

The Blessings of Jesus' Absence: Part 1

John 13:36–14:6

Studies in John #32

ABSENCE makes the heart grow fonder. What do you think of that statement? What I know is that when I'm in a state of absence it sure doesn't feel good but when I reconnect I can look back and say it's true. How about you? What about with your connection to and relationship with Jesus? We've confessed he "ascended into heaven...and he shall come again." In between we experience his absence from us, bodily speaking. How is this beneficial to our souls? How does it make us fonder of him?

Here in the Upper Room Discourse Jesus is preparing his disciples for his glorification (vv. 31–32), meaning, his crucifixion and through it his re-entrance into glory with his Father. He's urgent and emotional with them, saying, "Little children, yet a little while I am with you." Like little children with their departing parents he says, "You will seek me" but "where I am going you cannot come" (v. 33). This brings us to chapter 14 where Jesus speaks of THE BLESSINGS OF HIS ABSENCE. Today's going to be the first of what three parts. Let's focus just up to verse 6 and the first benefit: ETERNAL LIFE.

THE PROBLEM (13:36–14:1A)

Jesus' being with his disciples just "a little while" longer and that "where I am going you cannot come" leads to THE PROBLEM. Impetuous Peter speaks

up—again! **“Lord, where are you going?”** “Lord, we’re your disciples; we’re on a need to know basis and we need to know! (v. 36) Kids, don’t you want to know when your parents go somewhere but they don’t tell you? By not telling you it makes you want to know more, doesn’t it? But **Jesus** says, **“Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward.”**

Remember what I said about Jesus’ glorification in the Gospel of John: it actually begins on the cross before it culminates in his ascension to glory. This means Jesus’ words have a double reference.

Yet this leads Peter to be even more emphatic: **“Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you”** (v. 37). Do you hear the irony? Where Jesus is **going** is to lay down his life for his sheep (10:11); Peter says *he’s* **will**[ing] to **lay down his life for** Jesus! **“Will you lay down your life for me?”** we hear Jesus say. It’s as if he pulls rank on Peter and says, “Ok, you need to know? Know this...” He uses another of his solemn vow statements: **“Truly, truly—amen, amen—I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times”** (v. 38). Peter’s denial is one of the saddest episodes in the story of God’s dealings with his people. Right in the middle of our Lord’s glorious words about his laying down his life for his sheep he includes a story of one such wayward sheep! Peter teaches us something about

ourselves. As J.C. Ryle said, “Even the best of Christians have many bitter cups to drink between grace and glory. Even the holiest saints find the world a vale of tears.”¹ Don’t ever forget there’s a potential Peter in you! A true disciple should always think, “If Peter, why not me?”

The problem of Jesus’ absence is traumatizing to Peter and all potential Peters. That’s why Jesus says in verse 1, “**Let not your hearts be troubled**” (Μὴ ταρασέσθω ὑμῶν ἡ καρδία). We’ll see this again a little later in verse 18 where the disciples feel Jesus is going to abandon them as orphans. They’re **troubled**. It’s the same word used of how Jesus felt when Mary said if he had been there Lazarus wouldn’t have died (ἐτάραξεν; 11:33) and when Jesus prayed after his triumphal entry (τετάρακται; 12:27). Let me conclude the problem with an encouragement especially for you who’ve been traumatized by someone else, who lived with anxieties, who’ve been diagnosed with emotional, mental, and psychological illnesses and struggles. Brothers and sisters, even those who lived with Jesus, who preached powerfully in Jesus’ name, and who performed miracles struggled with trouble. You’re normal! Jesus knows your trouble. He speaks not a rebuke but a comfort: “**Let not your hearts be troubled.**”

THE SOLUTION (14:1B)

I was reading this week from the American Psychological Association's top researcher and writer on the benefits of faith, religion, and spirituality for mental health.² But what Jesus says brings *shalom*, true wholeness and peace, amen? To combat their anxiety and traumatic feelings Jesus tells his disciples and us THE SOLUTION is **“believe in God; believe also in me”** (14:1b). Note again here as we've seen before that faith in God is equated with faith in Jesus. This can be useful in talking with our JW friends to demonstrate the co-essentiality of the Father and the Son because faith is only to be placed in God.

Why is faith the solution? “Ya Gotta Have Faith,” as George Michael sang, right? Sorry, George, it's not just faith or faith in faith, but faith's object that make faith so strong. Faith is the solution because it's what keeps us in communion with our Heavenly Father and especially with our Lord Jesus while he's physically absent from us. Turn for a quick moment to page 862 in your songbook. Look at what Belgic Confession article 22 says about faith: “We believe that for us to acquire the true knowledge of this great mystery [that Jesus satisfies for our sins] the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a *true faith* that *embraces* Jesus Christ, with all his merits, and *makes* him its own, and *no longer looks for* anything apart from him.” Then it goes on to say: “However, we do not mean, properly speaking, that it is faith itself that justifies us—for

faith is only the instrument by which we *embrace* Christ, our righteousness. But Jesus Christ is our righteousness crediting to us all his merits and all the holy works he has done for us and in our place. And *faith* is the instrument that *keeps us in communion* with him and with all his benefits.”

So by embracing and communing with Christ the disciples would come to know that Jesus’ absence wouldn’t be a bane, but a blessing.

THE BLESSING: ETERNAL LIFE (14:2–7)

How so? Jesus speaks of THE BLESSING of his absence and the first is this: ETERNAL LIFE. Children, remember Jesus calls his disciples his “little children.” They’re just like you. You want to know where your mom or dad is going. You want to know why. But sometimes it’s not just on a date that benefits them; sometimes they’re going because it’s almost your birthday; it’s almost Christmas. Jesus says by his death then resurrection and ascension he’ll win for us eternal life. As verse 3 says, **“I will come again and will take you to myself”** (v. 3). You should be thinking, though, “Hasn’t Jesus said, “God so loved the world, that he have his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but *have* eternal life?” (3:16) “Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me *has* eternal life?” (5:24) Why is Jesus speaking of eternal life as future? It’s both: eternal life *now* but even greater life *to come*.

The blessing of his absence is the future fullness of eternal life. Look at how he illustrates it: **“In my Father’s house.”** If you know your Old Testament, what’s God’s house? The temple. But Jesus is speaking of a future house that’s the full reality of the earthly that he’s about to enter.

God’s heavenly house has **“many rooms”** (v. 2). The old King James says “mansions” based on the Latin Vulgate translation of *mansiones*. The old earthly temple was God’s house and it had several rooms for the priests to minister. Jesus is going to its heavenly reality to prepare rooms for *all* God’s people! Heaven’s house has a “vacancy” sign. There are *many* rooms there. The price has been paid. These rooms are free. While life is full of troubles you’d be foolish not to enter shelter and safety. Come to Jesus! **“If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”** (v. 2)

God’s heavenly house is where Jesus is. He doesn’t give us lots of details; he just says, **“I...will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also”** (v. 3). That should be good enough for you as God’s children.

The directions to get to this house are know: **“you know the way to where I am going”** (v. 4). This leads **Thomas** to speak up: **“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”** (v. 5) Jesus speaks one of his most famous sayings that echo down the calls of human history: **“I**

am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (v. 6).

“I am the way.” God created Adam and us for fellowship. By because of sin the entrance to that fellowship in Eden was blocked by an angel with a flaming sword. As the Son of God in human flesh, Jesus is the way to lead us sinful humans back to God. He’s the door (John 10). He’s the ladder on whom the angels ascend and descend (John 1:51). **“No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

“I am the truth.” “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). **“No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

“I am the life.” “In him was life” (1:4). “As the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself” (5:26). “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25). **“No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

“I’m going away to a place you cannot come yet—glory. But you know the way—me.” Do you see what Jesus is saying to you? We already know the way back to him because we already have him by faith. And until he comes, may his absence make our hearts grow fonder to see him face to face.

Notes

¹ Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John 13:1–21:25*, 50.

² <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/2013/03/religion-spirituality.aspx>