure Jesus.

And so, one of the clear marks of the work of the Spirit in a Christian's life is that they do, in fact, love Jesus and savour Jesus and treasure Jesus and how do we know if we love Jesus? Jesus, in fact, makes it four times, he says, it makes it very clear in John 14 what it means to love him. How do we know that we love him? Verse 15, if you love me, you will obey what I command. Verse 21, whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. Verse 23, if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. Verse 24, he who does not love me will not obey my teaching.

The test of authentic love of Christ and the clear evidence that you are united with Christ by the Spirit is whether you obey his commands and his teaching.

[29 : 55] The possibility here for these disciples of the abandonment of Jesus was just shocking for them. He speaks to their confused bewilderment, their fickle faith, their dim vision, their self-absorption and how does he deal with their great concern that Jesus is departing?

By focusing the attention on himself. He doesn't say, okay guys, I'm going, but I'm going to send a counselor, he'll take care of you, he'll sort of like sort things out until I come back again.

He's going to be my proxy. that's not the comfort. And it's not some sort of cheap comfort, a simple slap on the back and a quick hug and a nice little card or a casserole for them to take home.

Comfort for the disciples here is intensely focused on the person of Jesus. And the Spirit will come to make sure the spotlight stays on the way, the truth and the life.

And so if you are a struggling disciple right now, I want you to know that there are no quick fixes, no shortcuts, no techniques, no extra spiritual blessing that will make you stable, that will make you comforted as a disciple of Jesus while you wait for him to come.

[31 : 29] you want to know Jesus, you want to love him, you want to treasure him, you want to experience the presence of Christ, you'll find it in the scriptures.

The Spirit of God will make those words on pages come alive and you will see Christ. That's the work of the Spirit, one of the works of the Spirit.

There are no quick fixes, just the earnest discipline searching the scriptures in the power of the Spirit to see Christ, to know his presence and his comfort. I work hard not just to do Bible study, I work hard to commune with Christ in the scriptures, to commune with Christ in the scriptures.

It's a real shame that he's very hard to understand but it would all do us very well to read John Owen. He's incredibly difficult to understand but it would do us very well to read John Owen's communion with God.

If we are not consistently searching the scriptures for communion with God, then our faith will be fickle, we will be disillusioned, discouraged, we will feel abandoned by God regularly.

[33 : 10] And so it's a great concern for me that over 70% of Christians don't see the Bible as crucial for their faith. They don't see the Bible as crucial for their faith.

In the struggles and the battles of living in this world as followers of Christ, we are not alone. Jesus is with us and the Spirit is helping us to see Jesus in the scriptures and if you're not reading the scriptures, you're not seeing Jesus.

You won't find him somewhere else. God, I want to see the truth. He is the truth and he is the life and the Holy Spirit makes sure that we know it, that we know Jesus and see Jesus and that we experience his presence and his comfort.

He has not abandoned us. If you are fickle, you're struggling in your faith, pick up your Bible and read it and ask God, the Spirit, to bring illumination that you might see the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Let's pray. Father God, pour out your Spirit upon your people here, we pray, so that when we come to your word, it's not just an intellectual exercise of just wanting to understand a book.

[34 : 25] God forbid that we would stop there. Father, we pray that we would earnestly study your word, not just to simply gain knowledge, but to commune with you.

Father, give us, I pray, mercifully give us a glimpse of what, give us a taste of what that's like in such a way that we would desire not just a taste, but to desire to feast on you and your word, that we might see the glory of you in the face of Christ.

And we ask it for your sake. Amen.