

The New Testament Library

John

A COMMENTARY

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death as the act whereby "all people" are drawn to him (12:32); the new family gathered by him is the result of his death.

In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus admonishes his disciples to love their enemies; in John, the primary command given to them is to love each other (13:34–35). Both the Synoptic and Johannine traditions base these commands on the model of divine love (Matt 5:43–45; John 3:16). Even as the Father demonstrates his love for the world through the giving of the Son, so Jesus' followers bear witness to God's love as they together embody the kind of self-giving love for each other that Jesus has for them.

Thus, following Jesus includes:

- initial and ongoing commitment, being in his presence, coming to a certain understanding about him (that he is the Messiah, comes from God, and is spoken of in Scripture)
- faithful, persistent following after him (abiding in him; following him)
- keeping his commandments
- loving Jesus and loving one another

For one to become a disciple of Jesus, God must be active, "giving" and "drawing" people to Jesus (6:37, 44–45, 65; 10:27–29); God's spirit "blows where it wants" to quicken life and faith (3:8; 6:63). God bears witness to Jesus (5:37; 8:18); God's Spirit descends upon Jesus, identifying him as the one who baptizes with the Spirit, the Son of God (1:31–34). Jesus chooses his disciples (6:70; 13:18; 15:16). John not only emphasizes but also accords primacy to the initiative and action of God in bringing people to faith and sustaining them in it: God loves the world (3:16), seeks true worshipers (4:23), holds his flock (10:28–29), and tends the vine (15:1–8). Without the love, initiative, and continued sustaining action of God, there would be no life.

John also reckons with the instrumentality or agency of others: people bring disciples, friends, or neighbors to Jesus (1:35–37, 41, 45; 4:29; 12:21–22); similarly, the mutual love of Jesus' disciples for one another bears witness to Jesus (13:35). The Scriptures point to Jesus (2:22; 5:39; 20:9), as do his signs (20:30–31), calling for the human response of faith. Although John frequently uses the word "believe," the Gospel explicitly denies that the disciples "choose" or "decide" (*eklegomai* or *haireomai*) to be Jesus' disciples or to believe (6:70; 13:18; 15:16). There is genuine human response, but not without the enlivening work of God's Spirit. As God draws people to Jesus, so God's Spirit continues to teach them, through the Scriptures and in the context of the community, how to understand the person and ministry of Jesus (2:22; 13:7; 14:26; 15:26).

14:1–11 Jesus' Imminent Departure to the Father

Jesus' departure is now imminent. He promises his disciples that, if he departs, he will "come again and take you to myself, so that where I am you may be also" (14:3). This is a reference to Jesus' future return in order to gather the faithful to be with him in his dwelling with God. Later Jesus will speak of other ways in which the disciples will know and experience his presence. Now he

assures them that, because he is returning to the Father, he will subsequently take his disciples there as well. Since he has mediated the presence of the Father to them in his earthly life, they can be confident that he will take them to be in the presence of the Father.

14:1 "Let not your hearts[a] be troubled. Believe in God and believe in me.[b]
2 In my Father's house there are many rooms.[c] If it were not so, would
I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go
and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself,
so that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where
I am going."

5 Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going;
how can we know the way?"

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one
comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you had known me, you
would know my Father as well. From now on you will know him and
have seen him."[d]

8 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it will be enough
for us."

9 Jesus said to him, "I have been with you such a long time, and still
you do not know me, Philip? The one who has seen me has seen the
Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Do you not believe
that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I speak
to you, I do not speak on my own, but the Father who abides in me does
his works. 11 Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me.
Otherwise, believe on account of the works themselves."

a. While "hearts" is singular in the Greek (*kardia*), with the plural pronoun (*hymōn*) it is best translated in the plural.

b. *Pisteuete* can be parsed as imperative or indicative. Since the commands to believe (1) follow the imperative "Let not your hearts be troubled" and (2) are joined by *kai*, the most likely translation takes both instances of *pisteuete* ("believe") as imperatives.

c. BDAG: "a place in which one stays, dwelling (-place), room, abode." At the time of the KJV (1611), "mansions" carried that connotation in English, though it no longer does so.

d. The tenses of the verbs pose a challenge to translation: "If you had known (RSV; ESV) me [*egnōkate*, perfect tense], you will know [*gnōsesthe*, future] my Father as well. From now on you do know him [*ginōskete*, present] and have seen him [*heōrakate*, perfect]." One would not expect a perfect ("had known me") in the protasis to be followed by a future ("you will know the Father") or a present ("do know him") in the apodosis. Hence, the tenses here are not translated woodenly. John means to say that knowing (recognizing, understanding) Jesus leads to knowing the Father.

[14:1] After telling the disciples that his departure from them is imminent (13:33), that one of his disciples will betray him (13:21) and another will deny

him (13:38), Jesus admonishes them to lose neither courage nor faith even though circumstances that are about to unfold will threaten their trust in him.[59] To be sure, the prospect of death troubles (*tarassō*) even Jesus (11:33; 12:27; 13:21); little wonder that it would also trouble the disciples. The command "Let not your hearts be troubled" (cf. 14:27) anticipates the disorientation brought on by the grief and shock caused by Jesus' crucifixion (see 20:1, 9, 11–13, 19). Jesus encourages them, exhorting them to continue believing in God and in him. Faith or trust in God and in Jesus are paired; to believe in one is to believe in the other, because Jesus is the one who has been sent by the Father, to make the Father known, and to lead people to the Father (cf. 5:23–24; 12:45; 14:10). Jesus implicitly cautions the disciples neither to fall away, as other disciples did (6:60, 66; 8:30–31), nor to betray him, as Judas did.

[2–5] Jesus' next words are clearly intended to provide reassurance and hope to the disciples in the face of his death, even if it is not entirely clear what he is promising. Referring to the "many rooms" (*monai*) in "my Father's house" or "household" (*hē oikia tou patros*; cf. 4:53; 8:35), Jesus informs the disciples that he is going to "prepare a place" for them, and that he will "come again" and take them to himself, so that they may be where he is. Although the New Testament regularly speaks of Jesus' *parousia* ("presence" or "coming"),[60] this is the lone instance where Jesus explicitly speaks of coming *again*.[61] Jesus promises to return and to take his disciples to "my Father's house" (or "household"), likely an allusion to the heavenly dwellings prepared for the righteous, so that they may be with him.[62] In John, when Jesus comes "again," he will complete his work as the good shepherd, gathering all his own together. In the Father's household there is room for all those whom Jesus will bring to be with him (10:16; 12:32).[63]

Because the Farewell Discourse persistently stresses that Jesus will "come" and be with the disciples (14:18, 23; 17:23, 26), some interpreters understand

59. See Parsenios (2005) for the consolatory elements of this discourse as reflecting Greco-Roman consolation literature (esp. 22–31, 90–109).

60. The word is not used in John; cf. 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8; Jas 5:7–8; 2 Pet 1:16; 3:4; 1 John 2:28; using *erchomai* in 1 Cor 11:26; 2 Thess 1:10, as in John 14:3.

61. The NT does not refer to Jesus' coming or "coming again" as the "second coming."

62. Jesus comes "from heaven" (3:13, 31; 6:41–42, 50–51, 58), but neither he nor believers are said to go there; Jesus returns to his Father; believers hope to be with Jesus in the presence of his Father. For heavenly dwellings, see *1 En.* 39.4–8; *2 En.* 61.2–3; *4 Ezra* 7.80, 85, 101; cf. Luke 16:9. Steven Bryan offers the intriguing suggestion that "my Father's house" refers to a heavenly temple that Jesus prepares to serve as the eternal dwelling place of the righteous with God. Philo (*Somn.* 1.256) speaks of the soul's return to "the paternal house" (*eis ton patrōion oikon epanelthein*; see also 1.135); Heraclitus, *Ep.* 5, to Amphidamas (in *Cynic Epistles* 194–95), refers to the immortal soul's dwelling in "ethereal dwellings" (*aitherioi domoi*).

63. Among the scholars who interpret Jesus' words as a reference to his (eschatological) coming are Barrett 457; Beasley-Murray 249–50; Frey 2000, 143–50; Lincoln 2005, 389–90; Schnelle 1998, 227–28; Talbert 204.

Jesus' promise to "come again" somewhat differently: for example, as the coming of Jesus to believers upon their death[64] or as Jesus' ongoing presence made possible by the impartation of the Spirit.[65] To be sure, Jesus' parting words are shot through with the promise of his presence; but here he explicitly promises that his future return will complete his work of gathering "the scattered children of God" (cf. 11:52) to their dwelling place with him and with the Father (14:3). In light of the fact that he later promises his disciples that he and his Father will "make our home" (*monēn par autō poiēsometha*, 14:23) with those who keep Jesus' commands, it may well be that even the promise here—that Jesus will take them to be with him—already entails his joining them to himself as the risen Lord.[66] While Jesus promises he will come again, in the meantime he will also be present with the disciples in other ways: they are never without his presence.

If Jesus has explained any of this to his disciples, if he has shared with them his knowledge that "his hour has come" to go to the Father (13:1), they seem not to have understood it; although Jesus asserts that they know *the way* to the place where he is going (14:4), Thomas responds with bewilderment that they do not even know *where* Jesus is going. How then can they know the way to it (v. 5)? Jesus' reply (v. 6) seems to answer a different question than the one Thomas implicitly asks.[67] The answer to Thomas's immediate question is that Jesus is going to the Father; he goes by means of his own death and resurrection. Jesus answers the question how *others* come to the Father: they come to the Father through him. Implicitly, then, Jesus interprets his death and resurrection, the means by which he returns to the Father, as the path by which others come to the Father.

[6–11] In one of the Gospel's distinctive "I am" statements, Jesus identifies himself as "the way and the truth and the life." The three predicative nominatives (way, truth, life), linked by the simple conjunction "and" (*kai*), could be understood to indicate three distinct but related predications regarding Jesus. But the following explanatory comment ("No one comes to the Father but by

64. Bultmann 1971, 602.

65. R. Brown 1970, 624–27. Keener (2:938–39) contends that the only possible way to read the text is as an example of present rather than future eschatology (14:23). O'Day (741) argues that the "heavenly dwellings" (as virtually all instances of "place" in John) symbolically depict relationship, here referring to the full communion with God made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection. In light of the equation of Jesus' body with the temple in 2:19–21, Kerr (298) argues that "my Father's house" (14:2) refers to Jesus' body and, by extension, to the community of believers; see also Coloe 2007, 108–12, 145–48; Grayston 115; McCaffrey 138–40.

66. Some interpreters believe that Jesus' promise to "come again" refers to all forms of the coming of Christ (Hoskyns 454; Barrett 457; Ridderbos 489–92).

67. A textual variant (see NRSV 14:4 mg.) arose to smooth the transition to Thomas's dual query about where Jesus is going and how he will go: "You know where I am going, and you know the way" (*hopou egō hypagō oidate kai tēn hodon oidate*; Metzger 207).

me") suggests that the three predicates could better be understood to indicate that Jesus is the way that leads to the Father, precisely because he himself embodies the truth and life that come from the Father (cf. 1:4–5, 17; 5:33; 11:25; 17:3). Thus we might translate, "I am the way that leads to truth and life." In the Psalms the "way" of God is spoken of frequently (see Pss 1:6; 5:8; 18:30; 25:8–12; 27:11), where the word in the LXX is *hodos* ("way," "path"), as here. The psalmist professes to "hate every false way" because God's word (*ho logos*) is "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (119:104–5 [118:104–5 LXX]). In John, Jesus is the Word, the light that illumines the true way to God and so gives life.

The assertion that Jesus is "the way to the Father" (14:6) is the result of, and gives expression to, Johannine Christology.[68] Because Jesus is the Word, and because he embodies truth, light, and life from the Father, he is also the way to the Father. Jesus is not extrinsic to the identity of God; he is not one of many prophets or agents who speak what is true. He is God's own Word, embodied. Because Jesus' identity is *intrinsic* to the identity of God, because God has made Jesus equal to him and one with him, because God has chosen to be made one with Jesus, Jesus is the way to the Father. To know Jesus is to know the Father who sent him; to know the only Son is to know the only God. Jesus' identity as the unique Son of the Father grounds the sweeping declaration that "no one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus' remark that "from now on" (*ap' arti*, v. 7) the disciples will know and see the Father implies that something will soon change, or has changed, so that "from now on" something is possible that has not been possible before. But the statement is puzzling, because when Philip entreats Jesus, "Show us the Father" (v. 8), Jesus replies that if they have seen him, they have seen the Father. In other words, the disciples should already have "known" and "seen" the Father in Jesus. What, then, will change "from now on"? It may be that the temporal indicator "from now on" signals the imminent actualization of the conditions necessary for understanding Jesus more fully, conditions that include the resurrection of Jesus and the giving of the Spirit. These new realities alter the epistemological stance of the disciples, so that "from now on" they will see the Father because they will recognize Jesus more fully as both the *representative* and the *representation* of the Father (see comments on 2:17–22; 12:16, 44–50).

Jesus' statement "The one who has seen me has seen the Father" (v. 9) does not simply conflate the identities of the Father and the Son. Throughout the Gospel, Jesus has identified himself as the Son, the representative of God who speaks the words and does the life-giving works of the Father. To see the works of Jesus is to see the works of God because "the one who is sent is like

68. Rightly, Moberly 2008.

the one who sent him" (*m. Ber.* 5.5; see comments on 5:28–29; 13:16–20). But that is not all. Because the Father dwells in him, Jesus is also the representation of the Father. Thus, to see him is to see the Father. Indeed, no one sees God directly—that is, no one but the Son (1:18; 5:37; 6:46). Yet there remains a true, if mediated, vision of the Father through the Son, because the Son does the Father's work, and because Father and Son mutually dwell in one another (14:11). To see the works of Jesus is to see the work of God; to see the Son is to see the one in whom the Father dwells and who dwells in the Father. Because of their unity in work and their mutual indwelling, because they are one (10:30), to see the Son is to see the Father.

14:12–31 Jesus' Promises to His Disciples

Jesus continues his Farewell Discourse with a series of promises to his disciples:

- Those who believe in me will do greater works than I have done.
- I will do whatever you ask in my name.
- I will petition the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete, who will be with you and will teach you.
- I will not leave you orphans, but I will come to you.
- Because I live, you also will live.
- I will love you and reveal myself to you.
- I leave you my peace.

Taken together, Jesus' words promise his continued presence and peace with the disciples and his responsiveness to their needs and requests. Even though he is indeed going away and will not be among the disciples as he was before, they may nevertheless continue to know him, to see him, to be assured that they will live with him, and to expect him to act on their behalf. While after his death and resurrection the mode of Jesus' presence with the disciples will change, the fundamental reality that he is with them, making himself known to them, will not change. The disciples must learn what it means to "follow" the crucified and risen Lord, but it is the same Lord that they follow. As Hoskyns memorably put it, "What Jesus *is* to the faith of the true Christian believer, He *was* in the flesh."[69] All subsequent generations of disciples are also included in Jesus' promise of his presence, life, and peace.

14:12 "Amen, amen, I tell you; whoever believes in me will do the works
that I do, and will do even greater works, because I am going to the Father.
13 Indeed, whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, so that the Father

69. Hoskyns 35.