

RUF Bible Study – John
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John 14 – The Only Way

We've been looking through the book of John, reading and hearing about who Jesus says he is and what he does. He has done some startling things. He's made amazing claims. He keeps on pushing the envelope for his disciples and for us, the readers of this account. Do we think he was like this? Do we think he did these things? What would it mean if he really did and said these things?

John 14 is the beginning of a few chapters where Jesus turns and directly addresses his followers, his disciples. It's a family meeting. He doesn't have the Pharisees around, or the Gentiles who are interested, or even Judas, who has already gone out to betray him. He only has his band of brothers, the last 11, the ones who have been with him through his ministry, as strange and bewildering as it has been.

Jesus has just washed their feet after the transformed Passover meal. He's told Peter that Peter would betray him, in fact this would happen before morning. The disciples must be stunned at this news. With that context, let's look at chapter 14. We'll focus on the famous 14:6, but take care to discuss the rest of the chapter as well, at least briefly.

Jesus' commands – Do not let your hearts be troubled / obey my commands

Look back to the end of chapter 13. Jesus told Peter that he will be going away to a place where Peter cannot follow him. Peter is understandably upset at this news. He loves Jesus. He and Jesus are best friends. He has been an eyewitness to all the things we've read about in the book of John and more that was not recorded. He doesn't want Jesus to go away, and he doesn't want Jesus to die.

In the midst of that personal angst, Jesus tells Peter about the denial that is about to happen. Peter will deny his Lord and Savior three times before morning. Can you imagine being told such a thing? Peter must be crushed. Jesus is going away. Jesus is going to die. I am going to deny him. Ugh. Depressing.

John 14 opens with these words: *Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me.*

In the context of suffering, of heartbreak, of loss and despair, Jesus calls his followers to believe. It's a command in fact. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe in Jesus.

What is troubling to you? Do you have things in your past that you cannot let go of? Are you worried about your finals and your major? Are you wondering if you'll ever get asked out on a date? Or ever get married? Career and marriage are the two biggest worries of people in their twenties.

But you may get those things and still be troubled. Your friend or parent is sick with cancer. Your kids aren't behaving like you want them to do. Your marriage is unsatisfying and falling apart. You aren't getting promoted. Your parents might get divorced. You wonder if you can ever forgive this person.

Jesus is entering into those broken places of your life and calling you to believe in him. You may not feel like it at the time, but he says there is an objectivity to belief. It's not all just how you feel. You may feel cast out, long gone and thrown away. Yes, but believe in Jesus.

This is hard. There have been times this semester when I've had a difficult time believing in the gospel and following Jesus. I needed other people to remind me of what is true, and had to sort out the truth along the way, muddling through sometimes. Sin and circumstances get us off track. But that doesn't make the gospel un-true. Believe in God.

Jesus gives a second command in this passage. In 14:21 he says, *Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father and I will love him and manifest myself to him.*

Jesus wants us to obey his commands. In fact, he demands obedience. He is asking his disciples to believe in him and to follow him in what he says. That seems pretty straightforward, but we have such a hard time doing it, don't we.

First we need to know what Jesus' commands are. We do that by reading the Bible, memorizing important passages, going to Bible study, sitting under good expositional preaching, and talking about what we're learning and reading.

As we better understand what the Bible says, we can better apply it to our lives. The Bible isn't just a textbook to be studied with a test at the end. But neither is it a morality handbook like an instruction manual to be consulted for how to get out of this or that jam we're in.

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Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2008, website: www.ouruf.org. For this series, I used commentaries on John from Boice, Skip Ryan, Gary Burge, D.A. Carson, Hughes, Wright, Calvin and Leon Morris and listened to sermons by as many people as I can find, especially Tim Keller, Ricky Jones, Fred Harrell and Scott Sherman. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

The Bible shows us Jesus. How God is working his redemptive story with his sinful people. How he wants us to live in that faith and peace and love of Jesus. So there are things to know and to do, but it's all connected to Christ.

Are you troubled? Are you having a hard time believing in Jesus right now? Are you actually following his commands? Do you know his commands? Do you "have" them? Walking with Jesus is believing and doing. It's a real relationship as we follow Christ together. Those who love Jesus show it by fidelity to his words. They don't say they love Jesus and then do the opposite of what he wishes. That doesn't work in human relationships and it doesn't work with God. If you realize that is what you're doing then repent and believe the gospel and walk with him in his ways.

Jesus' comfort – I am going to prepare a place for you

Jesus also gives comfort. He is leaving, yes. The disciples are confused and sad. But he isn't only leaving – he's going to prepare a place for them. His leaving has a purpose. He's going to be doing things for us while he's gone.

What does this mean for us? We can't say too much because we simply don't know what heaven is going to be like. And somehow after heaven will be the New Heavens and New Earth, which will be our transformed, perfect earth the way it was meant to be. If we die before that day comes, the day of Christ's return, then we'll be waiting in heaven until that glorious day when all things will be set to right. This is the concept of glorification, the doctrine of why it matters that Jesus will return again to this world and make everything right.

This matters because it makes this world matter. It means that when you die it's not just – over. Secular humanism and biological evolution have no answer for life after death. When you die, you die and that's it.

I can't prove to you what happens after you die. Obviously that would be impossible. But it sure seems that there might be, could be, must be something. People long for it. Why would they? What in our brains and synapses and chemicalness would bring about this idea and make it such a passion and obsession for people? Perhaps because it's a real thing, and the longing of your heart.

Maybe you were made for something more than just being born, being a massive lump of tissue and brainwaves, living your life as a part of the survival of the fittest, and then dying somehow to be buried and never seen or heard from ever again.

Jesus says, Yes! You were made for more. I care for you so much. I am preparing a place for you so you can come home when it's time. This gives us an eternal vantage point. It reminds us that this world is not our home. It's a good world and one we should care about and love. But it's not the final destination.

As James says, we are but a mist. Our lives are so quickly gone. We feel like we'll never die, but it's not true. Snap! Your life could be over tomorrow. And yet, we're also eternal. We aren't paper cups that can be crushed and thrown away. There is something so much more, so much bigger and more important than that bleak nothingness. Jesus calls us to remember both of these truths. To realize we don't have that much time, so we need to make every moment count (repent and believe today!), AND that we have an eternity to spend somewhere.

Will he be preparing a place for you? It's tempting to speculate what that room might look like. I'd like a room somewhere in a lodge on a lake. My room could be filled with books and movies, of old television shows I haven't watched yet, with a stocked fridge, some port wine cheese and a ski boat tied up outside on the pier.

Yours? I'm guessing I have a few wrong concepts in my imagining. I think it won't be as important what will in my room or what it will look like. The important thing is that Jesus will be there. He will be present, and I'll be able to be with him.

I used to be in a church youth choir. I wasn't a very good singer, but hey it was fun. We would go on Choir Tours. We'd break out the bus, all get in and travel out somewhere, singing along the way. This was possible because we'd stop at various churches along the way, eat a potluck they provided, do our show and then we'd stay in their homes for the night.

I don't remember the specifics, but it was always the talk of the tour when you were able to stay in a really nice home with a pool. Every once in awhile you'd get to stay in a mansion, with your own room, but enough of the others to be able to experience it together. If 8-10 of us got in a van together when it was time to go, our eyes were big and we wondered if it might be our chance to stay somewhere spectacular.

Jesus is taking the time to prepare an even better room for you. There is hope after death. He will be there for and with his people.

Jesus' claim – I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.

So there is a place. Jesus says he's preparing it for us. We can believe that. Then Thomas asks a great question. "We don't know where that is. How can we find the way there?" (14:5)

Jesus answers with one of the most famous and most controversial statements – ever. In answering Thomas' question, he says, *I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.*

People don't like this. This has become one of the biggest "problems" of Jesus throughout the last few hundred years, and shows no sign of letting up.

People do like Jesus' ministry. They like his acts of love. They may not believe in his miracles, but they appreciate his ethic (and explain away his miracles). He was a good man. Someone to follow. A strong leader.

But then you have statements like this that crush that idea. Jesus took great pains to NOT be exactly what people are now believing. He didn't want to only be a teacher. He keeps pressing and pressing the fact that he is God, and he is the Savior.

Do you hear him saying this here? Don't forget that in the previous chapter, he washed the feet of the disciples. He showed them ultimate humility and care. Yes, we like that. Now he's saying he is the only way to God. Boo. We don't like that.

It's too exclusive, we say. Our popular, postmodern culture doesn't like the ideas of One Way to God, or really One Way to do anything.

And you have to admit it is a little crazy for a person to say this. If anyone in our contemporary culture would make such a claim, we would discount him as a madman. What if Obama started talking like this? – I am the way, the truth and the life. He'd be run out of town. What if a strong political leader in Africa started saying this in the news? Everyone would be nervous.

Jesus is saying it. He's been saying things like this all along. I am the resurrection and the life. I am the bread of life. I am the living water. I am the good shepherd. Now he says I am the way to God. The only way to God.

Maybe he's right. It would make sense if he really was who he said he was. If what we are reading is true, then maybe Jesus is the way to God. He certainly talks like he is. He says he is the image of God. That he represents God. That he knows God. That he was sent from God. That he forgives people. That he will return again. That he will raise from the dead.

What if he is the way to God? Then you need to go that way, and that way only.

It's been promoted over and over again that all religions are essentially the same. The illustration is used of several blind men all feeling around an elephant. It's a rope, one says as he hold its tail. It's a stump, one says as he holds its foot. It's a snake, one says as he holds its trunk. None of these men have the truth. They all have only a part of the truth. The truth is much bigger than only one perspective.

But realize this – that only works if you *know* it's an elephant. You have an outside knowledge that they don't. How did you get that knowledge? How do you know it's an elephant? Because you know there is a bigger truth.

I think in one sense all religions are the same. They are grasping at aspects of God. They have parts of the truth, parts of the way. But they'll never get there. Never, ever.

Because Jesus is the way. He doesn't point to the way like just another in the line of prophets. He's not a part of the way, like the man holding the elephant's trunk. He is the way. The path is a person.

This is the only God who came to earth and suffered like us. There is no other suffering God out there. This God because so in touch with his people that he came and died to make atonement, payment, for his children. That is different. It just is. Jesus isn't just someone who had more "God" in him, like the eastern religions would posit. He's not just someone who had more power in him, like the Western religious gods. He is God come to earth – Christmas – and God come to suffer and die – Easter – and return for his people. That is not normal. You can only know that if you have the perspective we're offering here.

Jesus is the way. He is the truth, the Logos, the big idea. He's the thing behind the thing. He's what lies underneath your needs and longings. He's what life is all about.

And he's the life. He will actually love you and care for you. Your other big ideas, your other truths, will crush you under their weight. As you serve the gods of career, sex, love, family, looks, money – whatever – you will never ever be able to satisfy them. They won't ever love you and forgive you. They'll always demand more and more. But this God, this God come flesh as a man, this Jesus, will love you and forgive you and give you life.

Do you believe in him? Is he the way, the truth and the life for you?

This dispels the idea there is some vague, general religious truth out there we're all grasping at. At least don't believe that. If you hate Jesus, you are closer to what he wants than if you just tolerate him or venerate him or respect him. He has been, and still is, pushing to be either loved or hated. You have to throw out the whole New Testament if you reject him being the way, the truth and the life. It takes a lot of work to bend over backwards and make it fit another way. Jesus is making exclusive claims for you to follow him only.

But his exclusivity is so inclusive! You don't have to be a good person to follow him. You don't have to be born of the right type of family or have the right background or be able to be this smart or run this fast or be this good looking. Most people have a hard time with the gospel because they think it allows so many bad people in and so many good people out. I want you to think about that and how actually that way of thinking is more exclusive than the message of the gospel. The gospel says any type of person can come in, as long as that person humbled enough to know he or she is a sinner and pleads on the merit and blood of Christ. Anyone can come!

If you want God to speak to you or if you want God to show himself – he has. Jesus is God. Listen to him. Follow him. He is the way.

Jesus' counselor – He will give you another Helper, the Spirit of truth

Two more quick things. Says he won't leave us along when he's gone away to prepare a place for us. He's going to send someone else. In 14:16, we read, *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,*

even the Spirit of truth. Later in 14:26, Jesus says, *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.*

We have the Trinity in this passage. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are all here represented and talked about.

The Trinity is a mysterious thing that theologians have discussed, written about and argued about for thousands of years. So we're not going to clear it all up here. You should read over the creeds and confessions of the church for a full/er explication of the Trinity and what each of the roles of the godhead are, and how they function together.

I'm simply pointing out we have all three in our text. And we have talked much about the Spirit in the book of John up to this point. Jesus did seem to hint at the Holy Spirit when he said the spirit blows where it will in John 3 as he talked to Nicodemus.

Jesus calls the Spirit of truth "Helper," as translated in the ESV. The word is "*paraclete*" and means "called alongside." Some older translations just leave it as it is, Paraclete. But that doesn't do much.

I don't really like the ESV's "helper." The word has two connotations. The first is Counselor. The Holy Spirit is our counselor. He listens to us. He understands us. We talk to him and he helps us. I have a great man who counsels me, and he is amazing. I cannot believe how insightful he is. How he says the right things I need to hear. How sometimes his words are baffling to me, but later I get what they mean. He gives me assignments and then pulls things together for me. The Holy Spirit is an even better counselor than that. I need to go to him more for those things, for he is with me and helping me.

The other connotation is that of "Advocate." The Holy Spirit speaks on your behalf. He stands up for you when you're in trouble, when you need help, when you need someone to represent you. He doesn't leave you on your own to fend for yourself.

The Holy Spirit is continuing the work of Jesus. He isn't doing something different than what Jesus has been doing. It's not like he's going off in another direction. He's bringing to remembrance what Jesus taught them.

As a really practical step for hearing the Holy Spirit would be to memorize more Scripture. It seems that the main way the Holy Spirit talks to people is through the words of the Bible. So if you know more Bible, you give the Holy Spirit a higher vocabulary. Not that he is limited by that, but you are more able to hear what it is he's saying to you when you know more of the words and messages of Jesus. They are working together after all.

Another practical step that results from this is prayer. Jesus talks about prayer in verse 13. It's through the Holy Spirit and through obeying God that we know what to pray. *Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.*

I hope you know by now that this doesn't mean you can go around town and start using Jesus' name for what you want. Jesus, give me this car. Jesus, buy me this business. Jesus, give me all these iPods for Christmas. You will be disappointed if you try this. I know by experience this doesn't work.

The Holy Spirit will help you to pray in Jesus' name because he helps you know what Jesus wants. This prayer, the prayer in Jesus' name, is one that taps into Jesus' desires. What are his desires – that his sheep will hear his voice. That the lost will be found. That those who are perishing will be brought to life. That the world will be redeemed. That we would feed the hungry, care for the sick, widows and orphans. Pray for God to have those things happening and you'll be praying in Jesus' name. That you got an A on a test or the Sooners win the championship are not things that are on Jesus' heart. Praying in his name is something different than that. It's waking up and saying, God please use me today in the lives of people. Help me to be a light in the world for you today.

Jesus' coming – he will come again

As a last point, let me reiterate that Jesus says he will come again. We've discussed this and why this matter in a previous point.

Jesus says he will not leave us as orphans, but he will come to us (14:18). Do you live life as an orphan? Do you feel like you've been abandoned?

Jesus says that living life with him, following his ways, receiving his forgiveness and redemption, is like being adopted. Instead of being an orphan, you are a son or a daughter of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

What would change for you if you lived with this new status? If you really understood how loved and accepted you are?

My kids are awesome and fun – and they drive me crazy. I think they are so great, and love them so much and am so proud of them. And they exasperate me. I have not yet been tested to find out the depth of my love for them. How far would I go to show them I love them? How far could they go to test that love? I'm not sure, but my love for them is deep, deep, deep. My kids don't understand this, but I hope they know they can never, ever be fired. Things may change, and consequences may come from their actions, but their status as my children is secure.

If you are a Christian, your identity is that of a son or a daughter. You are a child of God. You cannot be fired. You're not a hired hand.

And Jesus says he comes to bring peace. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled; neither let them be afraid.*

We're back to where we started. Are you in trouble? Are you worried? Do you need peace? Jesus says he gives eternal peace to you. He settles you as you rest in him. That doesn't mean he solves all your problems. But it does mean you can be at rest in your heart and your soul. He will not leave you nor forsake you. He is with you.

I want to recommend that you read *The Shack* by William Young. I'm not usually one for popular books, and this one has been at the top of the charts. But it will help you think about the Trinity, and about pain and suffering, in a new way. Don't get hung up on the "manifestations" of God, but go with it, and listen to what the author is saying about the love of the Father, the work of Jesus, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Maybe it will unlodge something in your soul. May you go and find The Way, The Truth and The Life. There is no other way to God than Jesus.

You are lost. Jesus says he is the way.

You are confused. Jesus says he is the truth.

You are dying. Jesus says he is the life.

How can we live this out?²

"It means, quite literally, putting your life in his hands.

If you've even done serious rock climbing you know what this means. Believing in is essential to climbing when you're using a belay. If you're not familiar with this term, let me explain.

A belay is a device that uses a rope, some carabiners, and a couple of harnesses to guarantee the safety of the climber. The belay connects the person upon on the rock to another person on the ground, who ensures that the climber won't fall. An accomplished belayer will allow the climber full freedom on the wall. Yet if the climber begins to fall, the belayer will almost instantly stop it.

When you go rock climbing, you always examine the equipment to make sure it's functioning well: the rope can't be frayed; the belaying harness must be in good working order, and so forth. And you also need to make sure the belayer on the ground is securely attached to something so he or she won't be pulled up into the air if you fall. At the end of your equipment check, you believe that the belaying apparatus is fully functional. You believe that it will keep you from dying. So far, so good. But you're still not a the believing in stage.

That happens when you put on the harness and start climbing. It really happens when you're far enough up on the rock that a fall might very well be terminal. At that point you're not just believing certain truths about the belay. Now you're *believing in* the belay. You're putting your life in the hands of the equipment and the belayer. This is like biblical faith. It's investing your trust in someone." (Mark D. Roberts)

² I got this from a sermon by David Jones. I don't know where he got it.