

PEACE IN A TROUBLED WORLD 2

Faith not Sight – John 13:31-14:14

Context

The immediate context of this passage is the basin and the towel when Christ demonstrated His love and grace to the disciples (13:1-17). In that action He launched three great ships of the Church – discipleship (we must obey and imitate Him), leadership (Christian leadership is always servant leadership) and fellowship (which is based on sacrificial love for one another). This action was the foundation stone of the New Covenant Community of the Church. Then in 13:18-30 the focus is on the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. These two passages are set against the background of 13:1 where we are told that Jesus “knew that the hour had come for Him to leave this world”. Now the embryonic Church is gathered as Judas the betrayer has left them (v31 starts with “When he was gone”). Christ is now preparing the New Covenant Community He has founded for His departure. He knows that without Him they will be like orphans (v18) – the feeling of loss they will experience will be profound like a child bereaved of its parents. Christ will now prepare them for the Church Age, and His teaching will be vital for us as we continue to be that New Covenant Community in our generation.

Introduction (13:31-38)

- **The threefold glory (vv31&32)**

The hour Jesus spoke of (13:1) is now! It has finally come. It is an hour of glorification. This is a remarkable truth since the hour that has come is the hour of the passion – the suffering and crucifixion of Christ. This is a unique glory of Christianity – that the greatest glory is through suffering. Christ’s view of the passion was that it was a triumphant event, and we should remember that when we speak of it. When He suffered in our place it was not “cosmic child abuse” (as one writer recently claimed that the idea of Christ, the Son, bearing the wrath of God in our place would be); rather, the Son and Father were together entering into the most glorious victory in history. This was an event of reciprocal glorification – God is glorified in Son of Man and the Son is glorified in God! It is worth noting that “Son of Man” (a title used by Christ 12 times in John’s gospel) is a Messianic title taken from Daniel 7:13. In Daniel’s vision the “Son of Man” is the one who comes into the presence of God (“the Ancient of Days”) to receive “authority, glory and sovereign power”. William Barclay described a “fourfold glory” in this passage, but I maintain a “threefold glory”:

- (i) **The glory of Jesus has come** (v31a) – the ultimate glory of Christ was the cross
- (ii) **In Jesus God has been glorified** (v31b) – the Father was glorified in Christ through His perfect obedience. That obedience must now reach its fulfilment in the cross, the ultimate and final step of obedience to His Father’s will (Luke 22:42; Philippians 2:8).
- (iii) **God will glorify Jesus** (v32) – this surely speaks of the resurrection and ascension (the ascension being the scene foretold by Daniel). The obedience to death of Christ will be followed by exaltation to the highest place (Philippians 2:9). Note that there will be no delay in this process and there is no doubt about it in the mind of Christ – it will happen “at once”. Barclay wrote: “the vindication of Christ must follow the humiliation of Christ; the enthronement of Christ must follow the crucifixion of Christ; the crown of thorns must change into the crown of glory”

- **The departure of Christ (v33)**

Again Christ prepares them for His departure. He is leaving them and they cannot follow Him now. His choice of words is touching – “my children” – showing His care for them (this is echoed in 14:18 where He promises not to leave them as orphans).

- **The New Command – a New Covenant Community (vv34&35)**

Christ now gives the embryonic Church its New Command. As we saw in the previous study, this was not a new command in the sense that the Old Testament law required love for one’s neighbour, but because it is given by a new law-giver (Christ not Moses), has a new measure (“as I have loved you”) and defines a New Covenant. To love one another as Christ loved us is the basis of our testimony to the world. This will be the defining characteristic of the New Covenant Community.

- **Simon’s Struggle (vv36-38)**

Peter now speaks out again. He seems to have missed Christ’s comment in vv34&35 entirely, and is still fixed on what Christ said in v33. He wants to know where Jesus is going. Jesus responds again

that he cannot follow now although He will go in future (possibly a reference to Peter's martyrdom). This comment should bring reassurance to Peter – He will one day follow His Lord although denial will come first. Peter seems to know that Jesus is speaking about death (v37) and he boldly states that he is willing to die for his Lord! Jesus corrects him – he will disown his Lord three times that very night!

It is against this background of a rather shaky foundational Church which has been decimated by Judas' betrayal and whose rock himself will soon deny the Lord that Jesus continues His discourse to the germinal Church. He focuses on a key issue which will be central to the life of the Church – FAITH. He will reveal three vital truths about faith.

Jesus is the Way (14:1-6)

- **Not troubled but trusting (v1)**

Jesus does not want them to be troubled but trusting. Anxiety is the enemy of faith, and faith is the antidote to anxiety. It is important to note that Jesus encourages faith in Him **and** in God. This is a "High Christology" (Milne) – it is equating Christ with God as the one to be trusted in for salvation. This statement would have been blasphemous to the Jews as only God is to be trusted (see Psalms 20:7; 118:8&9; 146:3).

- **A house with space for many (v2)**

Jesus speaks of His Father's house as the place He is going to, and tells them that there are many "rooms" there. The Greek for "rooms" is *monai*, which is derived from the verb "to stay", so the word is literally "staying places". Several alternatives have been proposed for the significance of this phrase:

- a) It could refer to many different types of dwelling places with different degrees of reward for faithfulness. This was a common idea in Jewish belief and finds some support in other New Testament passages.
- b) It could refer to stages of progression in Heaven. This view was taken by Origen, who believed that the dead soul needed to be taught and purified through stages of glory before finally being ready for the highest level of Heaven. This view, however, does not find concrete support elsewhere in the New Testament.
- c) The intention may be simply to reassure the disciples that there is space for every one of them in the Father's house. In the context this seems most likely – Peter in particular may have wondered if there would be space for him after Christ's prediction of his denial.

Jesus' honesty here is striking ("if it were not so, I would have told you"). Christianity is a religion of truth – it never seeks to bring someone into the faith under false pretences or by coercion (this is different from cults who reveal only half truths until people are members). Jesus said that He is going to the Father's house to prepare a place for them. Barclay describes the idea of Jesus as the forerunner who goes before us to prepare the way for us as "one of the great thoughts of the New Testament".

- **The promised return (v3)**

Christ gives a wonderful promise here – that if He goes to prepare a place for them He will return to take them to be with Him. There are different views about what the "return" spoken of here refers to. Some say it is a reference to the coming Holy Spirit or His appearances after the resurrection, but in context it seems most likely that He means the *parousia* when He returns in glory to take the Church to be with Him. There is a greater focus on the return of Christ in the synoptic gospels than in John, and it should be no surprise to hear Christ speaking of the end times at this point. Barclay comments that – "The curious thing about the doctrine of the Second Coming is that Christians seem either to entirely disregard it, or to think of nothing else at all." In my experience that is true – I have met some of those people who think of nothing but the end times, and I have noticed that others tend to ignore this wonderful truth. We must stand firm in our belief that Christ is coming again, and that He will bring a fulfilment to all things. This is the great hope of the Church! Little is said in these verses about the nature of the "Father's house", but the term would have reminded them of the Temple and probably echoes the Old Testament prophetic hope of a coming day when the dwelling place of God's people will be with Him (this is a New Covenant promise – see Jeremiah 31:34 and Ezekiel 37:27). Above all, Christ says that He will take them to be "where I am" – it is enough to know that we will be with Him, and that is the true joy of Heaven.

- **Thomas' question (vv4&5)**

Peter is now silent and Thomas becomes the spokesperson. He protests that they don't even know where Jesus is going, so how can they know the way! He doesn't seem to have grasped that the place Jesus is going to is Heaven (the Father's house). We must remember that the disciples at this time were really struggling to understand how Christ would be glorified and where. They had expected the coming of the Kingdom here and now in Jerusalem. Praise God for Thomas' question, as it leads to one of the most amazing statements Christ ever made.

- **An exclusive claim (v6)**

Jesus claims that He is the way to the place He is speaking of – the way to the Father's House or to be with the Father. No one can come to the Father except through Christ. The words "truth" and "life" reinforce the word "way" in the context of this comment – in other words He is the true and living way and in Him is the ultimate revelation of truth and of life! This is an absolutely exclusive claim – it does not fit together with other religions or philosophies (Peter repeats this exclusive claim when preaching in Acts 4:12. It is impossible to have Jesus plus any other teacher or teaching. Not only this, but Christ is Himself the embodiment of truth and life – not simply the one who gives them, but in His very essence He is truth and life. This cannot be claimed by any other human being. We have life and we may grasp the truth, but we are not the source of either. Barclay says about Jesus' claim to be "the truth" that, "The tremendous thing about Jesus is not that the *statement* of moral perfection finds its peak in Him, although that is true; it is that the *fact* of moral perfection finds its realisation in Him."

CONCLUSIONS:

- a) **Faith relieves anxiety**

Faith in Christ relieves the need to worry because it assures us of the ultimate destiny of our lives – they are caught up with Christ, and through Him we too will have a room in the Father's house. Perhaps for us it brings comfort to know that those who loved the Lord and whom we loved are now in that place.

- b) **Christ is the Way to the Father's house**

Jesus is the Truth (14:7-11)

- **From now on – a new way of relating (v7)**

Jesus reveals God perfectly. There are 3 possible readings of the first half of this verse:

- a) "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also"
- b) "If you know me, you will know my Father also"
- c) "If you have known me, you will know my Father also".

Most translators follow the first of these, and the meaning changes little whichever is chosen, because the point He is making is clear – those who know Christ will know the Father too. The second half of the verse makes this even clearer – from now on they will know the Father the way they know Christ. He is preparing them for the time when He will not be there in person, and reassuring them that if they know Him they know the Father – the Father will be no different in character than He has been! From now on their faith will be in the unseen father rather than the seen Son. From now on, now that they will see the full revelation of God in Christ, they will know the Father fully.

- **Philip's question – just a wee request! (v8)**

I enjoy this very direct question from Philip – it makes me wonder if he wasn't secretly an Ulster-man! His request is not a small thing. No one has ever seen God (John 1:18), and this was a belief vehemently maintained by Jewish teachers. Even Moses only asked to see the glory of God (Exodus 33:18) – God allowed him to see His back, but not the glory of His face. Philip still wants to depend on sight – to know the Father he must be able to see Him.

- **Father & Son (v9)**

We can almost hear His frustration as Jesus says "Don't you know me Philip". After three years of following Him day and night, hanging on every word He spoke and seeing the amazing things He did the disciples still hadn't grasped the full depth of the relationship between the Father and Son. In John 10:30 Jesus had stated it simply and clearly: "I and the Father are one". There was no doubt about His claim – in Him God was present in bodily form. In fact, this is the central message of John's gospel, which opens with that very claim (John 1:1). However, Christ needs to reinforce His point to them – the Father has been perfectly revealed in Him! They have seen His relationship with the Father – they should know He is the Way. They have heard His amazing teaching – they should

know He is the Truth. They have seen His ability to heal the sick and raise the dead – they should know He is the Life. Truly, anyone who has seen Christ has seen the Father.

- **Two great proofs of Christ's identity – words & works (vv10&11)**

Christ now appeals to two great proofs of His identity:

- a) **His words** (v10) – the words Jesus spoke were the words of the Father. They were not just Jesus' own words, although they were His words. The Father was accomplishing His will and work through Christ.
- b) **His actions** (v11) – if they cannot accept the words as proof of this intimate relationship, they could at least believe because of Jesus' miracles. No one in all the history of Israel had ever performed such amazing deeds. His miracles showed that He had power over nature, disease, death, evil spirits and even sin – who else could have such power other than God Himself?

In Christ both words and deeds went perfectly hand in hand, complementing each other – there was no hypocrisy or inconsistency in Him. The revelation of God in Christ was through His perfect obedience to the will of His Father – that revelation will be made perfect in the death and resurrection of Christ, because that is the ultimate obedience to the Father's will. In the cross, God is perfectly revealed – the meeting place of wrath and mercy, truth and grace, holiness and love! It is interesting that Jesus speaks of the Father indwelling Him (v11) – this prepares us for 14:17 where the Holy Spirit is said to indwell us. In v11 Jesus calls again for a response of faith in Him – through faith in Christ we know God. (cf. 10:30)

CONCLUSIONS:

- a) **Faith reveals God**

Faith reveals God to us, because by trusting in Christ we see what God is really like.

- b) **Jesus is the Truth who explains everything**

Jesus is the Life (14:12-14)

- **The mission of the New Community (v12a)**

Those who have faith in Christ will do what He has been doing (refers back to v10 – the Father is doing His work through Him). The Church's mission is to carry on the mission of Christ – to be His hands, feet and mouth in the world (His body).

- **Two amazing promises:**

- a) **Greater things (v12b)**

In fact, we will do even greater things that Christ did because He is returning to the Father. If Christ did not return to Heaven the mission of the Church would be geographically limited, but by His departure the way is paved for the expansion of the Church throughout the world. What does He mean by "greater things" – more spectacular miracles? This evidently did not happen in the early church – in Acts there are miracles, but less than Christ performed and seldom as spectacular. The greatest work is when a life is transformed by the Holy Spirit of God – "Greater works" means more conversions. There is no greater work possible than the conversion of a soul" (JC Ryle). The works are greater in quantity, not quality. Also, the gospel would go out to a pagan Roman world without the background of OT that Palestine had, but people would trust in Christ and whole cultures would be influenced by His teaching.

- b) **Whatever you ask (vv13&14)**

Prayer of faith in Christ is vital to seeing these greater things. If we are to be used by God we must trust in God and ask Him for His will to be done in us. Notice that it is in Jesus' name and for the Father's glory that we must pray – not for our glory or by our own right. When it says that we should ask in Jesus' name this is not some magical formula ("name it and claim it") – it refers only to those who "seek His glory and speak accurately for Him". The person seeking God's glory and praying in Jesus' name will want only those things that God wants. At the heart of this is a relationship with God through Christ – the following verses will reveal this relationship in more detail and will explain how this power can really be revealed in us (by the Holy Spirit). Intended to give hope to them – even without Him present they can do even more amazing things! We cannot expect Christ to do what **we** want, but we can be assured that He will use us to accomplish **His** purpose if we are available to Him. If we are not available, He will accomplish his purpose through a different means.

- **My question – how can this happen?**

How can Christ accomplish His will through us? This is a loose thread that carries into the following section. In the next study we will discover how God's power can live in us.

CONCLUSION:

a) Faith releases power

Faith in Christ releases the power of God in our lives. Can you live for Christ now? YES! Can God do amazing things through you? YES! Can you be used by Him to do even greater things? YES!

b) Jesus is the Life who lives through us

The Challenge

I have examined this passage through the three headings Way, Truth and Life. This statement of Christ is truly one of the most profound things He ever said. It is one of seven "I am" sayings in John's gospel, which speak of His divinity (based on the name "I am" revealed by God to Moses in Exodus 3:14).

Thomas à Kempis, 15th Century author of *The Imitation of Christ*, wrote that:

Without the Way there is no going
Without the Truth there is no knowing
Without the Life there is no living.

In these three titles we discover that Jesus is the ultimate answer to life's deepest questions.

The New Covenant community is a community of faith in Christ. We live by faith not by sight, confident that we have come to know the Father through the Son, that now we can do the work of Christ in His power as we look forward to His return to take us to be with Him. As the community of the faithful in Christ, we offer the world:

- **The Way** – Christ answers the question of where human history is going and what human destiny is. In Him we offer the world **HOPE!**
- **The Truth** – Christ answers the question of what is right and wrong and what is true. In Him the world makes sense and our hearts find rest. In Him we offer the world **PEACE!**
- **The Life** – Christ answers the question of why we are here – He gives purpose to human existence. In Him we offer the world **PURPOSE!**

I am not the world's greatest flyer – in fact, although I have flown dozens of times, I still get quite nervous, especially on take off and landing. There are three things above everything else that I need to know when I fly. I need to know where the plane is going first of all. If I want to go to Kuala Lumpur I had better be sure that the plane I board isn't heading to Kathmandu or Karachi! I check my ticket when I buy it and check the flight number as I board the plane. Secondly, I like to know that the pilot can be trusted. I feel reassured when the pilot welcomes us on board and when he sounds like a sensible person, with a clear voice. I suspect that if the pilot started to speak and I noticed that his voice was slurred or that he was a little bit too frivolous I might have less confidence about the journey. I am reminded of a scene from a certain spoof movie where the pilot and co-pilot of an aeroplane both fall ill. The stewardess announces over the PA system:

Ladies and gentleman, this is your stewardess speaking. We regret any inconvenience the sudden cabin movement might have caused this is due to periodic air pockets we encountered. There's no reason to be alarmed and we hope you enjoy the rest of your flight. By the way, is there anyone on board who knows how to fly a plane?

Needless to say absolute chaos ensues. Thirdly, I have developed a habit when flying of looking out of the window every so often to see if the engines are still working. I want to know that the plane has sufficient power to get me to the destination in one piece. In the end of the day, when it comes to flying I am reduced to faith. I cannot set the destination, and I cannot fly the plane. I must trust the airline, the pilot and the plane to get me where I need to go. The story is told of an elderly man, Uncle Oscar, who was apprehensive about his first airplane ride. Afterwards his friends, eager to hear how it went, asked if he had enjoyed the flight. "Well," commented Uncle Oscar, "it wasn't as bad as I thought it might be, but I'll tell you this. I never did put all my weight down!"

How like Oscar we are. Jesus is the Way – the destination is assured through Him, and if we have truly trusted in Him there is no doubt about where our lives are heading. Not only that, but He is the Truth – He can be trusted entirely and not only do we know that He is a trustworthy pilot but we also know the designer and builder of the plane! Finally, He is the Life – do we really doubt that He is able and will take us safely to the destination? And not only that, the experience of the flight will be exciting, exhilarating and fulfilling! Like Uncle Oscar, we grip hold of the seat with white knuckles and keep our full weight off our feet. Let us place our full trust in Christ and enjoy the flight. Through His power and by faith in Him we will do great things.