

“John 14: Anticipating the Kingdom of God”

John 14:1-31

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Scripture: John 14:1-31

Sermon:

Introduction...

Have you ever been lonely? Have you ever been lonely before somebody leaves? Knowing that they're going to go away, you anticipate their departure and feel lonely? Megan has reached an interesting stage in her development. As an infant she went through a stage where she was afraid or upset if we left, but she grew through that stage. She seems to have reached another similar stage now at the age of 3.

This week, Amy was in Toronto all day Tuesday to help her aunt move from the house where she'd lived for 60 years into an apartment style condo! That was a huge move! Before Amy left, she told Megan that she would be gone the rest of the day, but would be home that night and see her in the morning. Megan did not like that! She cried and begged “Mommy” not to go. She was in a sad mood the rest of the morning. She clung to me to an unusual degree and was generally upset. Several times she said she wanted Mommy to come home. She certainly didn't want me! She wanted Mommy.

That was just for one day! And Megan is just a toddler, but I think we've all experienced something like that. This is what Jesus' disciples were feeling in John 13-17. Jesus was telling them that he was going to go away for a while and they would not be able to follow yet, but that he would return and bring them with him. The setting of these chapters is in the Upper Room before Jesus was crucified. Part of the setting may also have included the short trip outside from the city to the Garden of Gethsemane. It may have been walking along the road that Jesus said, “I am the vine,” pointing to the vineyards along the way.

It is interesting that up to John 13 the action moved fairly quickly. The first 12 chapters of John cover about 3 years of ministry! Then, John 13-17 cover a few hours. John 13-19 cover about 24 hours total! When we step back and look at the Gospel of John as a whole, we realize that **this teaching or discussion in the Upper Room before the crucifixion is a major emphasis of John**. John uses about 2/3 of his book to cover 3 years of ministry and ¼ to cover 3 days. Then, in conclusion, he covers a few weeks. If you've been reading along with us you may have noticed how suddenly everything slows down at chapter 13!

The scene, as I mentioned, begins in Chapter 13. Jesus first washes his disciples' feet. Then he tells them one of them will betray him. As they are having the Passover meal together (although John leaves out the specific description of the Lord's Supper) Jesus tells them he is going only going to be with them for a little longer. Just as he told the Jews in John 7:33-34, Jesus tells his disciples that where he is going they cannot follow. They will look for him but not be able to find him.

Then he drops the big bomb shell- that Peter himself will deny Jesus 3 times before morning!

Text

Let's pick up the narrative, then, in Chapter 14. Please read along with me and keep your Bibles open to the page so you can come back to it as we work through the chapter.

Explanation

After telling Peter that he will betray Jesus, Jesus then comforts all his disciples saying, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, but rather trust in God and in me.” He then goes on to describe what is going to happen, but he gives theological descriptions instead of a description of events. **Jesus gives the meaning of what is about to happen, rather than the details of the events that will bring these things to pass.**

We have the privilege in hindsight of knowing what Jesus was talking about. The disciples, though, at the time had no clue what was coming! John, recording his Gospel later, is very honest about the disciples' lack of understanding and I think we should be gracious to them as well.

But, as I said, we have the value of hindsight to help us make sense of what Jesus was talking about. I want to step aside from the text for a moment to remind you, or for some of you show you for the first time, a very helpful diagram that can help us make sense of a very deep, complex theological reality. [pic] You need to put your thinking caps on for this. It is within the frame work of this theological truth that we can read John 14 and

make much more sense out of it. Usually I wait until after we have analysed the text before giving an explanation, but I want us to have this theological picture in our minds as we work through the text. I think it will make more sense to us if we do.

We've talked before about the Kingdom of God. When we use the word "kingdom" we tend to think of a geographical region, like the United Kingdom. But that's not what the word "kingdom" means in the Bible. Rather, **kingdom means authority to rule**. So the Kingdom of God means the authority of God to rule. This sheds light on a lot of Biblical passages, such as Jesus saying, "The kingdom of God is at hand! Repent and believe!" in Mark 1:15. Or the Lord's Prayer, "Your Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." These both mean that the authority of God is at hand, or we are praying that God's authority would be recognized on earth as it is in heaven.

[diagram] When talking about the Kingdom of God we frequently wind up dealing with the struggle between the authority of God on the one hand and rebellion against God, sin, on the other. This is where our helpful diagram comes in. There are actually two kingdoms at once. There is the kingdom of this world and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of this world is represented by the line running along the bottom. This kingdom, or this authority, which is in rebellion against God, stretches back to the Fall of humanity into sin in the Garden of Eden.

The kingdom of God, or God's authority to rule, is represented by the line that runs along the top. With Christ's death and resurrection, the authority of God broke into this world in a new, powerful way. The power of sin and death, the authority they hold, was broken. Now there are two kingdoms at work, struggling against one another.

The kingdom of God, along the top, stretches off to infinity on the right. The kingdom of this world, however, the Present Age of Sin, will come to an end. When? When Christ returns in glory and sits in judgement of creation and brings redemption to creation, making all things new.

We live in the in between times. We live between the resurrection of Christ and the return of Christ. As Christians, as those who have asked Jesus to bring his authority into our hearts, minds and wills, we straddle two kingdoms at once. We are citizens of the Kingdom of God, but we are residents in the Kingdom of this World, or the Kingdom of Sin. This is why it can be so hard to live as a Christian! We are the battle ground between two warring kingdoms; between two warring authorities!

So, why is this diagram helpful for us today? Why am I bringing out this pretty deep theological truth? We haven't even looked at the text yet!

Where, in this diagram, do the events of John 13-19 take place? Specifically, the chapter we are looking at, Chapter 14? Where, on this timeline, do these events take place? When Jesus is speaking, explaining what's about to happen, is this before or after the crucifixion? **[diagram 2]** It's before. That means that Jesus is speaking to his disciples *before* the coming of the Kingdom of God in power, before the in-breaking of God's Kingdom.

When John did John write his Gospel? Where, on the timeline, does the writing take place? Where do the final few chapters of John take place? **[diagram 3]** They take place after the crucifixion and, more importantly, after the resurrection! John's Gospel was written after the fact and, if you've been reading carefully through the whole book, you will notice a number of references John makes to things happening or becoming clear later, but the disciples not understanding things at the time they happened.

This is also the spot from which we are reading John. We, like John at the time of recording his Gospel, are between the resurrection of Jesus and the return of Jesus. We are in the spot where the two kingdoms overlap, the kingdom of the world, the kingdom of sin, and the kingdom of God.

Now, here's the really deep question. When Jesus was speaking, from what perspective was he speaking? One of the themes throughout John is Jesus' divine foreknowledge of what was happening. He knew before his death and resurrection that they were going to happen and he knew why. He repeatedly says, before his death, that this is why he came in the first place!

It would be tempting, or easy, to suggest that Jesus was speaking from the perspective of John 20-21. That's our perspective so it would be easy to suggest that this was Jesus' perspective with his divine foreknowledge. But this is too short sighted! Jesus' perspective, when talking to the disciples in the Upper

Room, was not that of John 14. No, he had foresight and knew about the cross. But neither was it the perspective of John 20! It wasn't our perspective of the in-between times. [**diagram 4**] Rather, Jesus' perspective was that of the Kingdom of God after Jesus' return when the Kingdom of the World was finished.

As Jesus was speaking to his disciples in John 14, our chapter, he was speaking to them from the perspective of when he will return in power and redeem creation bringing an end to the rule of sin. It was as if he was looking back from that time in the future and trying to describe to the disciples the meaning of what was going to happen both at the cross, but also at the return of Christ in glory.

What did that mean for the disciples? It meant they were confused. They had no idea what was about to happen. However, after the first Easter, when the disciples met the risen Jesus, and thereafter when they reflected on his words to them, certain pieces of the puzzle fell into place. Why? Because of hindsight.

What does this mean for us? It means, looking back at John 14, we can see some of what Jesus meant because it has already happened. But, other parts of what Jesus meant we are still looking forward to. All of what Jesus said in this chapter had not yet happened when he said it. However, now, some of what he said has happened but not all of it. In the future, at some point, everything Jesus described in this chapter will have come to pass and then, in hindsight, we will see all the pieces fitting together.

So, as we go through the text today, **we should ask ourselves, "Is Jesus describing something that has already happened for us, or is this something that will happen in the future?"** Knowing what we know now, we can have greater insight into Jesus' words than the disciples did at the time. Building on years of learning in the church we can glean quite a bit of what Jesus was talking about, even if we don't know all the details of all the events Jesus refers to.

What It Says

So, armed with this insight into Jesus' perspective, let's dive into the text and see what we can see. Remember, as we go, we are also looking for themes found throughout John's Gospel. I will point some out as we go.

The passage opens with Jesus saying that he is going to prepare a place for his disciples in his Father's house. He says he is going but will come back to take them with him so they can be with him. They do, in fact, know the way there already. Stop and think. Is this something that has already happened today or not yet? Part of it has. Jesus did go to be with the Father and to prepare a place for us with him. Also, Jesus did come back to the disciples after the resurrection. We, living in the in-between times, know that Jesus' return actually takes a couple of forms. There is the resurrection itself. That is Jesus' initial return to the world from death. He goes on to visit many of his disciples on numerous occasions. Also, as Jesus develops later in this chapter, part of Jesus' return to the disciples is the coming of the Holy Spirit! So we see that already this promise has been fulfilled in a variety of ways. However, while this is partially fulfilled, it is not completely fulfilled. Jesus also had in mind here his ultimate return in glory at the end of the Kingdom of this World. [DA Carson, *John*, p. 488; Frederick Dale Bruner, *John*, p. 807ff]

Thomas, not having any benefit from hindsight, asks how they are supposed to know where Jesus is going. This question sparks a beautiful answer from Jesus, one which the church has valued for centuries. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." This is one of Jesus' famous "I am" statements in John.

This verse, verse 6, is so helpful because it tells us that knowing Jesus is knowing how to get to God. Jesus is the way. He is the truth about God and he is the abundant life he promised. In Jesus we find life and truth and in Jesus we find the way to the Father.

In verse 7 Jesus tells us that knowing him is equivalent to knowing the Father. On one level this verse is powerful because it shows that Jesus saw himself as equal to God. Just as in verse 1 Jesus puts trusting in God on the same level as trusting in Jesus, here he puts knowing him on the same level as knowing God! This is part of John's emphasis on Jesus being truly, fully God.

On another level, this verse is comforting for us. Often we wonder what God is like. Too much of what we think God is like is shaped by our own negative experiences of authority figures. **But in Jesus we get to see exactly what God is like!** I don't know about you, but I've spoken to a lot of people who aren't really interested in knowing God, but Jesus is appealing to them. The irony is that this verse tells us that the same appealing

characteristics we find in Jesus are also characteristics of God! I like Jesus. That means I like God. Why? Because the two are one and the same! That is what Jesus explains in verses 9-11.

In verse 11, Jesus brings up believe based on evidence, the evidence of the miracles in his ministry. Belief and evidence are two important themes in John, so take note of those. Also, notice that the purpose of the miracles is to point to the unity between Jesus and the Father. They are also evidence of the Kingdom of God, the authority of God. Jesus wields the authority of God! Why? Because he is God.

Verse 12 is rather remarkable. Jesus says that his disciples will do even greater things than he has done! How is that possible? People have struggled over this verse because ultimately Jesus went to the cross and paid for our sins. Who can do more than that?!? Well, nobody can. But take note of when Jesus said this. He said this *before* the crucifixion. On our timeline, Jesus said this to the left of the cross, in the Kingdom of this World, before the Kingdom of God came bursting into the world. Why is this important? Because he says, “You will do greater things than these” – meaning the signs he had *already* performed. I think that leaves out the atonement on the cross and the resurrection.

Second, Jesus says, “Because I am going to the Father.” This is not to say, “You’re going to do greater things than these because I’m taking a break, sitting on the bench for a while, watching from the side lines.” No! Not at all! **It is precisely because Jesus is going to the Father, through the crucifixion and resurrection, that the disciples are able to do greater things that Jesus did in his earthly ministry. Why? Because in going to the Father, Jesus ushered in the Kingdom of God.**

The miracles in Jesus’ ministry had one purpose- to point to the fact that Jesus is the Saviour, the Messiah. But they cannot accomplish salvation in and of themselves. The miracles of Jesus’ ministry are firmly placed in the Kingdom of this World. They are not “part” of that world, but that is where they sit. And until Jesus was raised from the dead, those signs could not fully accomplish their goal of pointing to him as the Christ. [Carson, p. 496]

The things the disciples do, however, are part of the Kingdom of God. They are part of the Age to Come. Thus, they are greater than the miracles of Jesus’ earthly ministry. They point to the actual Atonement and Resurrection of Christ! The miracles the disciples did, and Jesus’ other followers after them, are part of the much greater work of the Kingdom of God, pointing to the greatest work of Jesus- paying for our sins and conquering death. And take note that it is Jesus doing these things through the disciples. Jesus isn’t sitting this round out. Rather, from his position next to the Father, he is doing even more through the disciples than he did in his earthly ministry before the cross. [Carson, p. 495-6]

Now, let’s take a look at v. 15. In the NIV it is easy to read this as “if you love me, then you will obey what I command.” But it is actually a continual process Jesus is describing. A better way of putting it is, “When you love me (not if), you will be keeping my commandments.” Jesus’ commandments are for us to allow him to love us and, out of that incredible depth of love we have received from him, to both love him back and to love one another. [Bruner, p. 835-836] In Chapter 13, Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. When Peter protested, Jesus said that unless we allow him to wash us, unless we allow him to love us, and thereby submit to his cleansing of us, we have no part in him. **So Jesus’ first command is to allow him to love us. Then, in response to that love, we love him back and love one another.**

As we love one another, Jesus sends the Spirit, another “counsellor” to be with us. The “you” in verse 16 is plural. It’s not just that the Spirit lives in me and lives in you, but that in all of us as a group, in loving relationship with one another out of the love we have experienced from Christ, the Spirit dwells in us as a community. [Bruner, p. 838]

This counsellor is our advocate. Literally the word means “one who comes along side.” The idea is not of a camp counsellor, or even a marriage counsellor, but of one who stands up for us, representing us and bearing witness for us like a legal counsellor. [Carson, p. 500] Notice that Jesus refers to him as “another” counsellor. Why? Because **Jesus is our first advocate!** He is the first one who came along side us. He literally came to earth and walked along side us! He is our advocate before the Father. He is our representative on the cross.

The Spirit, then, is another one who comes along side us. He lives in us and is among us. He represents us to God, stands up for us and speaks on our behalf. In verse 17 Jesus tells his disciples the Spirit is already with them, in Jesus (the Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism and never left!) and will dwell in them in the future.

Being with them was a pre-cross fulfilment. Being in them was a post-resurrection fulfilment. The Spirit dwelt in the disciples from the day of Pentecost onward until their deaths. We, as Jesus followers today, also experience the Spirit dwelling in us.

In verse 22, the “other” Judas asks how Jesus can reveal himself to them, but not to the whole world. Judas is thinking in terms of a Messiah who will set up an earthly rule. And in one sense, the good Judas is right. Someday, Jesus will reveal himself to the whole world when he returns in glory, but that day has not yet come. That day is further along our timeline. For now, between the cross and the return of Christ, only those the Spirit reveals Christ to will know Christ. This is not everybody, but only some. Remember, the world in John often means those opposed to Jesus. Here is just such a case. Those opposed to Jesus will not see Jesus or know him before his triumphal return sometime in the future. That’s what the good Judas couldn’t fathom.

In verse 23, Jesus promises that if anybody will love him, which he described earlier as keeping his commands to both accept Jesus’ love and to love one another, the Father will love that person and both the Father and Son will come dwell with him. Remember, in the opening verses Jesus said the disciples will go dwell with Jesus and the Father. Here, the Father and Jesus come to dwell in those who love them. In the first case, the people going to dwell with the Father and Jesus, that is an example of the final point of view of Jesus, the one on the far right of the timeline. Verse 23, the Father and Son coming to live in the believer, is an example of the in-between time, when God indwells the believer in this life, transforming his or her character to reflect Jesus more and more.

Verse 24, Jesus says, “I have told you these things while I’m still with you.” That’s before the cross, to the left on the timeline. Verse 25 Jesus says the Spirit will teach and remind the disciples of these things. That’s the middle of the time line, the in-between spot, the overlapping of the two kingdoms.

Verse 28 Jesus says that they should be happy he is going to the Father. Why? Because it is in going to the Father, through the cross and resurrection, that Jesus is able to accomplish for the disciples (and us) the salvation he came to bring! This is the whole point of Jesus!

Take note in verses 29-31 the themes from John. Jesus is telling them things before they happen- a sign of his full deity. He is doing this so they will believe, another theme in John. The prince of this world is mentioned, and the world must learn about Jesus. Finally, Jesus does exactly what the Father has commanded- another reference to who sent Jesus, which is part of his identity.

Why It Matters

Wow. So much to see! That was heavy sledding, right? So what does it matter? How do we apply this? First, **relationships matter**. Our relationship with Jesus matters a ton! He is the way to the Father. He is the truth about the Father. He is life. Our relationship with Jesus is the most important relationship ever. And, if you’ve been reading through John with us, you will see that everybody who hears of Jesus responds to Jesus. There are many whose relationship with Jesus is one of rejecting, discounting or ignoring Jesus. There are others who admire Jesus, are curious about Jesus, but do not believe in Jesus, they do not follow Jesus. They do not obey Jesus’ commands, which, as we saw today, are summed up in letting him love us and loving him and others in response.

How is your relationship with Jesus? Have you rejected him? Have you rejected his attempts to wash your feet? Have you rejected his love? If you’ve accepted his love for you, have you returned it by loving others around you? Have you been obedient to his commandments to love him and love one another?

Maybe you don’t feel like a super Christian. Maybe you are all too aware of your shortcomings and failures. That’s ok. Remember who Jesus was talking to in this chapter and when. He was talking to his disciples who, in a matter of hours, were going to completely desert him and abandon him! Yet he still gave them words of love and encouragement. He still promised the Spirit to them and that he and the Father would dwell in them. Jesus is in the forgiveness business! So ask for his forgiveness, submit to his cleansing love and, out of that love you have received, love the people around you.

How are your relationships with other Christians? That is important too. Jesus came to forgive us and bring us new life, but that new life takes place in community with one another. Yes, we will have eternal life in the future, but even then it will be eternal life in community! Love never fails. Faith and hope will come to final fulfilment, but love will continue. Love is a relationship word and it applies not just to our relationship with

Jesus but also with one another.

Since Jesus is in the forgiveness business, especially when we blow it big time, out of the forgiveness you have received, forgive others who have blown it with you. That is a great first step in loving one another. The Spirit, Jesus said, will dwell in us as a group, not just me and you in isolation as individuals. Our relationships with one another are where the Spirit dwells. That is where the world will see the authority of God at work, the God who says forgive one another as I have forgiven you.

Jesus says that he is the way, the truth and the life. There is a wonderful breadth of appeal here. **In the East, people are always looking for the way.** That's what "tao" means. The Eastern worldview is searching for the tao, the way. Jesus is the way. He doesn't know the way. He doesn't point the way. He *is* the way. The way to God is not through meditation. The way to God is not through doing enough good that your good deeds outweigh the bad. The way to God is not through ceremony, or pious activity, or holy living. The way to God is Jesus.

Westerners are always searching for the truth. Veritas! The truth is out there. We want to know what is true. Jesus is the truth. He doesn't know the truth. He is the truth. The truth is not a set of propositions, but a person. Imagine that! We are living in a generation that has rejected truth when expressed as a set of propositions. But what if we were to present to them the truth, not as a set of propositions, but as a man? As a man who was God in whom we can see God and know God?

Everybody is interested in life. We all want life, the good life, real life, whatever that is. We are all alive and want to be alive, or if we don't want to be alive it's because we want a better life and are so disappointed we don't have it. Life is miserable, so we don't want to live. It's not that we don't want a good life, it's that we are crushed we haven't found it. Jesus is the life. Jesus is abundant life, real life, genuine life. Jesus is that which everyone is seeking, even if they don't know it.

The way Jesus reveals himself to the world, the way he presents the truth and the life is through the life of his followers. And not just the individual follower, but the community followers demonstrate. Relationships again. Jesus reveals himself to the world the way as he revealed himself to the Disciples- person to person, side by side, in relationship. [Bruner, p. 843] Relationships matter. In our relationships we live out the authority of God, the kingdom of God. In our relationships with one another, we anticipate the Kingdom of God on earth! That is what the church is- the body of believers living out Christ's love with one another. It is a visible manifestation of the authority of God over the lives of the believing community.

Jesus offers his peace to his disciples, "My peace I give to you." Peace is another relationship word. It encompasses everything for a person's whole well-being. In that sense, it is related to agape love in which people are primarily concerned with the well-being of others. Jesus gives his peace to his disciples, that peace which is lived out among them in love for one another as a response to the love Jesus has shown them. And Jesus offers this peace to his disciples who are about to blow it completely, rejecting him, abandoning him and otherwise letting him down. So if you have let Jesus down, if you've blown it, that's ok! Jesus still offers you his peace. He still offers you that which is for your whole well-being. It is found here, among his followers, your fellow screw ups, who have also blown it but are learning the forgiveness business. We who are apprentices in the forgiveness trade. This is real life- loving Jesus and one another because he first loved us. He is the way, the truth and the life. When we accept that and start living it, we are the kingdom of God come on earth. We are the anticipation of the rule of God. Amen.