



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

John 14: 1-11

Winter 2023

"A House Above"

TRANSCRIPT

Well, good morning. We are continuing our studies in the Gospel of John. We're in chapter 14; a great text of Scripture. The Lord has announced His departure and that He'd be betrayed. So things were not working out the way the disciples had hoped when they entered into this upper room to celebrate the Passover feast. They were quite despondent when we begin chapter 14, and the Lord addresses that:

14 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ²In 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. ³If 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. ⁴And you know the way where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" ⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

⁷If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

⁸Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words

that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. ¹¹ Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.

John 14: 1-11

May the LORD bless this reading of His Word, and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow together in a word of prayer.

What a privilege it is, LORD, to be with Your people on a Sunday morning. —A privilege to be with Your people, opening the Scriptures, Your Word, the inerrant Word of God that is the revelation of truth for us, and the revelation of Your Son, and all that we can know about Him. You give us general revelation, and it reveals that there is a God, that there is a Creator, but not much more than that. We learn the details, and we learn “The way, and the truth, and the life”, through this special revelation. And so LORD, it's what strengthens us, it's what builds us up in the faith, it's the nourishment of our souls. And so we pray, LORD, that as we consider this text this morning, You would nourish us and build us up in the faith and strengthen us. And may we never depart from it; keep us faithful to Your Word.

And LORD, bless us materially as well. We are physical beings, as well as spiritual, and we need the sustenance of life that You provide. You instruct us; Your Son has instructed us to pray for our daily bread; we pray for all of the details and needs of this material life. And we look to You for that. You're the source of all of our blessings. So we don't need to take things into our own hands and seek to do it by ourselves; rather we look to You. We pray and we seek Your guidance, and we seek Your help and Your blessing, for You are faithful to us.

And so, LORD, we come before Your throne also to pray for those who have particular needs. We think of the sick, and so many, LORD, that are dealing with issues

today that we may not be aware of, but we know they're dealing with things, and we pray that You would give encouragement and strength and health.

And LORD, bless us now as we sing our next hymn, use it to prepare our hearts for a time of study and worship together in Your Word. Build us up in the faith. Use this great text of Scripture to encourage us and teach us more about Yourself. We pray these things in Christ's name, Amen.

(Message) Years ago I read an interesting book by a prominent physician at Harvard Medical School. It's about eight patients who faced death and the help that he gave to them. One was a young man with terminal cancer. He was afraid. The doctor tried to comfort him with words by recounting what his father had told him when he was a child that, 'Death is like being *unborn*. Before we're born, we're nothing and after we die, we're nothing.'

The young man was unimpressed and responded, "See if you still find that enough comfort when you're the one in this bed, *Nothingness!*?"

Well, if that's comfort for anyone other than the doctor, it's false comfort. Something awaits everyone at death; and it's eternal. And that's good news for Christians. We are promised glory in *a house above*. That's the comfort Jesus gave His disciples in the first verses of John, chapter 14.

When the chapter opens, they were a sad and discouraged bunch of men. It seemed everything that they hoped for had come to *nothingness*. Jesus told them, 'He would be betrayed. He was going away, and they could not follow.' The kingdom they anticipated, the thrones they expected, the leader they loved—all gone. All was gloomy; and that's when Jesus said, "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me." (vs1b).

It's a very revealing statement. In a few hours, Jesus would be violently arrested, put on trial, and suffer the pain and shame of the cross—separation from God, His Father...hell itself.

Just moments earlier, He had told them about the traitor in their midst. And John wrote, "He became troubled in spirit." (Jn 13:21). Jesus was facing a great personal crisis and it troubled Him deeply. He was the one who should have been given comfort and support by His friends, but He gave them comfort. Now that's the Lord, who washed the disciples feet, who cared for them, and put them ahead of Himself. He is compassionate and cares for His own, cares for us, in every circumstance of life.

But what's especially important is, His comfort is not just 'well wishing', like, "We'll get through this, men!" or the stoical, "Keep a stiff upper lip." The Lord's words give real comfort, based on real authority. He gave two commands, 'Believe in God', and 'Believe also in Me.' That second command, 'Trust in Me', has been called either '*sublime*' or '*ridiculous*', because if Jesus were just a man who was about to be captured and killed, it would have been foolish to trust Him. But the assumption of the Lord's counsel is that He is linked with God, intimately. Not just in purpose, but in essence, in His being. That's the reason they could trust Him as they were to trust God, because He is equal with God in His person and therefore in His authority. He is *God the Son*.

And His instruction is for all Christians in every age. He gives the solution to sorrow, the solution to fear. He is the great physician who cares and gives good medicine for troubled hearts: It is trust the Lord. Believe Him. Rest in Him and His promises, knowing that He is willing and able to lead us through the difficulties—and He will.

And His disciples had good reason for doing that, for trusting Him in all that He said, based on their history with Him He'd never let them down. They'd been in many crisis; He never let them down, he never failed in a promise to them. And so, when He said, 'stop being troubled', they had every reason to stop, to be at peace, and rest easy.

He gave them the reason for that in the next two verses. Things were not coming to an end or concluding in *nothingness*. In fact, the best was yet to come: "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." (vs2). That's a hopeful promise: 'The future is ours.'

It wouldn't, however, have been enough for, say, Judas Iscariot, were he still in the room with them. Judas lived for the moment. He lived for the present. He was an insightful man, though. He understood what the others didn't; that Christ would be crucified, not crowned. He would not reign, He would die. So Judas, understanding that, cut his losses for 30 pieces of silver.

It's the way of the world, and admittedly the way, to some degree, of so many of us. We really attach so much of our life, so much of our happiness to this present age—and invest in it as though we can really keep it, keep what we accumulate in it. —No, that's false hope.

Here's our hope, in verse 2. Some of us are familiar with the lyrical language of the King James Version and when we first were acquainted with these verses that was the version that we were acquainted with: "In my Father's house are many mansions." It's a nice picture; it's one that evokes images of splendid wealth, and comfort. 'We may lack much in this brief life, but we have a mansion waiting for us in heaven!' And that, of course, is true; heaven is glorious.

But that's not really the Lord's meaning here. The word that is used and translated *mansions* is a rare word. It's used, in fact, in only one other place in the New Testament and that's later in verse 23—and it simply means 'abode', or 'dwelling place', like an apartment. That doesn't sound very exciting, does it—an apartment complex in the sky?

But that's not really the idea either. It's about *reunion*. The New International Version translates this, "*many rooms*". And the idea in that is a picture of a great palace, maybe like Buckingham Palace, where the royal family dwells, (well officially dwells there; they have other residences as well, but officially, that's where the residence is.) And there, at times, within that great house, the whole family *dwells* together.

The point then is not splendor or spacious homes and streets of gold, (though there will be great glory and riches beyond imagination). But the point here is fellowship—being together again.

And that fits the context; the disciples were upset because Christ was leaving. They were afraid that they were losing Him and everything was coming to nothing. And so His assurance to them is that, 'He is going to His Father's house to prepare a place for them so that they will be reunited again—and forever.'

Now that's reason for great encouragement. We have a future home in heaven that is certainly glorious beyond description or imagination. But more importantly, a place of *fellowship* with our Lord.

What, after all, is a mansion without friends? —It's an empty, joyless place. Well that's how C. S. Lewis pictured hell in his book, *The Great Divorce*, it's a place of separation. 'The lost were in a gray town', he said, 'a colorless place, where they quarreled with their neighbors. All of them quarreling and the result is, they moved out. And they kept moving out, to the edge of town—and then beyond. Moving further and further apart, until they were millions of miles from us, and from one another, isolated and alone.'

I think some people take comfort in the idea of an '*infernal fellowship*' in hell. But I think Lewis was on to something in describing it as a place of separation from the warmth of companionship. It is loneliness.

But death for the believer is reunion, companionship, eternal fellowship. For that reason, we should not be troubled in this life. We have a glorious, joyful future—and that should fill our thoughts. That's something we should focus on and think about frequently and often.

And to say that is not to encourage escapism. The Lord wasn't suggesting that they turn their backs on the world, or become passive about human affairs and just wait for the end. He was encouraging them with words of triumph. That victory would be won by the cross—and it would ensure that eternal life is a certainty for all who are joined to Him. That was reason for hope, and not despair.

And hope gives incentive for action. We have a mission here in this world: And that is to glorify God in all that we do, all that we say, all that we think—and to witness for Christ, to represent Him well. But this place is not our terminus. This place is not our goal. We are pilgrims in this world, passing through on our way to heaven and glory.

But we also have the hope of His return into this world. He says that, "I will come again". (vs3). And when He does, He will receive us to Himself, that we may be with Him. That's His promise, and it's our destiny, to be with Him, and to be with all the saints of history. (And when I say saints, you understand I mean believers, because we're all saints.) And that's the company that we will spend our time and eternity with. And that's the reason He had to go away, the reason He had to go to the cross, where He purchased our salvation and prepared us for eternity. What a glorious day that will be.

The disciples were being left here to do the hard work of evangelism and teaching, to build the church and do the Lord's work; and to do that in this world—in this very dark and hostile place. They wouldn't have the riches and the pleasures of this world. They would be viewed as, "the offscouring of the world", as the apostle Paul told the Corinthians. (1Cor 4:13). That was the life of an apostle. They would be despised, they would be persecuted. Most would suffer martyrdom. Life would be difficult and not the thrones they had come into that upper room expecting.

But then, they would enter heaven. They would enter it triumphant, to the approval of the Lord, who would say, "Well done", and then to the reception of the saints and their fellowship.

And that's what we are promised as well. Heaven will be a place of reunion with loved ones. Mothers and fathers will be reunited with children and with infants that they had little time to know. And they'll all recognize each other. It's often asked, "Will we recognize each other? Will we know who our people are, or who our loved ones are?" Of course we will. Instantly. Like that! (*'snap' heard*). Our minds will be changed; we will have full knowledge. We'll know everybody there. That's my opinion, at least. We'll know everyone that is in our company there. We'll be reunited with friends, and have

friends we never knew; the reformers, the apostles, the patriarchs, and multitudes of saints, great and small alike.

But, most importantly, we will see Christ; we'll be with Him; we'll recognize Him immediately. Then we will know Him as we have never known Him. Then we'll realize how much He *loves* us, how much He *loved* us, and how much we owe Him.

We have no concept of that at this point in our life. We seek to cultivate that, (I think that's very important), to seek, above all things, to cultivate a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ—to know Him as He is and to know what He has done for us.

But the reality is, "...now we see in a mirror dimly...", Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13:12. Now, currently, everything is dark for the best of us. "...but then face to face...", he said—and what a revelation it will be: We will spend all eternity gratefully praising Him and in relationship with Him.

But that evening their earthly relationship was about to end. They'd never known a person like Him, never had a companion like the Lord with the wisdom and counsel that He gave. They never had known anyone who cared for them as He did; loved them so genuinely and deeply, who defended them so perfectly and powerfully. He was their Savior and God...and now He was leaving. They were overwhelmed.

It was for the best. It was necessary if they were to be with Him forever. But they still did not understand. They were all confused. That's clear from verse 4, where the Lord reminded them that they 'know the way to the place where He is going.' The *way* is the cross. (He had told them about that previously, numerous times, in the other Gospels.) He indicated that again there in the upper room, but they were not at all clear on His meaning.

And so Thomas spoke up. He said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going..." (vs5). 'We don't know if You're going to Greece, or to Rome, or You're going somewhere to the Far East. Lord, we do not know where You are going, how can we know?' "...how do we know the way?" (ibid.).

Thomas was the blunt disciple; he spoke his mind. And here he spoke openly and honestly, not only for himself, but for the others as well. He didn't know *the way*. 'What is it?', he asked. And we can be thankful for his ignorance and his candor, because his question opened the door for one of the greatest statements in the Gospel of John—and really in all of the Bible: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me...' " (vs6a). In other words, 'His way is the cross', and 'Their way is Him'. "I am the way," He said.

That is the sixth of the Lord's seven "I AM" statements: 'I AM the bread of life', 'I AM the light of the world', 'I AM the door', 'I AM the good shepherd', 'I AM the resurrection and the life', and 'I AM the vine'. But of all of these, this first statement in John 14:6, is the most exclusive. "The articles are not accidental", someone said. "I AM the way, and the truth, and the life." He didn't say, 'I have the truth'. He declared Himself to be "the truth", because He embodies the revelation of God; He is The Incarnate Word.

In Jesus Christ, God was revealed to the world. It's what John wrote, back in chapter 1, "No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him." (vs18).

So secondly, He is *truth* itself; and He is the content of the Gospel. Who He is and what He did, that's the good news of salvation—of eternal life. And so—He is '*the way*' to that life.

Then thirdly, He is "*the life*", spiritual life. New life, resurrection life is in Him; and by having Him, we have it.—And we have it in no other way.

So these are three descriptions that He gave of Himself. But of them, the first one is really the main one: He is *the way*. He is the only mediator between God and man. And if there's any question about that, He excludes all other religions, all other religious options in His last statement, "...no one comes to the Father but through me." (vs6b).

Now this is a verse for every age; but it seems especially relevant for our day of pluralism which accepts everything as valid and true; 'your truth', 'my truth', that kind of thing. 20 years ago I read an article in *The Wall Street Journal* that reads like it was yesterday's paper, titled, "*The Age Of Divine Disunity*," subtitled, "*Faith Now Springs From A Hodgepodge Of Beliefs*."

It began with a series of testimonies: Catherine said, "I'm an Episcopalian and I think of myself as a practicing non-Jew." "I'm a Mennonite-Unitarian Universalist who practices Zen meditation", Ralph said. "I call myself a Christian Buddhist", said another. The article went on to quote the Dalai Lama as calling America, 'The Spiritual Supermarket.'

That's what Professor David Wells called, "The triumph of the subjective over the objective. People don't believe in absolute truth, objective truth." Christian America, the land of the Puritans and Pilgrims, Calvinists all, is now a hodgepodge of ideas and spiritual confusion. We live in a post-Christian age, an age of neo-paganism. We won't change that with legislation but only with truth and prayer. John 14:6 is the message of the church for today and always: 'No one comes to the Father but through Christ and His sacrifice alone.'

He repeats that in verse 7, that the person who knows Christ knows the Father; "If you had known Me, you would have known my Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Knowing God only happens by knowing Christ—and that means, only through Christ can we enter the Father's house. Christ is *the way*, and what He called Himself in chapter 10, "The door."

If that is clear to us, it certainly wasn't clear to the disciples. They knew the Lord. They were all men of faith; and He made that clear when He washed their feet, 'You're all clean, but you need your feet washed.' They were men of faith, but it's obvious they were men of small faith, developing faith, and still confused by this revelation that the Lord gave.

So Philip spoke up and said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it's enough for us." (vs8). He wanted a theophany, something like Moses was given on Mt. Sinai when God put him in the cleft of the rock and passed by, and allowed him to see the back part of the Lord. Philip has been described as one of the Lord's 'slow learners'. The Lord had spoken about this before: He said, in chapter 10, "I and the Father are one." (vs30)—One in essence, as well as purpose. That didn't fully register with Philip.

But in fact, we're all slow learners, and we can be thankful Philip was because, as with Thomas' question, Philip's request led to more revelation. The Lord answered in verse 9, "Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

That is yet another definite, definitive revelation by Christ. No mere man could say what He just said. Not even a prophet could say what He just said. A prophet of the Old Testament could have said, 'He who has heard me has heard God.' But no prophet could have said, "He who has seen Me has seen God." But that's what the Lord said. He is the unique revelation of God because He is 'God the Son', 'The Word made flesh'; distinct from the Father in His person, but one with the Father in His essence. He is full deity—and He expressed that in verse 10. This is what they were to believe, that, as He said, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me." They are one in their being and their attributes.

But when the Word became flesh, when the Son of God became man, became one of us, in His human nature He came under His Father's authority; and all that He did was done in obedience to His Father. He spoke of that quite at length in chapter 5; 'All that I see the Father doing I do.' He is in perfect obedience to Him. All of His words and all of His works were the will of His Father and done in obedience to the Father; so that to hear Christ and see what He did was to see and hear the Father; Christ revealed Him.

Then He added emphasis to that by telling them in verse 11 to, 'Believe Him.' "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me." Believe that what He said is true and reliable. Believe that He is no mere man, but the eternal Son of God, who is

equal with the Father in power and glory. He is an equal member of the Godhead. Anything short of that is not Christianity. So it was necessary that they understand this revelation He gave of Himself; that seeing Him is seeing God.

But understanding it begins with faith. As Augustin said, "I believe that I may understand." Jesus adds, that if they were struggling to understand the meaning of His statements, if they couldn't understand on the basis of His Word, then He said, 'Believe on the evidence of His works.' (vs11b). Recall His miracles in order to help their weak faith. They're called *signs* all through this fourth Gospel, *signs* or *pointers*. And these pointed to truth, to the reality of Christ's person, His deity.

So He was saying, 'Reflect on the miracle of turning water into wine, of multiplying the loaves and fishes, of raising Lazarus from the dead'; it is evidence that He is God. And in the coming days, when the Holy Spirit was given to them at Pentecost, He would enlighten their minds. They would understand, and they would believe what He said was true, on the basis of His Words alone.

And that's how we, as Christians, live in this world. Paul said it in 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 7, "...we walk by faith, not by sight." We don't live by signs. We don't live by visual helps, but by the very Word that comes from God.

Now He does bless us; He allows us to see His hand in our life. But we don't live by that; we live by His Word. We live daily, believing that God's Word is true. Now that's often tested. When trials come, when difficulties come, the reliability of His Word is tested. Do we really believe it? Do we trust Him? And those things that come are for that purpose, to test us and strengthen our faith.

But we are to look to His truth and trust in it. —It is absolute. It is the final Word. It explains the world and reality as nothing else does or can. 'The Word is a lamp to our feet, it is a light to our path.' (Psa 119:105). Calvin began his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* with the statement, "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and

sound wisdom, consists of two parts: The knowledge of God and of ourselves."
(Book one, Chapter 1, page 1).

That is sound wisdom. And it is found here in God's Word—the Scriptures. It's the only basis for our authority, for understanding reality, and understanding what is right and what is wrong. It reveals God to us in His justice and mercy; and ourselves to us, in our lost condition and the way out of that, the way of salvation. It explains the nature of the world: It is His creation, yet fallen due to sin.

The Word of God shows us how to live in this fallen world safely; what is profitable, what is unprofitable, what is wise, what is foolish. And it gives us promises; it gives us great and glorious promises that are certain. This chapter began with the greatest of promises: There is a house outside of this world—it is the Father's house, Heaven. It is permanent. Our eternal destiny is permanent. This world and the things of this world are not. They are all temporary.

This life is slipping through our fingers right now, as we live. We can't keep it. And yet we fail to realize that so often. We're like Ephraim in Hosea chapter 7, verse 9, 'Gray hairs have sprinkled his head, and he doesn't know it.' Life is slipping by and people aren't even aware of it. So the wise person, the wise Christian, doesn't live for this world but for the next—and not for ourselves, we live for the Lord.

The promise of our first three verses should give us perspective on life and motivation to live for what lasts. And if we live for what lasts, we will be the most beneficial people to the society in which we live. The reward of doing that can only be seen dimly at this point with the eyes of faith. But, it is a glorious and certain future.

Anne Bradstreet was a Puritan—and a poet who wrote about the experience of her house burning down. Her poem is, *Upon The Burning Of Our House*. It's dated June 10th, 1666. It's instructive: She tells us of waking to the cry of "Fire!"; of fleeing the house and watching it burn down; of the pain of seeing everything turn to ashes and thinking of all the things that would never again happen in the house that she loved.

But she was able to deal with the tragedy in light of eternity. In the poem, she asked herself if she had fixed her hope on “moldering dust”, and made “The arm of the flesh her trust?” Then she wrote,

Thou has a house on high erect,
Framed by that mighty Architect.
It's purchased and paid for too,
By Him who hath enough to do.
A price so vast as is unknown,
Yet by His gift is made thine own;
There's wealth enough, I need no more,
Farewell, my *money*, farewell, my store.
The world no longer let me love,
My hope and treasure lies above.

It does for every believer in Jesus Christ. The world will dismiss that as ‘Pie in the sky’, as wishful thinking, as superstitious. But the One who came down from above has revealed heaven to us. It is true—the revelation is true. We must believe His Word to understand the promise, to know it, to know it is true, and to live it.

Well, may we by God's grace, believe that, believe all His Words to us and live for Him, and live for eternity.

The end is not *nothingness* for anyone. For multitudes, it is doom—that's Scripture; “It is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment.” (Heb 9:27). But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. If you have not done that, if you have not looked to Him and trusted in Him, then look to Him. Receive God's gift of life through faith in His Son, the sacrifice for sinners, the Savior of the world. May God help you to do that.

And help all of us to fix our heart on the things that He's promised us here: Fill our hearts with thoughts of heaven and know that, as we have that great hope and that certainty, we will be useful people in this world.

LORD, what a great truth that is that we have sung: "The debt is paid, the victory's won." It's finished. It was finished at the cross. There's nothing we can add to it. We can only receive it, and we can only receive it by Your sovereign grace. And You have poured out that grace on multitudes throughout history, an innumerable multitude. We thank You for that grace, and we thank You that we who put our faith in Christ can say that we've received it as well—and that truly, "the LORD is our Salvation."

Help us to remember that and grow in our understanding of that and appreciation of that. And as I said in our sermon, we'll spend all eternity marveling over that, never coming to the end of it, and praising You throughout the ages to come—all because of Your grace and the sacrifice Your Son made for us.

Now the LORD bless you and keep you. The LORD make His face shine on you and be gracious to you. The LORD lift up His countenance on you and give you peace. In Christ's name, Amen.

(End of Audio)