

Mike Schellhase
Three Rivers Grace Church
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Who is Jesus?

Let's re-read our text this morning – I'm going to start back in chapter 13 for some context and then we will focus on the beginning of chapter 14 in our time this morning.

Read John 13:33 – 14:11

What are the most important questions to ask in life? If we would ask random people on the street the most important question in the world to them, what would most of them say? Some might say, what is the meaning of life? Some might question the future of the US economy or the future of their children. Interestingly, as I was preparing this sermon I googled this topic and found a British article called the "10 All Time Greatest Questions". Among this list were such important questions as, "Do men have cellulite?" and "Does cheese give you nightmares?" and "Why do identical twins have different fingerprints?". I'm going to submit to you this morning that none of those are the greatest or most important questions in life. I think the most important question that every human on this earth needs to consider is: Who is Jesus? That was the theme of our Vacation Bible School this past week. It's also the theme of the Bible itself – all pointing to, foreshadowing, explaining, narrating the life and teaching of Jesus.

Don't worry, I'm not going to try cover all of this ground this morning. I simply want to spend our time looking at who Jesus is saying He is here in this passage and consider what that should mean to us.

I love how chapter 14 starts. Jesus cares for the disciples. After he just got done saying in chapter 13 that He was going away, He tells them not to let their hearts be troubled. He has just told his disciples that he is going away – something they clearly did not understand what he meant. The disciples have spent years with Jesus at this point but they see what God allows them to see and understand what he allows them to understand. Earlier in John, in John chapter 6 is one example of Peter

clearly articulating who Jesus is. It says “⁶⁶ After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷ So Jesus said to the Twelve, “Do you want to go away as well?” ⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹ and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

But we can tell here in chapter 14 and from other scriptural evidence they did not understand what Jesus is talking about when he foretells what is coming in his death on the cross. And Jesus is trying to reassure them regarding what will happen next. Even though John 12:27, Jesus himself says that his soul is troubled. He knows what is coming and the anguish that is ahead of Him and yet he wants to reassure them. And he does this by digging deeper into who He really is. So He starts by telling them not to be troubled and then tells them two commands: believe in God, believe also in Him. Or some translations say “trust” instead of “believe”, it’s the Greek word *pisteuo*. He is putting himself as a worthy object of trust or belief, on the same plane as God. This is important for him to remind the disciples of, for the credibility of what He is about to promise next.

Next he tells them of the rooms in His Father’s house and that he is going there to prepare a place for you. Again we see him referring to God his Father, another claim of his divinity. He is the Son of God. The reason for Jesus going away, he tells his disciples is for their benefit. He is going to prepare a place for them, and he is doing that in order that he can come again and bring Him to myself – that where I am you may be also. Notice the ordering here – He is bringing us to be with him, not Him coming to where we are. It’s all about Him. So he is going away in order to make preparation so that ultimately they will not have to be separated from Him. So how do we understand the “place” – in my Father’s house. I believe my Father’s house represents heaven - this is the simplest and most obvious explanation of what Jesus means here. So Jesus is going to prepare “the place” – what do we make of this? I don’t think this means a literal preparation of heaven. I don’t see any scriptural evidence that heaven needs to be prepared or that Christ’s work included some sort of lodging preparation in heaven. Rather I believe what Jesus means here is that his going IS the preparation. His going to the cross, his going away from them to take on the sins of the

world and bear the wrath of God, all of which He knew was coming, is what would prepare for them a place in heaven. As DA Carson says “The point is not the lavishness of each apartment, but the fact that such ample provision has been made that there is more than enough space for every one of Jesus’ disciples to join him in his Father’s home”.

I’m sure many of you have heard this promise many times, but let me make another point here about what Jesus says in verse 3 here. He talks of the rooms in His Father’s house in verse 2, true enough, but look at where the emphasis is in verse 3: he says that He will take you to – the rooms? No, it says it will take us to “myself”. The point, the ultimate thing to look forward to, is not heaven or some promise of a beautiful, safe, perfect place or some luxurious resort to live eternally. It’s the promise of being with Jesus himself. Of being together with him, that were He is there we may be also. This is consistent with Paul’s instructions in 1 Thessalonians 4: “For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words”. So let’s encourage one another with these words: **The true reward of the Christian life, is not a place but a person.** It’s the reward of being together with Jesus for eternity.

Jesus: Way, Truth and Life

Jesus’ next statement leaves Thomas confused. Jesus says “And you know the way to where I am going”. I have to smile at Thomas’s objection – he says where don’t even know where you are going, how can we know the way? In today’s world, the analogy might be – I don’t even know what address to put into my GPS, how will it possibly be able to provide the route me to get there! Of course this underlines the fact that Jesus’ words are not sinking in to the disciples since he did just tell them the destination in verses 2 and 3, namely – His father’s house to be with him. But Jesus answers again and his familiar words are the central theme of his answer to the question of who He is and why they should believe in Him – “I am the way, the truth and the life”. Now remember that Thomas’ original question is how can we know the way. So I think Jesus’ emphasis here is on the way – but that doesn’t mean

that truth and life are subordinate ideas in this clause. The fact that Jesus is the truth and the life must support the fact He is the way. Or, said differently, “Jesus is the way to God, precisely because he is the truth of God and the life of God” (Carson).

So what does it mean for Jesus to be the truth of God? This is obviously a topic that could take many sermons to unpack. I think back to the prologue of the Gospel of John, where Jesus is called the Word. God speaks only truth, so it follows that his Word is Truth. John also calls Jesus the “true light” in chapter 1, the idea here being that Jesus enables people to see (via that light) the truth of God. As he says in John 1:17-18 “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known”. Colossians 1 tells us that “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross”. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, with the fullness of God dwelling in Him. If he images a True God perfectly and has the fullness of the True God dwelling in Him, this also means he is the definition of truth as well. I can’t help but picture the scene coming, when Jesus is before Pilate and tells him that “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice”. And of course we hear Pilate’s revealing and condemning response – “What is truth?”. The answer was standing right in front of him. Jesus is Truth.

And what does it mean that Jesus is the Life? Again we look back to the prologue of the gospel of John: verse 4 says that “In him was life and the life was the light of men”. Again, just as with truth, John equates light with life. Jesus, the Word, had life in Him, and the life was the light of men. Again, later in John 11, we hear Jesus make one of his “I am” statements: “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me,

though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die". Interestingly, Jesus ties in the theme of resurrection here. When Jesus is comforting and teaching Mary in John 11 or his disciples here in John 14, the concepts of resurrection and life must have been much more hazy, abstract concepts than they are to us today. On this side of the cross, we can look at Jesus saying He is the life and rejoice that he did conquer death – he overcame it, was victorious over it.

I do think "life" here means more than just resurrection, however. Jesus being "the life" means more than just his conquering of death. It means life for those who are in Him. He is the only source of life, the only hope for life for any of us. We're not talking here about physical life but true spiritual life. As the familiar verse in Ephesians 2 says "you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked". That is the state of all men – dead in sin. No spiritual life, no real life in us whatsoever. But verse 4 continues: "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ". The one, true life gave his life to give his people life.

One of the more well-known apologetic answers to the question of who Jesus is was popularized by CS Lewis. Lewis encouraged people to decide whether Jesus was Lord, Liar or a Lunatic. This is one passage this morning that we can point to and raise this question. Many people in the world say that Jesus was a "good man" or a "great teacher". Passages like the one this morning make those impossible claims to make. Good men do not go about telling people that they are the exclusive way to God. Or that they are preparing a place to ultimately return and bring us to be with them. No good teacher says that. If the claims are not true then either this man must be crazy – a lunatic, or he must be know that he is not those things and a liar, trying to deceive the people he is talking to. If those bold claims Jesus does make are true – then he must be Lord. Because that is exactly what he claims to be.

Exclusivity

To be sure, Jesus does make some very bold claims here. He claims to be an equal of object of belief and trust to God in verse 1. He claims to be God's Son, in verse 2. He claims to be the truth, the life. And he

claims to be the way. The exclusive way to the Father. When Jesus says his “the way” in verse 6, he is not claiming to be one of the ways to God. Or even one of the ways to find truth or life. As he says in the very next sentence “no one comes to the Father except through me”.

When Jesus says he is the way, he is not just saying he is a means of access. The analogy is not that he is one set of road directions and turns to get from point A to point B. He is the way in the sense that He is the only means of transportation period from point A to point B. If we take “way” out of context as some try to do, it can sound like Jesus is one possible avenue to God. But as we see here, Jesus is the one and only one way to the Father. He alone enables it and He alone effectively makes it happen.

Listen to this Thomas a Kempis mediation: “Follow thou me. I am the way and the truth and the life. Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou must follow; the truth which thou must believe; the life for which thou must hope. I am the inviolable way; the infallible truth, the never-ending life. I am the straightest way; the sovereign truth; life true, life blessed, life uncreated.”

In our pluralistic world today, saying that Jesus is the only way to God is not a popular thing to say. That does not make it any less true. Just because post-modern society wants to be able to say that we are our own arbiters of truth and we each have to decide how best to get to God (for us!) does not begin to make it any more true. If God is truly God, does He not dictate how we may come to Him? And furthermore, who wants to come? We know this of ourselves, that we are totally depraved, not wanting anything to do with God’s glory by nature. The lies of coming to Him on our own terms are astounding when we rightly understand who He is and who we are. But as I Corinthians 1 says, “For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.’”.

Jesus and the Father Are One

Jesus continues to impress upon them his identity in verses 7-11 and namely his connection to the Father. He equates knowing him to knowing His father in verse 7 and then in verse 9 he says that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father. This harkens back to the Colossians 1 passage we read earlier - he is the "image of the invisible God". As Hebrews 1 says, he is the "exact imprint of his nature". If you've seen the Son, if you know the Son, then you have seen and known the Father. Jesus goes on to say that he is in the Father and his Father is in him. All that this means in terms of the Trinitarian fellowship, I am sure I do not understand. But we have a very clear picture here of Jesus' claims to divinity and his closeness with his Father. It's a very clear picture of the **unity** that exists between Jesus and the Father.

We also see further the credibility and the reliability of the things Jesus is saying in verse 10. Jesus says "the words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works". So Jesus is not speaking even on his own authority - He is speaking as the Father himself works.

This again speaks to Jesus not just being an envoy or agent sent from God - He is God. He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. He speaks as the Father dwelling in Him works. Jesus does **everything** the Father tells him to do and he does **everything** the Father tells him to do.

Who We Are

Well, one of the other interesting things about this passage is looking back at the context at the end of chapter 13. Starting in verse 33, "33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.' <skipping to verse 36> 36 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." 37 Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." 38 Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."

I think Peter's reaction contrasts so helpfully what we're talking about this morning. Not because of where his intentions are - he clearly

wants to follow Jesus. He claims to be ready to die for him. But it shows the weakness of our humanity. Can you identify with Peter? I surely can. How little we know what we are capable of (or in-capable as the case may be). How often do we make pronouncements about what we will do or what will or will not happen – even though we have no real ability to carry it out. Even in trivial, every day things we can't do this. I can say I'll be at an appointment at a certain time, but I can't control traffic, whether my car breaks down that day, or anything like that. Do you realize how weak, how frail, how fickle we truly are? I would submit to you that you probably have no idea. I probably have no idea. We live our lives today with illusions of control and of power over our circumstances. Or if not over our circumstances, our control of ourselves and the things we do, right? That's exactly what Peter is saying here – he wasn't saying that he would stop Jesus' enemies by force (of course he tried), he was saying that his devotion would never waver. But he didn't know himself well enough. His devotion wavered to the point of denying Jesus.

So do we realize then how different Jesus' words are in chapter 14 from Peter's words at the end of chapter 13? Peter's words sound grandiose, and of course they are. But what good are grand pronouncements if we have no ability to carry them out? What good is it if a large, imposing man is physically threatening you and one of your smallest, frailest friends stands up and says "I will defend you!". Is that reassuring? Not unless you truly believe the ability of that person to actually help.

Think about Peter's words another way this morning. Do we know what we're capable of? I don't think Peter would have ever dreamed that he would not only abandon Jesus but even deny that he knew him three times. That is a scary thought, isn't it? But my point isn't to scare us – it's to open our eyes to how weak and dependent we are. How dependent we are on God's grace to preserve us, to protect us, to grow us. As Paul says in 2 Cor 12: "But he (God) said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Paul understood that his weakness was a reason to boast in God's strength!

Peter's words in chapter 13 contrast so well to Jesus' words in chapter 14. Not because I am trying to pick on Peter – we are weak like He was. It's because when Jesus speaks it is unlike anything we can compare to – He actually has the credibility to back it up. He is God's Son. He is God. He is the second person of the Trinity. Omnipotent, omniscient, good and trustworthy. When he speaks these words of comfort to his disciples then and to us, his disciples today, we can know that He will carry them out.

Application

So what should we take away from this passage this morning? If you are not a believer this morning, if you do not know who Jesus truly is, then I encourage you to really ask yourself that question and consider what the Bible says about who Jesus is. Ask him to change your heart and reveal himself to you. No other pursuits or questions of life matter without the knowledge of this fundamental question. And it does not matter if you can intellectually know who Jesus is, if you can repeat what you have maybe heard many times. Knowing Jesus isn't about intellectual knowledge – it's about heart knowledge. James 2:19 tells us that even demons believe that there is one God – and they shudder because of it. It's about knowing and believing that He is who He says He is, and trusting him because of it. I'd also like to exhort you to consider how much you truly know yourself. I'm not talking about "finding the best you" or some search for meaning inside yourself – I'm talking about who you truly are before God. How weak and frail, and powerless and small we are before Him. How despite all of that, we still think the world revolves around us and we fail to acknowledge and glorify God. Consider this morning that you have no ground to stand on your own before the Holy and Righteous God of the Universe.

If you are a believer this morning, here are 4 things I'd like to encourage you in:

- Rejoice that we can trust Jesus' promises
 - He is Truth, His word is truth. Think of the encouragement he directly gives his disciples to not lose heart. We should not lose heart. Also applies to all of his Word – Scripture itself.
- Glory in who Jesus is

- If you are a believer you don't just know about Jesus – you know Him. You know God and more importantly He knows you. Glory in all Jesus declares himself to be – give God glory for all that He has given us in Jesus.
- Give up on our own efforts, admit and glory in our weakness
 - Reflect on how weak we really are – how much we need to rely on God's grace for everything. Stop making pronouncements like Peter – that “I'll never do that” when ultimately we need God's grace to walk with Him every day.
- Be assured in your salvation, if you are his:
 - Remember how Jesus tells Peter after his resurrection the rest of the story: “Satan demanded to sift you like wheat, but I prayed for you”. Jesus cares for his sheep and will not lose one.