

Greater Comfort (John 14:18–24)

By Pastor Jeff Alexander (5/8/2022)

Introduction

The upper room discourse (John 13:31–14:31) continues with the Lord’s charge to His grieving disciples: “*Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust God; trust in me also*” (v. 1). In the verses that follow, Jesus answers this question by revealing the things that He was doing.

1. Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom, was going to prepare a place in the Father’s house for His bride, the church. When the preparations were finished, Jesus assured the disciples that He would return to take them to Himself to be with Him forever.
2. To this He add, “*And you know the way to where I am going*” (v. 4). He said this to prompt Thomas to express his unbelief (v. 5). Did Thomas not know Jesus? Jesus’ response to Thomas was to declare that He and He only was the way to the Father (v. 6).
3. Then, He rebuked Thomas: “*If you had known me, you would have known my Father also*” (v. 7). Christianity is glorious union with Christ and the Father. “*In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you*” (v. 20). It is “that day” we will investigate in this message.
4. Jesus stated, “*If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him*” (v. 7). God’s working to create a new people to populate the new heavens and the new earth, the kingdom of Heaven over which Jesus is King and Lord. Kingdom citizens are a people who *know* Him and, in the knowing, live like Him (2 Peter 3:11–13; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 18; Galatians 6:15, 16).

In the passage before us, we see a glorious fulfillment of Isaiah’s closing prophecy: “*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind*” (Isaiah 65:17). Jesus makes a glorious promise, “*I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*” Are these just comforting words? Or is there a deeper message they are intended to convey? (Isaiah 65:18).

I. A Word of Consolation?

1. Verse 18 is often preached as if Jesus were just continuing to comfort troubled hearts. The King James has it, “*I will not leave you comfortless.*” It is doubtless true that the disciples felt abandoned, but was this statement simply to console them? Was Jesus simply concerned about how they felt?
 - a. First, the Greek word translated *orphan* (*orphanos*, from which the English word comes) is found only twice in the NT—here and James 1:27. In the latter verse, James clearly references the OT requirement to protect orphans and widows (Exodus 22:21 and Deuteronomy 24:17). However, the term as used by Jesus in this text is in a *figurative* sense.
 - b. Was Jesus solely addressing the *fear* that His leaving would make His followers orphans in the usual sense? No. Jesus followed this promise with “*I will come to you.*” But His coming to them would not be in the usual sense of His physical presence. How would this be? His going away was not to abandon them but to enable the purpose for which He was saving them—to live His life—“*Because I live, you also will live.*”
2. Christ’s words (vv. 18–24) introduce a transition from one age (old covenant) to the new age of the Spirit (new covenant), as seen in the words, “*in that day*” (v. 20).
 - a. In this new age of the Spirit, the disciples would *know* something they previously did not know. The Greek denotes *knowledge* of what is real and true. It is truth grasped by understanding and percep-

tion. It is to experience truth. Truth is to be lived out as light in darkness. It is the will of God lived out in selfless service to the glory of God. It is faith revealing the invisible God to a rebellious world.

- b. So, how would they know? Before we address that, note that Jesus earlier prepared for this (John 7:17; 8:31, 32). Here, Jesus clearly tells us that those who know the truth are those who also obey Him (v. 21).

II. Who Deserts Whom?

1. The Lord stated concerning his people: *“These have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations”* (Isaiah 66:3). The Lord’s standard is clear: *“Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? ... But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word”* (Isaiah 66:1, 2).

Yes, the disciples’ hearts were troubled when Jesus informed them that He was going away. Their fear was that He was deserting them. They had come to depend on Him, and now they feared His absence. Thus, He promised He would not desert them:

2. This promise (*“I will come to you”*) has caused many commentators to ask, which coming? Was it the coming of Christ to the disciples in His post-resurrection ministry? Was it the promise of His second coming at the end of the gospel age? Neither question is correct. The context of the passage clearly shows that Jesus meant His coming to them in the Person of the Holy Spirit.
3. This new age of the Spirit was made possible because Jesus, in His obedience, made it possible for the Spirit permanently to indwell believers. When the Spirit came, He enabled the real saving work of Christ in the believers, the work of *sanctification*—making them holy.
- a. Jesus stated this purpose in no uncertain terms: *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (v. 24). This was not a command, as implied in the KJV. The truth was introduced in verse 15: *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (v. 15).
- b. This whole upper-room discourse is the Lord’s response to four comments by the disciples: (1) *Peter* first asked, *“Lord, where are you going?”* (13:36). Jesus responded (13:38, 14:1). (2) *Thomas* then asked, *“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”* (14:5). Jesus responded (14:6, 7). (3) *Philip* stated, *“Lord, show us the father, and it is enough for us”* (14:8). Jesus responded (14:9, 10). (4) Last, *Judas* raised the question: *“Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?”* (14:22). Jesus responded (14:23).

A true believer is one who loves the Lord, giving proof of that love by keeping (“to attend to carefully and guard diligently”) His Word.

In Conclusion

Jesus warned, *“And that word that you hear is not mine but the Father’s who sent me”* (v. 24). This is a warning to the Jews (and all others) who believed their relationship to God was secure while they rejected Jesus and sought to destroy Him. They had chosen their own ways. The Lord responded (Isaiah 66:4).

Jesus also warned those who do not love Him and do not keep His Word. Do you claim to be saved? Do you keep His word? I ask with Jim Elliff, “Is this the generation that will turn from neglecting God?”