

John 13:36-14:14

This is now the third week we are looking at Jesus' final remarks to his disciples. Two weeks ago, he demonstrated the kind of humble service and love he would tell his disciples in last week's lesson to give to each other. Interspersed in this "I love, you love" lesson, the betrayal of Judas takes root and grows. By the end of last week's passage, Judas has left, Jesus has predicted his glory to come, and the disciples are told to love one another. This week, the focus shifts again to where it is Jesus will go after/while he is glorified.

13:36

Jesus has told his disciples in 13:33 that they cannot go where he is going. We talked last week about how Jesus was primarily talking about his death on the cross (given the context of being "glorified"). He reiterates the same sentiment here when Peter asks him to clarify what he meant.

It might be worth noting that Peter glosses over Jesus "new commandment" to focus on the coming work of Jesus. If this is something to notice then the follow-up question would be: is Peter right in glossing over the "new commandment" to focus on the place where Jesus is going (thus prioritizing Gospel over Law), or is he failing to recognize his calling as a disciple of Jesus and instead focuses on that which he cannot know? Your thoughts???

From where Peter stands, there is no way he could know exactly what Jesus is talking about. From our perspective, two possibilities come to light:

- Jesus is talking about his death at the hands of wicked men. Tradition has it that Peter was killed for his faith, and so Jesus is predicting this martyrdom.
- Jesus is talking about going back to the Father (notice he will not talk about "heaven" as we understand it in what follows), where Peter would eventually go after he is killed.

13:37

Peter thinks he will be able to go where Jesus is going as a reward for being so devoted to Jesus that he would be willing to die for Jesus. The irony here is that, in dying for Jesus (which he would end up doing), Peter goes to the place Jesus went. Remember, as tradition has it, Peter, like Jesus, was also crucified.

13:38

The troubling thing about Jesus is that he knows everything that we will do. We like to make boasts about ourselves to Jesus (even subtly), comparing ourselves to others. "Lord, I am not like these other men..." How much less would we be inclined to boast if we knew all the dumb things we'd do between now and when we die. Jesus knows everything we are going to do; we do not. And yet we like to boast in what we are doing

presently, not knowing the evils we will commit in the future. Jesus sees our successes and failures together. Our accomplishments impress him as much as our failures (and sins) disappoint him. With this in mind, let us proceed to live humbly in the sight of God!

14:1

Once again, we have an unfortunate chapter break. There should be no break between what Jesus is saying to Peter at the end of 13 and the beginning of 14. The meaning then becomes: “Peter, you are bragging about what you will do for me, as if that’s the reason why I would let you come after me. Have you learned nothing? Don’t ask me to look at your works, for if I am to look at them, I will be forced to see a man who will deny me three times. No, Peter, instead of asking me to focus on you and your works, focus instead on me and the Father. Don’t believe in yourself, believe in me, believe in him.”

14:2

Jesus follows-up his appeal for Peter to avoid looking to himself to gain God’s favor and explains why it is he should look to God and Christ himself instead. The reason? There are lots of rooms in his father’s house. In other words, Peter should not worry about being left out of any good thing that Christ should give him; rather, he should trust and wait patiently for the good gifts of God to be given to him.

Many Christians take this verse to be all about heaven. As if Jesus were going to engage the angels in some sort of building campaign, and proceed to purchase furnishings and fixtures for the place where we go when we die. But here’s the problem with that thinking...

We all believe that God takes to himself those who are his when they die. Old Testament, New Testament... all are SAFE when they die and exist in “heaven” where sin and evil cannot have their way with them as they await the resurrection and life in the age to come. Now, if heaven is not ready, if Jesus has to GO THERE AFTER HIS ASCENSION to prepare a place for those who are his, then he is saying that the place where you go when you die is not ready yet. So what about all those who were the Lord’s who died before Christ? Where are they?

I think we should take a different approach when it comes to understanding this passage. In context, Jesus has talked about his death and the kind of love he has for his disciples. “The place” where he is going, I contend, has not magically shifted to “heaven,” but is instead still the CROSS! Jesus is going to the cross to prepare a place for us with his Father. Make sense?

14:3

And so if Jesus is going to the cross to prepare a place for us with him and his father, he will also be the one to make sure we end up with him. Now, instead of looking at this text as something having to do with heaven (like we have all been trained to do), let’s think about this in terms of Christ’s second coming.

1. Christ “goes away” to the place Peter cannot go, that is the cross.

2. In doing so, Christ prepares a place for us in the Father's house (or family).
3. Christ will come back (second-coming) and bring us into this family, which is rooted in him.
4. End result: the "house" the Father has (with many rooms) is actually life with Jesus when he comes back for us.

Now, before you argue that this passage is talking about death and heaven, notice several things:

1. Our death is not mentioned here or in the context.
2. Heaven is not mentioned here or in the context.

In other words, if you make the case that this passage is about dying and going to heaven, you must admit to importing both of those ideas from somewhere... (your imagination?) not from the text.

14:4

"The Way" Jesus is talking about is not Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven," but is rather the way to the cross. The disciples had been in Jerusalem for a little while now, and would have probably seen Golgotha, or had some knowledge of Roman execution methods. Admittedly, Jesus is toying with his disciples at this point, but he's trying to move them along in their thinking... which, as you will see, he does.

14:5

Again, Thomas speaks! We have heard him before when he said: "let us go that we may die with him," a statement about the journey of Jesus to Bethany to see Lazarus. We noted the double meaning in what he said there: are they going to die like Lazarus so that they might be raised like him by Jesus, or was he saying they should go to Bethany and die like Jesus will die because the Jews sought to kill him? And again here, Thomas speaks rather cryptically. Jesus says that the disciples know the way to where he is going. Thomas disagrees. His question, I believe, is a set-up of sorts.

Like Peter, Thomas is asking a question that puts the burden of "following Jesus" on the disciples. "I will lay down my life for you," Peter said. And Thomas implies that he would walk 500 miles and walk 500 more just to be the man who walks a thousand miles and falls down at the door of the place to where Jesus is going. Works righteousness is alive and well in this one. And like he did to Peter, Jesus will rebuke this way of thinking in Thomas in one of the best known passages in Scripture.

14:6

This passage is often used as a proof-text for the exclusivity of Christianity. "Jesus is the only way." And while this is true, it is not the main focus of the text. This verse, as it is given in context, is a repudiation of works-righteousness. Jesus is the way, truth, and life... and they are his to give, not ours to earn.

14:7

And no sooner does Jesus claim to be the thing for which Thomas sought to labor for, Jesus GIVES IT AWAY FREELY TO THEM ALL!!!

14:8

Philip seems to understand that Jesus is talking about giving something freely to them. He seems to believe that “way, truth and life” is akin to saying SALVATION. And he equates salvation with being able to see or be in the presence of the face of God. So far so good.

What he seems to fail to see is the relationship between Jesus and the Father. Hold on... Jesus will set him straight in 5... 4... 3... 2... 1...

14:9-11

It's a shame to lump these three verses together, being as how they are each profound and wonderfully full of Gospel, but they also form a cohesive unit that we should read together. (And it's getting close to 7:00... and this is already going to be 4 pages long, or longer.)

Jesus makes the point you will see at the end of this long discourse he had set out to make all along: the singular relationship he has with the Father. Philip believed that Jesus could GIVE the disciples salvation by showing them the face of the Father. But what he failed to realize was that Jesus had been doing this all along. There is nothing about the Father we need to know or can know that we cannot know from Jesus.

Jesus and the Father are one. When you see Jesus, you see the Father and you cannot see the Father without seeing Jesus. Imagine the shock of these words on the disciples: “so you know all the things you've seen me do and the teachings you heard me teach? Yes? Well, these are not just impressive signs and wise-sounding teachings, they are the very words and deeds of the God we came to Jerusalem to worship.”

The problem with these statements of Jesus is that they sound too good to be true, or too offensive to be true. And so, many people try to ignore them and domesticate Jesus, pull out his claws and turn him into a novelty item for their lives. Jesus becomes a good teacher when he says what I want him to say; a loving person when he loves the kinds of people I want to love in the ways I would want to love them; and a prophet when he reveals the kind of God I already believe in. But this is not the Jesus given to us by the Word of God. We get a Jesus who does what we don't think he should do, say what we don't think he should say, call who we don't think he should call... and then to top it all off he says: “and if you don't like this, well, I'm only doing the works my Father has given me to do. And all those things you saw me do that were offensive? Those were also the works of my Father.” The end result is, you either end up receiving Jesus as he is given to us in the Word, or you end up with a Jesus that serves no purpose.

14:12

This is a hard saying of Jesus!

We might be able to accept easily the first half of this verse in light of what he has already said in 13:15 (“For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”) and 13:34 (“...just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.”). “OK,” we might say to ourselves, “in view of who Jesus is, we should try to

make our lives look as much like his as possible.” And then we’d go on to appreciate our Law-Gospel understanding of Scripture and the 3rd Use of the Law.

But then Jesus goes on to say that we will do greater things than what he has already done. And just as a reminder, he has:

1. Turned water into wine
2. Healed the official’s son
3. Healed the paralytic
4. Fed the 5,000
5. Walked on water
6. Healed the man born blind
7. Raised Lazarus from the dead

So what will we do that is greater than THAT?

Notice that Jesus is talking in the future tense. We WILL do greater things than he has done. Not NOW, but later. But how can we know that this is true, and not just some promise Jesus makes that is unverifiable? (Quick! Read 14:13.)

14:13-14

It seems like the promise here is Jesus’ way of saying: “if you don’t believe you will eventually do greater things that I have done up to the point, just see if I don’t do amazing things THROUGH you today! Test me and see, my word is true!”

And before we go trying to make sense of this promise (which I hope we’ll talk about in class), keep two simple things in mind:

1. ANYTHING means ANYTHING; there is no limit to what the disciples can ask that Jesus will give them.
2. The promise is given to those with Jesus in chapter 14 of John’s gospel. He has not directly made this promise to you in this verse.

It seems, taken together, that Jesus is promising to prove his promise that the disciples will do greater things than what he has done EVENTUALLY and NOW, when they ask in his name. And, while the same promises have not been directly given to us, we can see how God made good on his promises to the apostles when we read the book of Acts.