

The Way

By Don Green

Bible Verse: John 14:1-6
Preached on: Sunday, August 25, 2019

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For our Communion meditation this morning, I invite you to turn to the Gospel of John to a familiar passage. John 14, John 14 in the first six verses that I will read for us at this time. Our Lord said,

1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. 4 And you know the way where I am going." 5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do 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 but through Me.

I think this is a very fitting text for us as we just gather our thoughts to take Communion in a worthy way, and remind us why it is that we can gather together in the name of Christ with a sense of confidence that we have been reconciled to God, those of us that know Christ, and for those of you that do not know Christ, to present to you once again the way by which your sins can be forgiven and that you can receive the promise of eternal life. This is a very wonderful magnificent text and I'll be candid with you, I'll be honest with you, I've preached this text many many times at funerals. I haven't counted exactly how many funerals I've done over the years and memorials and the like, it's scores and scores of them, and I've often turned to this passage at those times and with a little different sense of perspective than I have as I stand here this morning, but I just want to give you a little bit of a sense of perspective that we would take this seriously, that we would take it earnestly. The thought of funeral gives me the sense that funerals, as we all know, are a time of parting. We part from our loved ones even in a physical sense as we're saying good-bye to them and life will go on without them as we part from them in that way. I want you to think about that in this perspective as we're here this morning, we're gathered together and we're all living sentient beings and we're gathered together around God's word and that's a wonderful time for us to be able to share together, but the reality of things is this, is that there is a time of parting that is coming for all of us, probably one by one over a course of time that will take place; we will not always be amongst the living, there will be a time where we part from the living and enter

into the realm that lies beyond, and what is that going to be like and what is the significance of that. That's a pretty important point for us. Our spirits will separate from our bodies. We will separate the living from the dead and there's this time of separation coming. Do you remember, beloved, that there's a further separation that takes place after that time as well in that, you know, we don't all go to the same place. Those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ go to a place of blessedness in his immediate presence but those that do not know Christ and that have rejected the Gospel, go to a place of judgment waiting the final judgment where they will be resurrected at the Great White Throne Judgment and be condemned and sent to hell forever for their sins as the right punishment, the righteousness punishment of having violated the eternal law and the eternal character of an eternal God.

So there's all this separation that's taking place. In life, we'll separate and then in that realm to come, there will be a further separation of those who knew Christ from those who don't, and that impresses upon us the seriousness of what we're talking about. I had a conversation just before the service with a friend and just the recognition that for some of us, you know, we just need to take to heart the fact that there are consequences of gathering together like this; that the way that men and women, boys and girls, respond to the Gospel have an eternal consequence to them and I think that it's probably far too easy for us to just in the familiarity and the repetition of what we do, to lose sight of that. But gathering together under the sound of God's word is like being under the heat of the sun. God's word can melt and soften a tender heart and either draw it to Christ in the first instance or soften a Christian toward sanctification and greater Christ-likeness, at the same time, the sun hardens clay and the same sun can have a hardening effect on clay while it melts something else and the question that I have for you as we gather around the Table today is what effect is the word of God having upon you in your life? Do you harden against it? Do you say no? Do you say not now? Do you roll your eyes saying he's saying the same things I've heard a thousand times before and I'm not interested in this? Well, beloved, I want you to know that the heart that hardens itself and rejects and stubbornly pushes aside God's word is like clay that is getting harder and harder and more brittle under the effect of the sun, and you don't want to be in that position because eventually that time of separation comes and the opportunity that you had to receive Christ in response to a loving presentation of the Gospel to you will be gone and it will be gone forever, and you will be separated into a realm where judgment and darkness and separation prevails ultimately to the eternal destruction of your soul.

That's really serious. The consequences of that are just unfathomably great and so when we come, when we step back from that and we come back to remember Christ and his redemptive death, we realize that we have in front of us a representation of the most precious thing in the world and it is imperative for you to soften your heart to it, to submit to God's word, to submit to Christ, and say, "Lord, teach me. Lord, save me. Lord, sanctify me." And to have that attitude that says, "Lord, I want Your word to have a cleansing sanctifying impact on my life because there is a time of separation coming, Lord, and I do not want to be in that position of separation in death. I need You to save me so much so that I'm willing to come to You in this life and give myself over to You

completely." And not everyone responds to God's word like that and yet the consequences of it are so so great.

Now in that passage from John 14 that I just read, there's a contrast between Thomas and our Lord that helps us put all of this into perspective. Jesus had been speaking of going to heaven. Look at verse 2 with me, he said,

2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

There will be this wonderful time, this wonderful reality as we pass from this life, those of us that know Christ, being separated into that realm over which Christ reigns and into the place that he has prepared for us ahead of time, and that's the place that I would have for each one of you, that's the place that God invites you to come to, to realize that sin and death are realities that bring judgment, to recognize that there is a way of salvation presented to you in Christ Jesus our Lord and Jesus says, "One day, I will welcome My disciples into that realm." And I want to be there, don't you? I want you to be there whether you care about that or not. I want you to be there too and the invitation is there.

James Montgomery Boice said about this passage, he said, "The words of Jesus were a comfort to the disciples and are precious to us. The disciples were going to lose the physical presence of Jesus for a time but He told them that one day they would be reunited with Him in His Father's home, heaven would be a home for them because they would be with Jesus." And as we gather together around the Communion Table, we're reminded of that wonderful reality, but as you know in this passage Thomas does not understand and look at verse 5, he says to Christ, he says,

5 ... "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"

And with those words, Thomas expressed what many feel in their hearts. "I don't know how to get to heaven. I'm not sure I understand these words of Jesus. I'm afraid I'm not good enough. I'm not sure what will happen when I die." Let me just repeat that, "I'm not sure what will happen when I die." Are you in that most miserable of possessions and positions where you say, "I don't know what will happen when I die"? And in my experience in dealing with the dying and in the realm of death, I've come to find something very interesting as a pastor, is that it is often the most religious people who have those kinds of doubts. They've tried to do what their church says but they have no assurance that they'll be safe when their life ends. Inside what they really think is, "I hope I'll be okay." I remember a dear woman, my own grandmother, many many years ago saying, "Well, I hope I'll know what to say in that day." Do you know why they feel that way? Do you know why some of you have those doubts echoing in your heart that if you seriously thought about it, you'd realize you're really not confident in your final destination where you will be separated unto in the end? In their heart of hearts, they're

trying to earn their way to heaven with their religious works, with their good deeds. They're trusting in themselves. In their heart, they know they don't meet God's standard but either through pride or a lack of understanding they're trying and they think that they're hoping that God will weigh the good more than the bad and that they'll enter in on that way.

Well, I've got news for you: God doesn't grade on a curve, his standard is perfection. Jesus said, "You must be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," Matthew 5:48. And so these people are trying to attain to a standard that they cannot reach because none of us satisfy that standard. The sad news, my friend, is that your good works cannot save you. That is not God's way of salvation for you to be good enough to be rewarded in the end, because your good works cannot take away your sin, they cannot erase the stain of your guilt. Scripture says we're all guilty before God. The prophet Isaiah said, "All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way."

Well, friends, that matters. That really really matters because if you die like that, you will face that eternity of judgment, death and hell. You and I need a Savior and even as Christians, we should not be ashamed to come back and to acknowledge and remember that again and again and again. We never outgrow our need to remember that we desperately need a Savior; that even as Christians we are falling short day-by-day of God's standard. And the wonderful news of this passage, the wonderful news of Christ is that there's hope for us, there's confidence for us if we look to Christ alone for salvation.

Look at his confidence as he speaks. This is the eternal Son of God saying in verse 6, look at it with me there,

6 Jesus said to him [said to Thomas], "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

Your good works cannot save you. They cannot get you to heaven. Trusting in your good works is the seal of your doom frankly. They are a guarantee of your position in eternal perdition if that is your hope. Scripture says that "salvation is not as a result of works so that no one may boast," Ephesians 2:9, but Christ can get you there, but the Lord does know the way. Think about it, he came down from heaven, he ascended back into heaven after his work was done. He is thoroughly acquainted with the route from heaven and to heaven. He knows his way around and so for him to say, "I am the way and the truth and the life, you can come to the Father through Me," he knows what he's talking about. There is time and space historical reality pointing to the fact that in his Incarnation he knew the way from heaven to earth, and in his ascension he knows the way from earth into heaven, even more he knows the way from the grave to life on the other side. That's what we need and Scripture says that it was on the cross that we remember here in the act of Communion where Jesus paid the price for all of that to happen when he offered his life as a sacrifice to God for the sins of his people. He says, "Father, punish Me in their place so that these, my friends, might go free."

So it's not a matter of you working your way into heaven and God congratulating you on your goodness at the end. No one goes to heaven that way. The way to heaven is saying, "My only hope and my only friend when it comes to heaven is Jesus, is the Lord Jesus Christ. I trust in Him to save me. I trust His promise to be that which gets me to heaven. I trust His righteousness, not my own as my merit before God. I trust His shed blood, not my works to wash away the stain of my sin." You see, salvation is not a reward for doing good, it could never be that. Salvation is a gift that you do not deserve and so we come to this Table acknowledging that we are unworthy of it. We come to this Table realizing that we have sinned and broken the glass of God's holy character and his holy law, and that it shattered and we can't fix it and we can't fix ourselves and fix our souls. We come by faith to the one who has promised to do it on our behalf.

The most familiar verse in all of the Bible is John 3:16 and listen to it with fresh ears here this morning, that

16 ... God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

You know, the reality of ministry is that if God spares me for a period of time, is that I will probably do some of your funerals if I don't go first at the front of the line, and when that time comes, my friends, my beloved fellow Christians, I want to be able to say that this person knew this way, knew this Christ, and that it's well with their souls, and let your life be a springboard to the presentation of the Gospel to those that are gathered around. But for that result to attain, for you to be in heaven and to leave a testimony like that behind, you have to repent of your sins and embrace Christ now while there is time.

This bread reminds us of the body of Christ broken for us, pierced for us. The cup reminds us of his shed blood. My friends, if you lack assurance of salvation, I invite you to take this occasion to turn to Christ in your heart and to put your faith in him to save you. And those of you that have wrestled with assurance, come to him and do business directly with Christ yourself and say, "God, Christ, I need You. I don't know what to make of my prior spiritual life, I'll just cast it all aside, I'll cast all of that aside and just cast myself entirely upon You. Have mercy on me, the sinner." The promise of God is that the one who comes to him like that receives eternal life. God's not hiding his salvation, he's not making this difficult, he's just saying you have to leave self and the world behind and come alone to Christ and ask him for mercy.

Well, I invite every true Christian to join us in this sharing of the Table. We only ask as the elders of the church that you examine your heart before you do, confess any known sin in your life before you partake of these elements. If you've been persisting in sin, this is the time to say, "Lord, I come back. I repent. I am done with that." And to receive the elements with a fresh sense of mercy.

If you're not a Christian, you know that you're not a Christian, we ask you to pass on these elements. This is for the people of Christ. It's not an outward ritual to make us feel better about ourselves, we are communing with our Savior here and if he's not your

Savior, the Communion is not for you to share in. It can be yours through faith in Christ but if you're resisting him, these elements are not for you.

And finally I would just say in the context of everything that we've said here this morning, if somehow deep in your heart you think that you are good enough for God, that you have avoided the right sins and you have done the right good deeds and that's your attitude toward yourself in the presence of God, I not only ask you, I tell you, do not take of these elements. They are not for you. These elements are only for people who confess their utter brokenness and their utter sinfulness before God and say, "I have no merit of my own. I am trusting in this Christ alone to be my way, my truth, to be my life before God, and I'm going to heaven in complete reliance on Him." This Table is for repentant sinners who trust in Christ alone, not the self-righteous who somehow trust in themselves.

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