

John 14:31 (Thanksgiving Service, Monday evening)

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[0 : 00] I turn, if you will, to the second passage of Scripture we read from John's Gospel, chapter 14. John 14. Our text is verse 31.

But I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father, and particularly these words rise.

Let us go from here. Come now, let us leave. I'd like us to consider two things concerning the words of our text, the command and the departure.

Rise, let us go from here. Well, this command to rise, to leave, comes at a very significant moment for the disciples.

Jesus is addressing troubled disciples. Their hearts are troubled. This word troubled implies inward commotion.

[1 : 28] It's the language of restlessness, even fear and dread. And when we consider chapter 14 against the back cloth of chapter 13, then we see, we begin to appreciate why the disciples are so agitated.

Jesus has spoken of the betrayal, of his betrayal. We have had that moment, the ominous departure of Judas into the night.

Peter's denial has been foretold. The disciples are unsettled. Jesus makes them aware of the fact that the cross is looming.

Calvary's shadow is deepening. The disciples are anxious, somewhat disturbed at what Jesus has shared with them.

And so Jesus will now put them at ease. He will speak to them concerning his father's house. A heavenly mansion, we read, prepared, reserved for his disciples.

[3 : 03] They ask for a revelation of the father. And he reminds them in no uncertain terms that he is the one who reveals the father.

The way to the father is through the son, he says to them. He speaks of his imminent departure. He speaks of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

He assures his troubled disciples that they will not be left as orphans. And as you read chapter 14, it becomes apparent very quickly that the words of Jesus are packed with assurance and comfort and consolation for his disciples.

And it is obvious that his disciples understandably enjoy and appreciate this time of intimate fellowship, one with another, at the feet of their master.

They are enjoying gospel fellowship at the feet of Jesus. But it is all over much too soon. Just as things appear to be going so well, the disciples are savoring this moment.

[4 : 32] They don't want this moment to end. And then they hear these words from the lips of their master. Rise, let us go from here.

You can almost hear the disciples protesting. You can almost hear them sighing, reluctant to rise and leave this Bethel behind.

They're happy to pitch their tent if he will but allow them to do so in this upper room. They would like to remain within its walls just a little longer.

But Jesus says, no. You must rise and you must leave this place. You must go on from here.

Let us leave. Let us go, he says, to his disciples. The Kidron Valley, Gethsemane and the cross await the Lord Jesus.

[5 : 41] And if they are to follow him, his disciples, they must familiarize themselves with the way of the cross. This particular milestone has all but passed and Jesus must now move on.

The time has come to move on to the next redemptive milestone. A step closer to Golgotha. And by implication, this comes at a price for the disciples because it means that their comfort zone, that Bethel, the upper room, must now be left behind and abandoned.

They must leave. They must step outside of it. And it's not without risk. It's not without danger. But leave they must.

And I want to begin tonight by applying a little of what this would have meant for the disciples of Jesus. Perhaps there are some within these walls who know something of the comfort zone that the disciples experience at this time.

Perhaps at a personal capacity, you are no stranger to sitting at the feet of Jesus, as it were. Perhaps you are no stranger to immersing yourself in his word.

[7 : 19] Perhaps you have a disciplined reading plan that very few know about. But in any case, you read your Bible and you do so in your own quiet, unassuming way, day by day.

Again, you come under the proclamation of the gospel week by week. Prayer has a significant part to play in your life.

But all within the walls, within the privacy of your personal private space. Perhaps you have established your own upper room.

And you do business with God behind closed doors. But perhaps the time has come for you to step outside.

And perhaps you have been challenged over this communion weekend to do precisely that. Perhaps you have been reminded more than once over this communion weekend that you too must rise.

[8 : 31] The time has come for you to take the next step. Or you've enjoyed the communion weekend. You've enjoyed fellowship. You've perhaps read your Bible a little more than usual.

But you are still within your comfort zone. And more often than not, a comfort zone can bring a false sense of security.

You are being challenged, friend, to follow in the footsteps of the disciples. As you leave this communion behind, I urge you to follow in their footsteps.

To follow their example. Their master bids them to leave, to rise, to take the next step in faith. And I wonder if the word of God is challenging you to do that on this Monday evening of this communion.

Perhaps you appreciate that there is a greater exposure required to your Christian life.

[9 : 42] You see, the Christian life is not meant to be lived under a bowl or a bushel. People speak of secret disciples. And they speak of Nicodemus as a secret disciple.

Well, perhaps initially he kept his discipleship a secret, but not for long. Follow his journey and you quickly discover that the light is removed from the bushel sooner rather than later.

And so I say to you that there is a greater coverage of your Christian life required of you tonight. And I want you to mull over these things.

As you read your Bible, your Bible is challenging you to take up the cross publicly every day and to follow the Lord Jesus.

And this is a recurring emphasis on the pages of the Bible. We read that passage from the book of Exodus, chapter 15.

[10:59] We read of how bitter waters were made sweet in the experience of the children of Israel, our Old Testament disciples.

They too are on the path of discipleship. They are led beyond Marah to a place called Elam. There they are granted to rest for a time and to refresh themselves.

Twelve springs of water, no less, and seventy palm trees. They encamp, we read, by the green pastures of Elam and by the still waters, but not for long.

You can hear Moses, can you not, saying something similar to his disciples. Rise, let us now leave, let us go on from here.

The way of the wilderness awaits us. And they are commanded in no uncertain terms to rise, to leave Elam and to move on.

[12:07] And we read that they set out from Elam. And they take on the challenges of the wilderness of Sin.

Oh, perhaps they are saying to Moses, just a little longer, Moses. If we can, just another day or two here, by the palm trees of Elam and by the springs of water, please, if you will, grant us a further extension, another week or two, a day or two at least.

Yet, God's command is that they should rise and move on. And again, perhaps there is a message there for you, friend, tonight.

It is time to leave this oasis of a communion weekend. Or you would perhaps like to remain a little longer, but move on.

One must. The comfort of Elam must be left behind. The comfort of the upper room must be left behind.

[13:19] Jesus is saying to each one of us tonight, it is time now to rise. Let us go on from this communion.

Who knows what the next few weeks or months may bring into your experience. But rise, you must. Let us take the next necessary step.

Jesus is saying faith must be exercised because we have no warrant to remain where we are. The Christian life is not a static life.

We have no license to remain where we are, but we are given every exhortation to move on. Faith must be exercised.

Read, if you will, the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11. And there we read of Abel. We read of Noah and Abraham and Moses and others.

[14:25] Faith. Abel. Offered to God. A very significant sacrifice. It cost him his life. I wonder if we are prepared to sacrifice so that we can serve the Lord better.

I want you to ask yourself tonight and me with you. What is it that I must sacrifice? What ties must be severed?

What must I do to commit myself to the Lord better? What must I do to serve the Lord Jesus in a more proactive, committed manner?

We look at Noah. He built an ark. He actively engages in doing God's will. Are you prepared to do that as you leave this communion behind?

You have pledged to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. How will you do that? Will you wait until the next communion? No. You will take up the cross, will you not?

[15:39] And you will deny yourself just like Abraham did. That day he was called of God to leave his particular comfort zone.

And he does. He went out, the writer to the Hebrews tells us. He went out not knowing where he was going. But when God said, rise Abraham, let us go from here.

He is obedient to God's will. And he goes. Are you prepared to be led where God leads you?

And then we have Moses. He made a significant choice. He's taken from obscurity. Oh, he had his own comfort zone as well.

The far side of the desert. But God says to him, Moses, rise. Let us go from here. Ultimately, he refuses to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter.

[16:50] Instead, he chooses to be mistreated with the people of God. Choices, sacrifices, decisions.

Rise, if you will. There is something else that is noteworthy in the words of Jesus.

When he says, rise, let us go on from here. It is, if you like, a wake-up call. And I say that quite literally.

Because this word, rise, it means in the Greek tongue, wake up, if you will. Get up. It is to shake someone out of slumber.

I remember my father telling me. When he was a fisherman. And at sea, one would fall into a deep sleep.

[17:56] And he would say it was a sleep most sweet. But then the skipper would call for all hands on deck.

And he would say that particular moment of sleep was very, very difficult to disengage from.

It was difficult. It was challenging. It required every ounce of energy to leave that bunk and make for deck.

A rude awakening, if you like. But the captain's word must be responded to.

The disciples, they receive something similar. Bear in mind that as they sit at the feet of Jesus, they are reclining.

[19:06] Their heads low, their feet pointing away, resting on one elbow, eating with the other hand. This is a most restful, relaxing posture, if you like.

Perhaps too restful. They're too contented. They're just a little too laid back. And the symbolic significance of this moment is being pointed out.

The danger is that you too, and me with you, we can recline. We can find ourselves adopting a posture that is not compatible with the Christian life.

The Bible gives us no warrant to remain in this reclining mode. We must not remain static or stationary or immobile.

The language of the Bible is always to keep moving, to rise, to leave, to go on. Onward, Christian soldiers marching as to war with the cross of Jesus going on before.

[20:33] And let's not underestimate that. This is essentially a battle cry. Arise. Jesus is saying, rise up to his disciples.

Take up arms. The captain of their salvation is speaking to them. He's urging them now to come to the front line and to take their stand and to be counted.

He makes reference to the ruler of this world. They are being challenged to confront the evil one. But the captain of their salvation, he is at the helm.

Rise, he says, let us go on from here. Well, perhaps you too have had a rude awakening over this weekend.

Maybe you've been reminded that you must become more proactive. You must engage more than you have been doing.

[21:38] Perhaps the word of God has been challenging you to rise and to take up arms. Perhaps you've been in this reclining mode for just too long.

And maybe you're asking, well, what difference can I make? Oh, you can make a significant difference. You can make all the difference if you are prepared to stand up.

As Isaiah did in his time. Who will go for us? And Isaiah says, here I am. Here am I.

I will go. Are you prepared to say that tonight? As you are being challenged to get up, to wake up once and for all.

And engage in the kingdom. And in fulfilling the good commission. In your own experience.

[22:50] Or perhaps you have had over this weekend what you would like to call a mountaintop experience. But again, you must leave it.

You must descend. Or you would like to stay there just a little longer. Not unlike perhaps Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. You remember that moment.

As they have a time of fellowship with Jesus. And Moses and Elijah. Are there as well. You remember the contribution of the disciples.

Rabbi, they say to Jesus. It is good that we are here. Now, allow us, if you will, to make three tents. Three tabernacles.

Three shelters. One for you. One for Moses. One for Elijah. What are they saying? Well, it is an attempt, is it not, to capture and prolong the moment.

[23:52] It is a desire for permanence. They want this episode to last. But then we have that defining moment as the cloud envelops them.

And they hear the voice of Almighty God. God the Father is saying, this is my beloved Son. Listen to Him.

They look around. They no longer see anyone except Jesus only. And as He speaks. And as He speaks. They listen.

And they are led down the mountain. And then there is this very significant development at the foot of the mountain. There, Jesus is confronted by Satan himself in the form of a demon-possessed young man.

He is confronted by the Lord Jesus and rebuked. The young man is restored. But there is there a lesson for the disciples.

[25:03] Very often in the Christian life, a time of blessing may be followed by challenging moments where faith is tried and tested.

The disciples are reminded that the real world awaits them at the foot of this mountain.

And friends, as this communion comes to a close, we are all reminded that the real world awaits each one of us out there.

None of us know what a day, what an hour will unfold in our experience. Yet, the Lord is saying to each one of us tonight, rise.

Let us go from here. Come now. Let us leave. But you will notice that Jesus includes himself in this, in the formula of words we have.

[26:14] Rise. He doesn't say, go from here, if you will, and I'll be behind you. No, he says, let us go from here.

He leads. He guides. He shepherds. He protects. He preserves. And what he did for the disciples, he will do for you and I.

As we bid farewell to this mountaintop experience. Maybe you're more than a little anxious about what tomorrow may bring. And the challenges you may face.

As you anticipate your faith being tested. But fear not. The one who says to you, rise and leave this communion.

He is going with you. He is leading you. He is guiding you. Well, so much for the command. Just in a word, the departure itself.

[27 : 16] The disciples depart, we read. They leave the upper room. They follow Jesus. They rise to the challenge of discipleship anew.

And they do so with no small measure of courage and bravery and commitment to their master. Mingled, yes, with a measure of reluctance.

They leave this place of blessing. But it is imperative that they do so. This Bethel that leaves such pleasing memories.

Such a pleasing aroma. They must now move on. Of course, the word Bethel we take from the experience of Jacob back in Genesis chapter 28.

You remember how Jacob discovers the reality of that truth that God has not abandoned him.

[28 : 30] Thus, this back of beyond wilderness place becomes Bethel. How awesome is this place, Jacob says, as God draws near.

This, he says, is none other than the house of God. He is saying, it is as if I am in God's house. It is as if I am standing in close proximity to the very gate of heaven itself.

Nonetheless, God says to Jacob, rise. You must go on from here.

And he does. So he commits himself to God, pledging his obedience and craving God's presence and blessing. Chapter 29 begins with these words.

Then Jacob went on his journey. And so must you. And so must I. Are you prepared this night to leave your upper room?

[29 : 44] To leave your Elam? To leave your mountaintop experience? And to leave your Bethel? Are you prepared to offer God a greater exposure of your life?

A greater openness? Are you willing to become more visible? Are you prepared to engage in a more public walk with the Lord Jesus?

Are you prepared to come into the body of the Kirk this week? Perhaps on Tuesday evening or Wednesday evening or Thursday evening has the time come.

For you to nail your colors. You have been challenged in a more public walk with the Lord Jesus. Because you have been challenged in no uncertain terms over this weekend.

Oh, you know what it is. To have a Bethel experience as Jacob did. It was a very, very personal experience Jacob had. You know what it is to be on that mountaintop.

[30 : 52] You have been there perhaps more than once. And you have your upper room as it were. But you are being challenged.

And it is the Lord who is challenging you and exhorting you. To once and for all let go.

And to walk the path of discipleship. With the people of God. Has that time come? Is there a silent acknowledgement in your heart this evening?

That the time has come. For you to take that next necessary step for the Lord Jesus.

I'm going to finish by sharing with you something I read concerning Charles Wesley. When he received what he referred to as a new sense of pardon.

[31:54] As he shares his sense of a conversion experience.
As he shares with a close friend the joy of the Lord that he experiences in his heart. He's not quite sure how to respond to this sense of forgiveness.
That he knows is his through Jesus Christ. He says to his friend. I suppose he says with more than a measure of uncertainty. That I'd better keep silent concerning this new sense of pardon.
But his Christian friend replied with the words. Oh no my brother. If you had a thousand tongues. You should go and use them all for Jesus.
Charles was challenged. And he went home. And with a pen.

[33:03] He began to write. These words that are familiar. I am sure to most of us. Oh for a thousand. Tongues. To sing my great.
Redeemer's praise. The glories. The glories. The glories. Of my God. And King. The triumphs. Of his grace. Are you prepared.
To confess. To speak. Or forever remain silent. Are you prepared.
To speak. By way of word. And conduct. Over these days. Have you now reached. This point. Where you feel constrained.
To sing. Of your. Redeemer's praise. Well be encouraged to do so. What is it. That hinders you. What is it. That may be.

[34:04] Keeping you back. Let go. And know the joy. Of the Lord. God. Because. If we follow. In the footsteps. Of Jacob.
And the disciples. And others. We discover. This truth. That blessing. Follows.
Obedience. And you must. Discover that. And you will only discover that. When you take. That first step.
Into the open. In obedience. And so I say to you. Rise. Let us go. From.
Here. Amen. Let us. Pray. O Lord. Our God. We pray that.

[35:00] You would grant us. To. Be prepared. To stand. And.
Be counted. Perhaps. A day of reckoning. Has come. In our experience. Grant us. To see.
That. There is no time. Like the present. Enable us. To pledge. Ourselves. To Christ. A new. This night. Grant us.
To. Commit. Ourselves. To you. Our great God. And your kingdom. Grant us. To be no longer.
Distracted. By anything. That may come. Between us. And serving. The Lord. Jesus. Take from us. Anything.

[35:57] That may be hindering us. From obeying. The truth. We pray. That we might indeed. Be shaped. And molded.
As clay. In the hands. Of a potter. By. Your inspired. Word. Give us. To embrace.
Its authority. And its commission. This night. To take up. The cross. And. To follow. The way. Of the wilderness.
The way. Of the wilderness. The way. Of the wilderness. We ask. That you would go. Before us. That you would. Continue with us. That you would. Presence yourself. With us. And you have assured us.
Of your. Ongoing. Presence. Lo. I am with you. Always. Even. Until the end. Of the age.

[36:51] World without end. You are. The God. Who has promised. To be with us. For time. And for eternity.

Go before us. For Christ's sake. Amen.