

Easter 5 2023

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life

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John 14:1-14

It is good to be back with you again. I know some of you are familiar and it looks like some new folks who've joined the church or are visiting today. I haven't been here probably over maybe about a year, but I always enjoy it and I look forward to coming out and being with you. This gospel that Doug just read today, starts very beginning of chapter 14, but you need to go back a little bit to understand what's going on. What we're going to be talking about today, is we're going to be talking about struggle and trust.

I think that's something that all of us experience. We struggle and we struggle to trust, and I know I do, and that's what a lot of this is about. When I say you have to back up, because what He's saying is, "Don't let your heart be troubled." Why are they troubled? Well, they didn't do chapters originally, they just told stories. This is all one scene. In chapter 13, you've got Judas's betrayal is predicted. You've got Peter's denial's predicted.

You've got Jesus is basically telling them, "One of you's going to sell me out and the rest of you are going to let me down too, but don't be troubled." I know I've mentioned him before. There's a guy that wrote a great commentary called Frederick Bruner, and he's my go-to guy on the gospels of Matthew and John. A lot of my thinking has really been shaped by Dale Bruner. What he said made sense to me when he wrote not just don't be troubled, but really the meaning behind it is don't be too troubled.

We're going to be troubled. I don't think Jesus is saying, "Just don't be troubled." Jesus Himself was troubled in, again, what we call 13. It tells us that Jesus was anguished. Jesus was troubled. It makes sense when you think of it as don't be too troubled. Don't be so troubled that it paralyzes you, that it causes you to want to just give up. Don't be too troubled. This is all rather depressing what He's just said to them. Chapter 14 again, is He's lifting them up, but what just happened, the things He's just told them was pretty depressing.

Here He is, the next thing you know, He's lifting them up. They were grieved at what He had told them. They were grieved when they heard that He was going to be betrayed. They were grieved when He said that, I'm sure Peter was really upset, that he was going to deny Him. They were grieved when He talked about going away. I think that's really what got them, that He was going away. Then Jesus comforts them, "Don't be too troubled." Again, if that was me and these guys were, "Jesus, where are you going? Jesus, what's going on, Jesus?"

If it was me in my flesh, I'd be like, "Will you guys just shut up? Did you not hear what I said? One of you bozos is off right now selling me out. The rest of you, you're going to scatter." If it was me, because I'm not Jesus, I want to be like Jesus, but that would be my reaction. I got to tell you, there've been plenty of times in my life and I've been a believer for about as long as I can remember.

Because as a child, I was just told this was the truth and I believed it. As a teenager, I fell in with some awesome folks and young life leaders at my high school, and I threw myself into that. I've gone to church my whole life and adult life. I've always been a believer, but I never really questioned. But as I got older, and I got married and had kids, and experienced things in life and jobs, and got fired from jobs

and then worried over. There were times when I'd be like, "Jesus? Jesus, where are you? Where have you gone?"

I can understand where the disciples are coming from. I find them a comfort to me right now when I read the way they're reacting to this. But Jesus' response to them is just so beautiful. Don't be too troubled. "Don't be too troubled. I'm going to my Father's house. It has many rooms. I'm going to prepare a place for you." I always read I'm a lot like the disciples here. I'm a lot like Philip and Thomas, I'm very literal. When I think about this house, how many of you growing up or maybe now, even think of Jesus, He's going to prepare a house?

Like rooms in heaven, a mansion. That's how I always pictured this, He's going to add on rooms. In a Jewish home when a young man got married, they added rooms to the house and made the house larger. That's the analogy, the illustration Jesus has given. But I always just thought, "Man, what kind of house am I going to have in heaven?" I don't know about you, but my dream house has always been the Swiss Family Robinson House at Disney World. I went there in '72, I think, when it opened.

I'm just like, "Man, that is the most awesome house in the world, all these different layers and stuff." If Jesus were talking about a literal house, I would like, "Can I put in a request? I'd like mine to be like kind of like this awesome treehouse." My grandson's 11 and he's a really good baseball player. We've got a deal when he is in the majors, he's building me a treehouse in his backyard to live in. That's going to be where I retire. The disciples were really literal too, okay? They were literal guys.

What do you mean? What do you mean, Jesus? They want Him to spell things out. I am thankful that they were that way because they were that way, He spells it out. He spells it out for them and He spells this out for us. Because the house that He's preparing by going away, by dying, by being raised and coming back, the house He's building is us. The scripture that was read this morning about the living stones, we're the living stones. We're being crafted, we're being crafted now.

Maybe there is a literal house in heaven. But this is all not just for in the sweet by and by, this is for now, because we're not just being shaped for later. We're being shaped in the here and in the now for later. There is going to be a later, I believe that. But this house that's being built, this holy house is being built for us, in us, by Him. He doesn't want us to be too troubled, too troubled so that the work on that house stops.

It's great when our house is a peaceful place, isn't it? My house, when I moved back here to Tennessee, I lived in Florida for about 20 years, not 20 years, I lived in Florida 12 years, 11, 12 years. When I moved back here, my house contained my kids that were starting high school, my teenage children. My father died and my mother moved in with us. There's no easy way, she and I didn't get along from the time I was about 10.

We're going on 50 years now that oil and water, we don't get along and she's still alive and we're all still living together. You got to imagine, my kids were teenagers and then my mom comes in, who we don't get along that well. I'm going crazy on one side here and I'm going crazy on the other side here, and then I was going crazy inside. My house was really, really troubled. I thank God that in the last couple of years, she's 90 now, in the last couple of years there's been some real movement in me with my mom.

I'd be lying if I said that's all changed now and I'm a new man. No, it's like most things in life, it's two steps forward and one step back, but it's a change that's happening. It's a change that I know I want

to happen in me. Homes are usually places where we experience some troubles. I'm not going to talk a lot about it. Our Anglican home, I don't know how many of you here came to the Anglican church from before, from the Episcopal church, have been through the travails of the last 20 years.

I was a youth director at a church when everything started to really happen when Rwanda came in and offered us cover. But our Anglican home is going through a severe remodeling. If I understood what I heard from a week ago, when all the archbishops were gathered, they've basically said to Canterbury, "We're no longer a part of this. We are the Anglican communion, but we feel like you've left." Am I paraphrasing that right? Close enough?

Okay. Well, so that's a church, church home that's struggling. Then there's our personal homes where there's struggle, there's always struggle in homes it seems. Don't be too troubled, though. This isn't all there is. It's just so easy when homes start coming apart to lockdown into a Hatfield McCoy kind of a mindset. That's what I've always had with my mom. One of us is going to be the last one standing and it's going to be me. I think she's probably felt the same way earlier on, but it's easy to lock into that idea.

We got to win this thing but you don't win relationships. Relationships are like a dance, nobody wins a dance, you and your partner, one of you at the end of dancing. I'm going to go take my wife dancing tonight. We dance to the dance club every Sunday evening. And at the end of the dance when the music turns off, I don't look at her and go, "I won. I win." It's a dance, forward, backward, to the side, it's a dance. But when we become too troubled, when we become too troubled, it becomes a life or death fight.

It's easy for our fears to take over. The disciples fears were running rampant and they did not understand. But Jesus promised them, "I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, you also may be. You know the way to where I'm going." Then Thomas, he's so literal, "We don't know where you're going. How can we get there? We don't know where you're going." Jesus, at that point's got to be like, "Okay. We've been together for a while." You've seen a lot of stuff, but He's so gentle. I'm so thankful for that because I'm 61.

Like I was saying before, I've been at the church stuff all my life and there've been some places where I wanted to chuck it and they were as a priest. Some struggles even after being a priest that I was just struggling so bad, I just thought, "You know what? I don't know. I don't know," which turned out to be a beautiful thing because where else would I go? He's the one with the words of life. I was really thankful for that kind of a struggle. Jesus is saying, "If you believe in God, believe in me. If you believe in God, believe in me. Because when you see me, you see the Father."

That's really what I talk about with young men that Doug mentioned earlier about the Campus Mission. We talk about trying to understand they're Christian guys raised in the church usually, but they're Christian guys who are at 18, 19 to 20. Now, I meet with my guys that have graduated and they're married. I try to do that follow up that's really important in their late 20s. What we talk about is how do we figure out the way? How do we figure out what Jesus means when He's going?

Where is He going and where is it He's leading us? What does that look like? Jesus reassures them, "I am the way. I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." That's a bold, exclusive claim. "No one comes to the Father except through me." That means He's not a way, He's not an option for life, He is the way to the Father. He is the truth in flesh,

God incarnate. Incarnate, you ever had chili con carne? That's chili with meat. He's God in meat, He is God in the flesh.

You see me, you see the Father. He is not a way, He is the way. He's also not saying, "And I will come." He says, "I am coming. I am coming to you." It's present tense, "I am coming to you." It's not something off in the sweet by and by, but it's now. I am coming to you now in your struggles, in your questions. I am coming to you over and over at conversion, yes, at baptism, yes, at this table, yes, I am coming to you. When you are struggling, I am coming to you.

When the person that you've married looks at you one day and says, "I just don't know. I don't know about you anymore." I am coming to you. When you've been in a job for 20 years and they tell you, "Yeah, we're downsizing. We just can't use you anymore." I am coming to you. When we struggle with the biggest thing, our sin, and that's our problem. Those other things are problems, but it's our sin that's the problem.

He says, "I am coming to you because I am the way you want to be with the Father. I am the way. I am the truth." I am the life that reveals that and gives you life and begins shaping you. You, you holy stones into a holy place, into a dwelling place for my Father and I The Spirit, I will send you this comforter. My Spirit will go with you. I am the way, not just a way. CS Lewis says that what God's arrangements are for others, we don't know, but we do know that it's only through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Just growing up, I just always thought you got to say certain words, you got to make a certain claim. I was really concerned about getting into heaven. Or actually, I was concerned about avoiding hell as a child more than I was about getting into heaven. Being friends with Jesus really didn't play that much into it. The church I was growing up in had me pretty rattled about hell so I was really wanting to avoid hell at all costs.

There are obviously certain words that have to be said, certain things that have to be done. All I know is this. I'm thankful that it's not left to us to be the final say-so on anyone's eternity. God knows what He's doing. God is holy and God will do it right. No one will come to the Father except through the Son. I don't know exactly what that's going to mean in some cultures and in some ways, but I know no one, I believe that, no one will come to the Father except through the Son.

We need to be a people that hold to that and believe that, because He is the way and He is the truth and He is the life, but we need to be a gentle people. You want to know what God is like? You want to know what God is like? You look at Jesus, He is a gentle man. He was a humble man. Jesus did not waterboard people into the kingdom. Jesus loved people into the kingdom. Jesus would ask, "What are you after? What do you want? What do you looking for?"

He would answer them when they told Him. Sometimes they walked away sad and He let them go. We don't need to be overly concerned about who is in and who is out. How can we be a people that don't become too troubled by that, when it's somebody we care about in our family or when it's somebody that we work with? Humility, the humility that comes from looking at Jesus and desiring Him. Humility and gentleness, and it can get messy. It can get messy, but we don't need to become intolerant of the folks that it's messy with.

My biggest problem, I always thought my biggest problem was my mother, if she just wasn't the way she was. It never occurred to me that a huge part of my problem was how intolerant I was, my

intolerance. I wanted her to change into the shape that I wanted her to be in. It's easy to become intolerant with other folks that don't agree with us or don't believe like we believe, but we don't need to at the same time in order to be tolerant, back off the truth.

That is what I've seen is the slippery slope of this idea of tolerance and intolerance. We want to be tolerant. That doesn't mean letting go of the truth. How do we do that? Humility and drawing near to Jesus. Our faith doesn't need to be something that we want to give somebody like a bitter pill so they'll get better. Love the truth, love Jesus, believe Jesus. We don't back off of that. We don't back off of that, but we also want to be like Jesus. We walk the Jesus way.

That way is a way where salvation is exclusively through Christ alone, but it is inclusive of all sinners. There's mystery in that. Now, I grew up in a little Southern Baptist church. I love the Baptist church. I'm spend the summer helping out at a Baptist camp. I'm thankful for my Baptist upbringing, but it may have been just been the church I was in, there was no mystery. There was no mystery. We didn't like mystery, liked the answers, knowing the answers.

But there's mystery with God. I like the mystery because with mystery, with accepting mystery comes humility. I have to trust God to be good. I have to trust God to know what He's doing. I trust this Word to be the truth. No one comes to the Father, except through the Son and that is the truth. I have to trust God to know how to work that. Jesus lays out the truth for His friends, and then He's mocked and He's killed and He's buried. That had to shake them. We know that it shook them.

This is a test also of their knowing Him. Honestly, it looks like they failed. I take a weird comfort in that. Maybe it's a misery loves company thing but man, I fail. I fail. Jesus, Jesus is so loving and so gentle, Jesus knows that that's going to happen to His friends. He's telling them about it beforehand, He's telling us too. We get the benefit of their experience. We get the benefit of their literalness and asking those literal questions, and we get the benefit of what happens to them.

Jesus tells them, "You're even going to go on to do greater things." We get to go on to do greater things. How am I going to do greater things than Jesus? Well, it's been 2,000 years, the church has grown over 2,000 years just by sheer numbers alone. It's greater. But these are guys that locked themselves in a room because they were terrified. Beloved, our world is watering down the wrong things and then it's making its last stand on the wrong hills.

Just like our church is splitting, coming apart, this happens. Families come apart. But as followers of Jesus, let's not plant our flag in a place of pride or in a place of I win. Let's just side with Jesus. In a spirit of humility and mercy and love, proclaim the truth. No one comes to the Father except through the Son. I am not getting it right, but I am trusting that He does. I'll confess to you, as we're talking about how do we walk this way? How do I do this? Because see, we're big on how do I do it?

How do I do this? How do I work this? Jesus, where have you gone? When we're struggling, when you're in trouble, when a marriage is falling apart, when your kids are headed off one way and it's not the way you wanted them to go, and we're struggling with that, "Jesus, where have you gone?" I find myself in those places from time to time, and I always will. We want to know how do we fix it? Of course, the Sunday school answer's Jesus but I'll tell you a way that this works for me.

Yesterday, while I'm putting some finishing touches on this, I'm thinking about this and I'm writing some things down. My phone buzzes and my mom has a special ringtone so that I know it's her. It used to be the Darth Vader march, it really was. Then I realized, "You know what? That just reinforces

the way I'm feeling. That just reinforces my frustration." Instead of being a 60-year-old, I turned him into my 12-year-old self.

I got rid of that and now it's something very pleasant but ringtones honestly don't matter. The ringtone goes off, "Can you come downstairs and change my channel for me?" Yeah, I was just down there. But yes, I can come downstairs and change the channel. I go downstairs and change the channel. Then I come back to work on my sermon, and then it buzzes again. "Can you come down and heat this up for me?" Yeah, I'll come down and heat that up for you. I go down and heat this food up.

Then I get back upstairs to work on my sermon for you about Jesus and about God, and about being holy. Then my phone buzzes again and it's not hot enough. "Could you come down and reheat it again?" I'm like, "Oh my gosh." The thing is, I'm not seeing in the middle of all that that I'm a jerk. I'm just being me in my flesh. I come back to write my sermon to you about following Jesus and being holy, and you see what it's like? At that moment, it hit me.

While this is going on, at that moment it hit me. As I'm walking down the stairs, I'm just praying, "Lord, help me, help me. Help me to see her in a different way. Help change my heart." You know what happens? He starts to do that. I go back and revert, but I know where to go and I know what to do. In other words, what I'm saying to you is that that's the way. This is what it looks like. He shows up and change happens. While I'm sitting there working on my sermon, which is now gone on at least five minutes longer than I've meant for it too, He really does show up.

I am coming. He shows up and He changes us, and He brings that spirit of humility and love. He changes us. He does it, He does it in the here and the now. You know what? There's going to come a time later when I'm going to see my mom and she's going to be beautiful. She's going to be somebody that I'm not going to recognize. I'll be beautiful and you'll be beautiful because we'll finally be who we were meant to be, and created to be the people that God created us to be.

I don't even think we're going to spend any time looking at one another going, "Gosh, how stupid was I?" I don't think there's going to be space for that because to be honest, that would never end. If we spend our time in heaven apologizing for all the junk we've done, when would we ever love each other and have time to worship and be grateful? That's all we'd be doing and I don't think there's going to be space for it, but that's just my idea.

I think what there's going to be space for though is you're beautiful. Oh, you're beautiful. That's what Jesus is talking about, "I am coming. I am coming. I've made a home for you. I'm making a place for you." I'm changing you, but you got to hold to this truth. We aren't going to do this perfectly, but we can want to. I think that's where it begins. Was it St. Francis that said, "I don't know that I please you, Lord, but I want to please you"?

Was that St. Francis? I don't know, but I love that. Where it begins for me, it's not even I want to please Jesus or I want Jesus, but I want to want Jesus. I do want to want Jesus. I'm awake right now. I've got my collar on. I'm in a church. We're talking about God. I'm really awake to the fact that it's all about Jesus. I want to want Jesus more than anything. Now, that's where it begins. We can want to, and all we need to do is ask.

Because Jesus says, "Anything you ask in my name, I'll give you." I used to think that was like, "I want a pony. I want a Corvette," when I was younger. It's none of that, thank goodness, or the world will be full of ponies and B-17 bombers and who knows what. Ask anything in my name, ask in my heart. Ask

in the heart of my Father, I guarantee you ask God. Lord, give me more of you. He'll do it. It may happen in a way that's painful, there's struggle.

It may happen in a way that your 90-year-old mom's calling you about 40 times a day, telling you, reminding you to put a coat on when you leave the house. Even though you're 61 years old and it turns you into a 12-year-old all over again. It may be through some struggles. It may be through some tough places. Look at what the disciples were going through. Look at what Jesus went through for us. Yes, it will come through tough places, but He will do it. He will shape us.

He will shape you into the image in which He made you for. Beloved, we're going to be troubled, but let's not be too troubled. Let's remember instead, let's remember as we say these words of faith we're about to say. Let's remember as we come to the table where we actually say, remember, let's remember. Let's do our best as we walk out these doors to remember. If you're like me, before I get back across the bridge and over into Farragut, I will have begun to forget.

But that's the beautiful thing is about being in community with one another and with Jesus, He keeps bringing us back. He keeps bringing us back. He keeps waking us up. Remember the Spirit keeps it worked, keeps it worked. Shaping, shaping, shaping, shaping us, shaping our hearts into the shape of the Father's heart. We'll remember again and again, we'll remember. We'll remember to hold to the way, and to the truth, and to the life. It's not our story that's about us.

That's why I'm so messed up. I keep thinking the story's about me. It's His story. It's His story. It's about Him, and He has written us into it. Let's remember, don't be too troubled. Amen.