

What is the Way of Jesus?

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If you're exploring the Christian faith or returning to it, there's no better place to start than Jesus' very own words. Today we begin looking at four chapters that many consider *to be among the most precious and most intimate in all the NT*, John 14-17, Jesus' Farewell Address. And if you've been in the faith for a while, it's probable you've experienced a kind of spiritual ping pong, batted back and forth between indifference or performance toward God. In these four chps, Jesus will show us a better way. Wherever you are, you'll discover that Jesus' mystical teachings crash into our earthly questions with stunning relevance. Our passage contains three such questions of Jesus: Where are you going? How do I get there? What difference does it make?

Where are you Going?

In the film, *Midnight Special*, a young boy sets out on a journey to lead his father and one of his close friends to an undisclosed location, miles away from home. The boy has to reach the destination at a specific time. Some thinking it a kidnapping, other wanting the boy, it becomes an all-out manhunt. Along the way, his father wrestles with his son's words *because deep down he knows he's going to have to let his son go*. Similarly, after sharing a final supper with his disciples, Jesus walks out into the evening air to make his way toward the place of his fateful arrest. He tells his disciples that will be leaving them soon. They struggle with his words, with the idea of letting go of their beloved Teacher and friend. Knowing this, Jesus responds by saying, "[Let not your hearts be troubled](#)" (14:1). Let not your hearts be troubled. Welcome words, you can imagine, to these disciples, but with Jesus now gone, they have special appeal to us. Let not your hearts be troubled amidst difficult news, controversial executive orders, policies against foreigners and minorities, personal trials. Let not your hearts be troubled. What comfort does Jesus offer? "[Believe in God; believe also in me.](#)" His comfort comes in the form of an exhortation to *believe*. Believe what? Believe that his departure is *for you*. With all we're facing, all you're going through, how is Jesus absence for us? He gives two reasons why we can find comfort believing him. [First, comfort comes because we believe he is preparing a place for us.](#) What kind of place? "my Father's house" which has many rooms. Some have interpreted "rooms" as *mansions*, based on a mistranslation of the Greek word into Latin, concluding that Jesus is off building custom estates, or that we deserve wealth and prosperity in this life. But the Son of Man had no place to lay his head. He lived a frugal life focused on God's will. Perplexed, Thomas says, "[Lord, we do not know where you are going](#)" (5). Where is he going? Where has he gone? To his father's house. As a boy, Jesus got separated from his parents, who frantically search for him, and when they find him at the temple he says, "*Did you not know that I would be at Father's house?*" (Lk 2:49) In Jewish theology, the temple was the place where heaven met earth, the place where the realm of God overlapped with the realm of men, which is why God's glory inhabited the temple. In fact, temple architecture resembled this. In the outer court you had the "sea" that contained water for sacrifices. At the front of the temple were the pillars that resembled the pillars of the earth. Inside were the lights, symbolizing the heavenly bodies, and toward the top was a curtain that divided the holy place, the presence of God, from the earth. Heaven meets earth. So, when Jesus says I'm in my father's house, it's like the moment in MS when the boy says to his father, "*There is*

another world on top of ours and that's where I belong." When Jesus says he's going to the Father's house, he's saying he's departing to where he belongs, the place where heaven meets earth. And he's going there to prepare a place for us, a heaven meets earth, physical paradisiacal place. He's not saying believe in me and you'll escape this awful world (Buddhism) or get wealthy and healthy (?); he's saying believe in me because I'm making it possible for you to flourish in this world forever. And that future, if you trust Jesus' words, brings tremendous contentment and peace into our lives. Most people live with a buried fear of death and the future. Not so for those who trust in Jesus. Let not your hearts be troubled. The **second** reason we can find comfort is that he will come again and *take us to himself to be where he is*. Notice that he first says, take us to himself. Heaven, if you will, isn't just where the realm above overlaps with the realm below; *it's where Jesus is*. Ultimate comfort is found, not in a glorious future, but in a gracious Redeemer. That he takes us to himself. It reminds me of moments in my life when I have been so shaken by grief, I've collapsed, been taken into the arms of my wife. Jesus says, "If anyone 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*" (14:23). The word "home" is the same word for "room" in the Father's house. Even now, Jesus is inviting us to find a home with him, not in a physical home, not in a relationship, not in a city, but *in him with the Father*. So when we turn to Jesus, he opens up the benefits of the Father's house to us. It's like he creates a rift that allows transport transcendent comforts to us, now. It's what allowed the people of Emmanuel AME to forgive Dylan Roof. It's what allowed one of our members to sing, with tears, by the side of her father's deathbed. It is the shalom of God, that not only causes ceasefire but also restores. Like our friends in Turkey working to shelter, comfort, and counsel refugees. This is the peace of God. Peace that overtakes troubles. Peace that pours out where heaven and earth overlap, peace that comes through the Spirit, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (Jn 14:27). It is a shalom that allows us, despite our past, present or future, in the words of Brandi Carlile to, "*dance in a hurricane...But only if you're standing in the eye.*" Christ opens "the Eye." He's places a funnel on top of our hearts to pour out the shalom of God. *So, comfort comes not just from knowing the place he is preparing, but the Christ who prepares it.* Will you believe? He stands ready, at the center of reality, to give you peace.

How do I get there?

Confused about how to get to the Father's house Thomas asks a second question, "How can we know the way?" Jesus responds, "I am the way..." (14:6). But the disciples' thinking is confined to earthly space and time. You could say their thinking is stuck in the wrong dimension. How, then, is Jesus *the way*? How does he *prepare* a place? Well, we need a way into the Father's world of shalom and acceptance. We are naturally, metaphysically and sinfully stuck. But Jesus prepares a place by becoming *the metaphysical bridge* to the Father and his house. And he does it through his death, glorious resurrection, and exaltation to the Father's right hand. How do we get there? By walking on Jesus' death and exalted resurrection. By putting our trust in his sturdy life-death-resurrection promises, and enjoying its support. You see, his preparation wasn't as much constructive as it was redemptive. The Way is Jesus' death-resurrection/exaltation. There are no other bridges to the Father's house. His way is *the way*. The **only** way? Isn't that oppressive and arrogant to say Jesus is the only way? Well, *arrogant* doesn't fit the bill. Think about the kind of person Jesus was—a God who washed men's feet, wept at funerals. *Oppressive?* He bore the

oppression of human sin to give his life for all. Far from oppressive and arrogant; it's humble and sweeping in generosity. What's oppressive and haughty is imposing the view that only *all-ways-lead-to-God* is the way. It sweeps all other beliefs to the side. In fact, you could argue it's as oppressive as pushing your executive orders on everyone else and creating facts to suit your claim. All ways lead to God is baseless bumper sticker philosophy, that uses marketing power to define truth. Jesus uses his power to die for arrogant, sinful, stuck in their own dimension humanity, to make a way into the reality of his Father's grace. How do we get there? "Believe in God; believe also in me." Believe in Jesus' promises. But what if we find it hard to believe him? He says, "believe on account of my works" (11). How are his works helpful in cultivating belief? Is it because he did miracles, turned water into wine, raised Lazarus from the dead? Yes and no. Yes, they are stand-out feats but consider *what the miracles actually tell us about Jesus*. That he brings life out of death, comfort to the grieving, rearranges the molecular structure of water to produce vintage, otherworldly wine. It's not just that he does miracles; it's the kind of miracles he does—works of new creation. It's as if he is able to open up the benefits of a renewed world and pour them out into this world. How do we get there? By Jesus bringing it here: "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (3). We don't have to clamor for enlightenment. Jesus will come and 1) take us to *himself*, the supreme benefit and 2) enable us to join him where he is, the shalom of his Father's house.

What difference does it make?

Does all this metaphysical talk have any earthly value? Well, we've hinted at it along the way. You can experience peace directly from the Father's house, which means you don't have to control everything. You don't have to trust in your brittle 5-year plan, retirement investment savvy, or good looks. You get to live in confidence of a good, humble, generous Creator who is making all things *for you*. That brings peace. But what else, anything tangible? Jesus says, "Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father" (14:12). Greater works—what are these? Are they greater in quality? Surely not. What could be greater than raising the dead, and more profound, forgiving sinners? The works aren't greater in quality but they are greater in quantity and kind. What do I mean? I mean we do works that express the redemptive work of Christ. Up to this point, the disciples couldn't proclaim the hope of the metaphysical bridge, offer the shalom of God through Christ, and had not carried his message around the world. But now, the typical Christian lives in Asia or Africa. The center of global Christianity has traveled from the Mediterranean, to North Africa, to the British Isles, to Europe, to North and South America, and now to Africa and Asia! That's the greater work. The gospel bearing fruit in all the world. Where do I get that?—greater works than these will he do because I am going to the Father. Jesus means that his death-resurrection-exaltation has opened up a way into the Father's love, peace, and promised new creation in a way never before possible! So, we should live as though it's true. We should pray, sending requests through the rift to the Father for the stranger, the foreigner, and even our enemy. To ask for racial reconciliation, social justice, economy-building, missional community, personal holiness because Jesus has taken on our troubles and given us his peace. Let's demonstrate the shalom of God, declare Jesus is the way, and reveal the fountain of his new creation blessings here and now. Let's ask and attempt great things *for his glory*, and he will do it.