

“Jesus Has Prepared a Place for Us” John 14:14 Shane Hatfield 1/10/21

If you’ve got a Bible, turn to John 14. We are going to start, or continue, depending on how you look at it, our sermon series on the book of John this week. Now, for those of you who’ve been around for a while, Ethos started the book of John a couple of years ago, and this last summer Steve took us all the way up to chapter 13 in June before switching to some topical teachings. So, we’re going to go back it this week and we’re going to pick it up in John 14, but let me remind you that John wrote his gospel so that his readers might believe that Jesus Christ is the son of God and by believing in Him, they would have life, true life, eternal life. Chapters 1-12 of John focused on Jesus’ signs and His teachings, and then in chapter 13 it switches scenes and it focuses solely on Jesus’ last night with His disciples in the upper room, and that’s John 13-17. After that, he tells about His trial and His crucifixion and then His resurrection. I thought we’d pick it up here in John 14 as a great place to address some of the things that are going on in our lives right now, as well as a great place to prepare us for Easter which will be coming here in a few months.

So, we’re going to start here in John 14 tonight. If you’re new, don’t worry, we’re only going to test you over John chapters 14-21; we’ll give you a pass on all the rest of the stuff. Everybody else, if you’ve been around for a while, you need to go back and refresh yourself on John 1-13. Just joking. Alright, well, at the end of chapter 13, Jesus begins what scholars call His ‘Farewell Address.’ He tells His disciples that He’s leaving and then He begins to give them this farewell teaching. So, this got me thinking about farewell speeches and so I started researching famous farewell speeches, and I found out there aren’t a lot of famous farewell speeches. So, if you know of some famous ones, please send them my way. Well one of my friends sent me, not a farewell speech, but a farewell letter written by a man named Sullivan Ballou. And he wrote this to his wife Sarah before the Battle of Bull Run on July 14, 1861. And I’m going to read this to you because I think it’s such a powerful letter and I think it connects to what Jesus is going to start doing in John 14.

So, this is Sullivan Ballou to his wife, Sarah: “My very dear Sarah, the indications are very strong that we shall move in a few days, perhaps tomorrow. Lest I should not be able to write again, I feel impelled to write a few lines that may fall under your eye when I shall be no more. I have no misgivings about or lack of confidence in the cause in which I am engaged, and my courage does not halt or falter. I know how strongly American civilization now leans on the triumph of the government and how great a debt we owe to those who went before us through the blood and sufferings of the revolution and I am willing, perfectly willing, to lay down all my joys in this life to help maintain this government and to pay that debt.

“Sarah, my love for you is deathless. It seems to bind me with mighty cables that nothing but omnipotence could break, and yet my love of country comes over me like a strong wind and bears me irresistibly on with all these chains to the battlefield. The memories of the blissful moments I have spent with you come creeping over me and I feel most gratified to God and to you that I have enjoyed them for so long and hard it is for me to give them up and burn to ashes the hopes of future years when, God willing, we might still have lived and loved together and seen our sons grow up to honorable manhood around us. I have, I know, but few and small claims upon divine providence, but something whispers to me, ‘Perhaps it is the wafted prayer of my little Edgar, that I shall return to my loved ones unharmed.’

“If I do not, my dear Sarah, never forget how much I love you and when my last breath escapes me on the battlefield, it will whisper your name. Forgive my faults, and the many pains I

have caused you, how thoughtless and foolish I have oftentimes been, how gladly would I wash out with my tears every little spot upon your happiness. But, oh Sarah, if the dead can come back to this earth and flit unseen around those they love, I shall always be near you. In the gladdest days and in the darkest nights, always, always. And if there be a soft breeze upon your cheek, it shall be my breath, as cool as air feigns your throbbing temple, it shall be my spirit passing by. Sarah, do not mourn me dead, think I am gone, and wait for thee, for we shall meet again.”

Now that, is a farewell letter and that is a farewell letter written by a man who died a week after he wrote it. Now, do you think Sarah Ballou knew that her husband loved her? I bet she did. And I bet on dark days she pulled out that letter and read that to herself, because she could see his commitment to a greater cause, his love for her and his faith in divine providence in that letter. Well as we are about begin reading and studying Jesus’ farewell teaching to His disciples, I think that we see Jesus’ deep, deep commitment to God’s greater purpose, His deep love for us, and His trust of God’s caring and loving hand. And so, with that, I’m going to read John 14:1-3. The farewell discourse is long and there’s a lot to it, so we’re just going to get a small chunk tonight and we’re going to build on it in the next few weeks. So, John 14:1-3: “<sup>1</sup>Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. <sup>2</sup>In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? <sup>3</sup>And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.” This is God’s word.

Jesus begins His farewell instructions to His disciples by giving them two commands. First, is a negative command, He says, “Let not your hearts be troubled” and then a positive command, “Believe in God; believe also in me.” Now the disciples had a lot of things to be troubled about at this time, okay? Let me just run you through what’s happened in John 13. First, they get to Jerusalem for the Passover and the servant’s not there to wash their feet, so what does Jesus do? Jesus disrobes and begins washing His disciples’ feet, which is an embarrassingly shameful and low position for Him to take and not only that, but He tells His disciples, ‘Now I want you to go and wash each other’s feet the way I’ve washed your feet.’ Then, He says that one of them is going to betray Him, Judas, and He sends Judas out. And not only that, He tells Peter, ‘You’re going to deny Me.’ Now if you’re one of the other ten, you’re probably looking around thinking, ‘That probably doesn’t bode well for me.’ Then He tells them that He is going to go away, that He’s going to leave them. This man that they have followed for three years, that they have lived with for three years and that they have committed their entire life to, is going to be gone in a matter of days. And so, you can see how they would be a little troubled.

Now, like those disciples, I think our hearts are troubled as well. Our hearts are troubled by a worldwide pandemic that’s been going on for a year and even though we have a vaccine, it still looks like it’s going to take months of fighting to get it under control. The death toll continues to rise, and the cases continue to rise. I think our hearts are troubled by the election. We are witnessing one of the most contentious and turbulent elections in the history of our country and it culminated this week on Wednesday with the loss of four American lives and with people bringing the gallows to our nation’s capital along with a cross and a Christian flag. I don’t care what party you’re in, that ought to be deeply, deeply troubling to all of us, that Christian symbols were used in that way. Our hearts are troubled by those things and then there’s all the other stuff of life, right? The uncertainty of finances and sickness and sin and strife. So, I ask you, what troubles your heart today? What do you bring in here this evening?

Well, over the next few weeks as we go through this passage, especially John 14, I want us to meditate on these truths, and I think they are triumphant truths that Jesus gives for troubled

hearts. He tells us what He wants us to do. He wants us to believe in them and to believe in the God who gave them so that we may have peace. He wants these triumphant truths to calm and quiet our hearts. He wants His peace to be with us. And so, tonight we are just going to look at two of these truths that are in verses 2 and 3, and then we'll move on to more next week.

The first triumphant truth is this: that Jesus has prepared a place for us in the Father's house. In verse 2, He says, "In my Father's house are many rooms, if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?" So, after Jesus' death and His resurrection, He's telling them that He's going to go away to a very specific place for a specific purpose. He's going to go to His Father's house so that we can go be with Him, so that we could dwell there. Now, you may have heard this verse before, you may have sung it in a Steve Green song growing up. Where it says, "many rooms" here, the King James Version uses the word "mansions," okay? And that might give the illusion, right, that there's this gold Buckingham palace in the sky with pearly gates that we're all going to go to, or something that you might see off of MTV Cribs. But, this word here in the Greek is actually a very rare word, it's used only once in the New Testament in John 14:23, and there Jesus says that the Father and the Son will make their home in the believer through the Holy Spirit. And so, it's more accurate to translate this word "home," or "dwelling place." It's a neutral word. It's a common word. It's not an illustrious word.

So, what I think what Jesus is driving at here is that the emphasis is not what this mansion looks like, what this home in heaven looks like, but who is there. And the important thing is that God is going to dwell there with His people. And this makes sense, right, because what are the disciples upset about? They are not upset about losing this heavenly inheritance that they don't really know anything about. What they're upset about is that their friend and their Savior and their teacher, Jesus, is going to leave them. And so, Jesus wants to comfort them with the truth that even though He leaves, they're going to see Him again in His Father's house. And this is a promise that stretches all through the Bible, right? God has never dwelt with His people face to face since the garden, and one of the major promises, maybe the main promise in all Scripture is that God is going to dwell with His people again, that He will be our God and we will be His people.

In the Old Testament, the tabernacle and the temple and the sacrificial system were established so that God could dwell with His people and they could experience His presence, but as you see, as you read through the Old Testament, the tabernacle system is veiled, it's incomplete, it's limited in who can see it and what they can see. But what Jesus is promising here is that there is coming a day when all believers will get to dwell with God in His house and experience His goodness and His glory face to face in all of its fullness. But for that to happen, Jesus has to leave.

In the church, we talk a lot about the life of Jesus and a whole lot about the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus, which are super important, okay? But if Jesus was still just resurrected, walking around on earth, then His work would not actually be complete. What we don't spend a lot of time talking about is His ascension and His session. His ascension is what we read about in the beginning of Acts when Jesus ascended into heaven, and then His session is where Jesus sits now ruling and reigning over all things. Those two things are important. They're equally as important, right? Because what happens when Jesus ascends to heaven and He sits at the right hand of the Father? He secures our place in the Father's house. He prepares the place for us. Now, what is this like?

Well, right now my children are experiencing this a little bit because every weekend I leave and I go to Tulsa, and I spend the weekend here in Tulsa working for Ethos, in a sense, preparing a place, right? I've got to come here, and I've got to work in Tulsa so that someday, when we have a house and all that stuff and they're finished with school, they can move here and live with me. But every time I leave, they're sad, and they're upset, and they say, 'Dad, we don't want you to go! Why are you going? We don't want you to leave! When are you going to be back?' They want to know the plan. They're troubled because I'm leaving. But what they don't realize is that if I don't leave, then a place won't be prepared for them. It's because I love them that I'm leaving. I'm not a bad father. I'm not abandoning them. I'm not leaving them as orphans. I'm caring for them. That's the same thing that Jesus had to do for the disciples. He had to leave them for a time so that they could be with Him and God in heaven and because He did that, our eternal home is secured. Jesus has secured a place with the Father for us.

I think that's incredibly important for our troubled hearts right now, because our earthly homes feel so uncertain. This life feels so uncertain. That's the word that kept coming around last semester on campus: uncertain. Everything feels uncertain, with the pandemic and politics, chaos, confusion and conflict. There's uncertainty in this world and we're anxious and we're scared. What this passage teaches us is that this world, as it currently exists, is not our home, that we have a home in heaven that's eternally secure through Jesus. Jesus has secured it for us so that we can go and be with the Father, the Son and the Spirit. It's a home without sickness and sin. It's a home where there is truth and justice and righteousness. It is a home with a good King and it's a good kingdom. The kingdom of America may feel very uncertain right now, but I can assure you that the kingdom of God is not, and it never will be. And those two things are not the same thing. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of America are drastically different, and for all who are in Christ, your home in the kingdom is eternally secure. That's the first thing that Jesus teaches us for our troubled hearts: He tells us that our home has been prepared and secured in heaven with our Father.

And the second thing is this, He has prepared this place for us and He's going to take us to it. Verse 3, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also." So, there's a little bit of debate surrounding what Jesus says when He says, "I will come again." Some people think that it means that He will come again at the resurrection, at His resurrection, that He's going to be resurrected and He's going to come and see His disciples, which He did. But He didn't say, He ascended like we just talked about. Some people think that what Jesus is saying is that when the disciples die, Jesus is going to come and he's going to take them up to heaven, which it is true they go to heaven, but in this passage it doesn't say anything about them dying.

So what I think Jesus is saying, and the third interpretation that scholars propose is that this is a reference to Jesus' second coming. Jesus came, we celebrate that at Christmas, He came the first time, He does His life, death, resurrection, ascension and then He's going to come again. On this day, when He comes again, heaven is going to come to earth and God is going to dwell with all believers here. John talks about this in His gospel and John really, really shares it with us in His visions in Revelation. He says that on this day Jesus will fully and finally defeat Satan, sin, and death. He will judge the living and the dead and the dwelling place of God will be with man. Listen to how he describes it in Revelation 21: <sup>1</sup>"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of

God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Now that, is a glorious home. That is a glorious future.

But interestingly enough, that’s not what Jesus emphasizes here. What does Jesus emphasize in verse 3? He emphasizes that when He comes back, He’s going to take us to Himself. Think about how personal that is. Jesus emphasizes the personalness of His return, that He is going to be with us, and we are going to be with Him. In fact, when He’s describing heaven, and He’s describing His Father’s house, He uses, ‘to himself,’ in reference to us, in the Greek, nine times in two verses, and seven times in the English. Jesus is saying emphatically, repetitively, consistently, that heaven is Jesus being with His friends in the Father’s house. That’s what heaven is and that’s what Jesus wants to experience with us and that’s what we get to experience with Him and so, as we look towards the joys of heaven, as we look towards our future home with our Father, let us not forget that the greatest joy is the joy of being with Jesus.

Whenever I first took the job with RUF, it was the first time, really in my life, that I traveled on a regular basis. For RUF, there are trips and work trainings and that sort of thing. I would travel about four or five times a year for a week or so, and I felt really bad about that, I had lots of dad guilt. So, what I thought is, I am going to bring home some little gifts for my kids, that way they’ll be surprised, they’ll be thankful, ‘Hey, daddy got a trip, I got some candy.’ So, I started bringing home stickers and candy and maybe a t-shirt or something like that, and at first they were really surprised, they were like, ‘Dad’s home! Oh, we get candy too? That’s awesome!’ And then after a while they kind of, it was like I was equal, like: ‘Oh Dad’s home! And we get candy!’ But then after a few years it was like, ‘Dad, you’re home! Hey, what did you bring us?’ They were more excited about the candy than they were excited about me. So, what I did is I threw them a curveball and I came home one time and they said, ‘Dad, what did you get us?’ And I said, ‘ME! I’m the gift! I’m home. You get to be with me, and I get to be with you.’ That’s what Jesus is saying right here in this passage. When we get to heaven, we get to be with Him, and He gets to be with us. That’s His greatest joy and that will be our greatest joy as well.

So when our hearts are troubled by the uncertainty in this life, Jesus gives us a promise to believe, a promise to cling to, and that is this: that Jesus has secured an eternal home for us with God and He will come again to be with us and we will be with Him, either when we die, or when He returns. That is our future. That is our hope. These are not just sentimental sayings to give us warm fuzzies. This is not a nice bedtime story to make us feel good before we go to sleep. These are not just Christian cliches that we can use to motivate ourselves to do better and work harder. This is truth. These are historical realities that are anchors for our souls when we’re troubled. This is the voice of our heavenly Father coming to us in the midst of our troubles saying, ‘All will be well,’ saying, ‘I have given my only Son for you, how will I not graciously give you everything that you need?’

Think about it this way: if Sarah Ballou was comforted by her husband’s farewell letter, and I’m sure that she was because that was an amazing letter, how much more can we be comforted by the fact that our Savior is in heaven ruling and reigning over all things and there is nothing that can get to us without coming through Him first? Nothing. Trust in these truths will help us live confidently in the present by grounding us in the future. If you’ve never put your faith in Christ, now is the time to do it. Whether this is the first time or whether you’ve been a believer your entire life and you’re just wracked with anxiety. God tells us, He says, “Cast all your anxiety on me because I care for you.” If you feel uncertain and scared and afraid, now is

the time to believe these truths. Jesus has secured your home in heaven and you will be with Him, and He will be with you.

I want to close with the Heidelberg Catechism question and answer number one. That's probably not the thing to close your first sermon with, they probably don't put that in homiletical books, do they Steve? But I will tell you, I come back to this question and answer over and over again and I want to encourage you to memorize it and to pray it because it's a great way to hold on to these truths. This is what it says: "What is your only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own, but belong body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with His precious blood and has set me free from the power of the devil. He also preserves me in such a way that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head. Indeed, all things must work together for my salvation. Therefore, by His Holy Spirit He also assures me of eternal life. It makes me heartily willing and ready from now on to live for Him." Let's pray that the Holy Spirit would help us believe these triumphant truths so that we may have Jesus' peace. Let's pray together.