

(38) THE NEVERENDING AWAITS: JOHN 14

Focus Idea: The future hope of Jesus' followers is not a vague abstraction. Christians believe that their ultimate joy will be in a *place*; the guarantee of that final joy is experienced already in the presence of a *person*.

The Context: The gospel according to John has been introduced in previous lessons; as the last of the four accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, it offers the most thoughtful considerations of Jesus' divinity.

Chapter 14 is set on the night before Jesus' crucifixion. Jesus and his disciples have gathered for an evening meal. During the supper, Jesus has taken the extraordinary step of washing his disciples' feet. He has identified Judas Iscariot as his betrayer and Judas has subsequently left the company. Immediately preceding chapter 14 is Jesus' prediction that Simon Peter would disown him three times before the rooster crows.

The Characters: John 14 is an extended conversation between Jesus and his disciples. Thomas, Philip, and Judas (not Judas Iscariot) contribute to the discussion.

The Core: Jesus Christ had an extraordinary impact on the world. For three years, he taught, healed, ministered, and served the people of Jerusalem and Galilee.

But Jesus is not present in the world anymore. We can't listen to him or interview him. We can't ask him for blessings or medical miracles. So why are Christians so fixated on him today?

John 14 points to three reasons why the church still loves and adores a man they cannot see. First, Jesus says, he is coming back. In verse 3, Jesus indicates that he will go away "to prepare a place" for his disciples. After this, he will "come back and take" his followers to be with him. This language reflects the commitments made by young men to their betrothed; the groom will ready a home for his bride and then return and claim her so that she might live there with him.

Where is Jesus now? He has bodily returned to his Father's house (vs. 2) where they will ultimately live.

Secondly, Jesus explains to his followers that he is "the" way, truth, and life (vs. 6). In a pluralistic culture like ours, such a claim feels scandalously narrow. But Jesus is clear: no one comes to the Father except through him. Moreover, Jesus claims that his disciples have seen the Father because they have seen him. These words would have approached blasphemy in the Jewish mind, but they represent Jesus' self-understanding and establish the Church's primary creed: Jesus and the Father "are one" (John 10:30)

Finally, Jesus promises to be with his disciples by way of the Spirit of Truth (vs. 17). Because the disciples have this Spirit, they will not be left as orphans but will be "with" Jesus (vs. 18). Also called the "Advocate" (vs. 26), this Holy Spirit will be sent in Jesus' name and will remind his followers of all that Jesus has said.

In the end, Jesus asserts that his return to the Heavenly Father is in the best interest of the disciples (vs. 28). These words, echoed in John 16:7, suggest that the presence of the Holy Spirit (a person not limited by space or time) is better for the church than the ongoing bodily presence of Jesus would have been. Nevertheless, there *will* be a physical reunion of the followers of Jesus and their leader. They will be with him in his Father's house forever.