

Sunday School Lesson July 26, 2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed.

Lesson for July 26, 2020, "Wisdom: The Way, Truth, and Life" Background Scripture from Proverbs 3:17, 8:32-36, and John 14:1-14.

"Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money. Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, if it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that. As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins." (James 4:13-17)

James is giving us the wisdom of our eternal God. He is saying, "Life is short. Include God in everything you do. Seek God's will for your life." God is our Creator. We begin life with Him and end life with Him and we need to sandwich Him into our lives every day. Rightfully, we should focus on Him continually, as in "pray without ceasing."

Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace (Proverbs 3:17).

Wisdom adores God and is caught up with His majesty. Wisdom says to pay attention to what God does and to glory in Who He is. Wisdom says to listen to His instruction and to keep His commands. Fools neglect God's counsel and Him as well, but those who love wisdom love God. Those who desire wisdom will find it, and they will find blessing, life, and favor from God. Those who reject and hate wisdom prove that not only do they hate God but themselves. Rejecting wisdom is self-defeating and self-destructive, but doing things God's way by faith is a treasure trove of grace upon grace (John 1:16).

From the section, a word about farewells – John's Gospel gives us a very different start to the night we call Maundy Thursday, than the other Gospels. Instead of the breaking of bread and the sharing of a cup, the ritual action at supper in John chapter 13 is the washing of feet. Jesus' last lecture began with a demonstration of servant leadership. Then he offered his parting thoughts to his friends, a speech which goes on through chapter 17. Like Ecclesiastes chapter 3, a portion of which appeared in our lesson two weeks ago, the first few verses of John 14 often appear in funeral services. They

feel appropriate not just because Jesus speaks of the place he goes to prepare for us, but because they are part of his long goodbye to the disciples known as the Farewell Discourse. Jesus spoke knowing that he would not have ongoing opportunities to teach his followers.

In the church we turn to these words when we need comfort. As mourners we build on the image on many dwelling places to envision where our loved ones might be in spirit, a place where we someday hope to join them. He's going ahead to prepare a place for them. In his Father's house there are many dwelling places, many mansions, enough room for all of us.

As we read and try to comprehend this week's lesson, try to understand and think about what Jesus told his disciples and what he is telling us. Think about, "What words of wisdom would you want to share with your loved ones if time were short?"

The Gospel of Matthew records that, early in his ministry, our Lord said, "I have come that I might utter things that have been kept secret since the foundation of the world." Surely, some of these truths are found here in the Upper Room Discourse. John 14:1 says "'Do not let your hearts be troubled; trust in God, trust also in me."

The plural is used for "your" here: "Let not your hearts be troubled" includes all the disciples. We can understand why they would be greatly troubled. They were aware of the mounting peril to Jesus, and that the priests and the rulers of the Jews were out to put him to death. Maybe they were ashamed of their own behavior at the Last Supper, arguing about who was the greatest till the Lord rebuked them by washing their feet. Then they were uneasy when he declared that one of them was going to betray him. They were confused and puzzled by the sudden exodus of Judas from their midst. Most of all, they were afraid of losing Jesus. The disciples were afraid for their own life. They did not want to lose Jesus. They had given up everything to follow and be with Jesus.

Jesus suggests two things in verse 14:1, which really is a command, that he is saying to them. He tells the disciples, "Trust / Believe in God, trust / believe also in me." What Jesus means is, "You have found relief for worry many times in the promises of God." They had the Old Testament, with its rich heritage of wonderful promises, and they had found strength and help from those passages in times of pressure. But now he gives them new truth which goes beyond anything in the Old Testament. "I want you to believe this too," he tells them. "You have believed in God; now believe in me." He begins to reveal to them the things that had been kept secret since the foundation of the world.

One of those new things is found in the next two verses: "In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:2-4)

Some versions render this, "If it were not so, I would have told you, for I go to prepare a place for you." In both cases Jesus is saying, "If you had thought something to be true that was not true, I would have pointed that out to you." In other words. "I have come to correct the erroneous concepts, the false thinking that you may have held. I want you to understand that in my Father's house there are many rooms." The word in Greek for "rooms" really means 'a place to live.' This word appears but twice in the New Testament, here and in verse 23 of this same chapter. In that verse Jesus says, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

A home is a place where we live, a permanent place, not a place to visit, but a place to eat, sleep and get comfortable. Whatever it means, our Lord wants his disciples to understand three comforting things from verse 3. This word is designed to help them in their fear, primarily their fear of death. What would become of Jesus if he died? Would they ever see him again? What would become of them if all this turmoil in Jerusalem should eventuate in their own death? First, he is going to prepare a place. The second fact he states is, "I will come again." Just a few days before this event he had sat on the Mount of Olives and talked about a time when the Son of Man would appear in glory, with all his angels with him: and the peoples of the earth would be gathered before him. Now he relates it directly to these disciples:

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." (John 14:3)

Those are very comforting words. Paul enlarges on this in First Thessalonians: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that we who are still alive and who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."(1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

The third comforting thing is that we will be with Jesus forever. Just to be with Jesus, that is all we need, that is what we want. One commentator has said, "You don't go to heaven to find Christ. You go to Christ to find heaven." This is what Jesus declares to reassure his disciples here.

In verses 4-11, our Lord adds more marvelous but mysterious things, gathered around two interruptions by the disciples Thomas and Philip. Both of them are as bewildered and confused as most of us are when we first read this passage. Thomas is the first who interrupts, in response to the words of Jesus in verse 4: "You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered him and said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you [do] know him and have seen him." (John 14:4-7 RSV)

"Doubting Thomas" he has been called. Notice Jesus does not rebuke him. He simply replies with a great revelation about himself, in the Gospel of John. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, except by me." Nobody, but Jesus Christ can make a claim like this, "I am the way. When you come to me you are meeting God; you have found ultimate reality and truth. When you come to me you then and there possess life."

John puts it this way in 1st John 5:11-13. "And this is the testimony; God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." He who has the Son has life; and he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

Here is an excerpt from a Bible study conducted by Dr. John Piper when he quoted the verse, "No, one comes to the Father but by me". One lady said, "That's terribly, narrow-minded." Dr. Piper said, "Yes, it is, but that is the way truth is. I find the phone company to be terribly narrow minded too. If you want to call someone up you must dial the exact numbers, in the exact order given; they will not allow any deviation. The IRS is terribly narrow-minded. They require you to state your income exactly. They don't accept a wild guess on your part." "But I think you must interpret a verse like that," she said. "How would you interpret it?" Dr. Piper, asked her. She said she didn't really know how. I said, "Well, if it is true, if Jesus means what he says that there is only one way to God, that those, that try to come another way will not end up with the God who exists, but with some god of their own invention, and, if there is only one way, how could he ever have said it any plainer than he does here, "No, one comes to the Father except by me."

Jesus goes on to reassure Thomas with this word in verse 7: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you do know him and have seen him." Thomas' problem was not that he did not know the Father; it was that he had not realized that he knew the Father. In coming to Jesus he had not grasped fully what had happened to him, how much his

knowledge of God had been broadened and deepened. "You have known him, and you have seen him," Jesus reassures him.

Philip interrupts: Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us". Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Phillip, even after I have among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father? Don't you believe that I am the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves."(John 14:8-11)

These are, words of mystery. They reveal what theologians have called the "Doctrine of the Trinity"; that three distinct Persons can still exist as only one God. It is beyond our human comprehension. We have nothing to compare it with, thus we struggle to grasp it.

But the heart of it is, what our Lord says twice, "I am in the Father, and the Father in me." Our Lord will go on very shortly to point out that this is the relationship which will now be obtained between us and him: "As the Father is in me and I in the Father, so I am in you and you are in me." That is the greatest secret in the Word, the secret of God and man working together. Man working, making choices, putting forth energy, but God touching it, blessing it, pouring his divine power upon it so that the results are far beyond anything you would expect from man's working. That is the wonder of what he is teaching us here.

There is still more. "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask for anything in my name, and I will do it." (John 14:12-14)

This has been called one of the greatest promises Jesus ever made. The Apostle Peter states in (2 Peter 1:4) "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

It is so great a promise we must read it carefully. Jesus says three things: First, "He who believes in me", not just he who becomes a Christian but he who keeps on growing and trusting as a Christian, "will also do the works that I do." Remember, these words were first addressed to the apostles. "He who believes in me will do these works that I do." This promise of Jesus has been literally fulfilled.

But he goes on to a second promise, "Greater works than these shall he do." When we look at both the record of Scripture and of church history we see how true this is:

On the day of Pentecost, 40 days after our Lord uttered these words, Peter, filled with the power of the Spirit, preached with such effect that 3,000 people were converted in one day. That never happened during Jesus' ministry. Perhaps a few hundred on occasion believed when he preached, but mere handful was the usual response, never thousands as the book of Acts reports.

When Billy Graham preached on the parable of the prodigal son in Wembley Stadium during his first crusade in London in 1955, 3,000 people became Christians. A few years ago Billy Graham preached to over a million people gathered in a great public square in Seoul, Korea.

The third thing Jesus stresses is: It is not, we who do these "greater works," but him. Notice, what he says, "Because I go to the Father." By that he means that after he ascends to the throne of power, he will send the spirit and through the Spirit he will work universally. In verse 13 Jesus links this to prayer. When you pray in his name, when you ask in line with God's will, what the Father wants, as Jesus himself always did, "I will do it," he promises. Twice he says this. Whatever you ask. "If you ask anything in my name, I will do it."

When we have Jesus, we have all we will ever need. Maybe Peter and Thomas had similar fears. At the Last Supper, both disciples had questions as Jesus explained He is the only way to the Father. Peter didn't understand why he couldn't go with Jesus right then and there (John 13:36). He thought he'd miss salvation if it didn't happen on his timeline. Thomas didn't have all the information he thought he needed to follow Jesus. (John 14:5) He wanted to walk by sight instead of faith.

We have all done it before, and I think as we become more mature in Christ, and get to know God's word better, we believe more naturally. Child-like faith, is what we need. You just believe, period, and there is no doubt. We have to believe it, Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6)

In this week's lesson, Jesus gave words of comfort to his disciples after He had spoken troubling words to them. He assured them that He was going to prepare a place for them in His Father's house and that He would come again for them. Jesus also emphasized that the only way to God is through Him. He declared in no uncertain terms, that those who had seen Him had

seen God the Father as well. Those who come to the Father through the Son will accomplish great things for Him and will be granted requests made in Jesus' name according to His will or His purposes.

It is a privilege and a responsibility to represent Jesus. We should encourage one another to work and pray in Jesus' name, or more specifically, according to His will.

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me" (John 14:1). Try to commit this verse to memory and think about it each day, as we go through life trying to accomplish God's will. Therefore, you who trust the Lord Jesus: Let not your heart be troubled, because there is a place for you in Jesus' Father's house. Let not your heart be troubled, because Jesus prepared the place for you. He opened the way. He is the way. The only way. Let not your heart be troubled, because Jesus himself is your dwelling place and he will come and take you to himself. Let not your heart be troubled, because Jesus and the Father are one, so that if you have Jesus you have the Father. Let not your heart be troubled, because Jesus has come in the Holy Spirit. He is with you now, and will be with you always, not as an observer, but a Helper.

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson August 2, 2020, "Faith and Wisdom" Background Scriptures James 1:1-11.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, Sermons from Desiring God.org by Dr. John Piper, Chancellor of Bethlehem College and Seminary, Sermons from Dr. Bob Utley, retired professor of Bible Interpretation and Pastor, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.