

The Father, the Son & the Devil

John 14:28-31 | Pastor Jason Van Bommel

²⁸ You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. ²⁹ And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here. – John 14:28-31, ESV

Clearing Up Confusion

This morning, we're coming to the end of John 14, which is Part I of a Three-Part teaching Jesus does with His disciples on His final night with them, just before Judas shows up to betray Him into the hands of wicked men, who will take Him away and crucify Him.

Have you ever had someone try to explain something to you and you only end up more confused? Maybe you feel that way sometimes with my preaching. I had this experience several times growing up with my dad, who always seemed to know about everything. I would ask him a question about something and he would launch into an explanation that would most often leave me more confused than before I asked.

In John 14, Jesus' disciples are hurt and confused on this most important and yet most somber night. They have heard Jesus say repeatedly He is going away from them, and they cannot follow nor will they even be able to search for Him and find Him. Jesus has been explaining to them why it is to their advantage that He is going away. He has been telling them how they can have hope and encouragement, even in the face of His departure. But the disciples cannot get past the very sobering reality of Jesus' imminent departure. All of Jesus' explanations seem to have left them confused and heart-broken still, because they cannot bring themselves to rejoice at Jesus' departure or see how they can be encouraged and have hope at such a time.

So Jesus wraps up this first part of His teaching with a bit of a rebuke and further clarification of the benefits of His departure.

Of course, part of the reason for the disciples' confusion is their lack of understanding of what is going to happen to Jesus and what will happen to them as a result of what Jesus is about to do. They know He is going away, they have a sense this might mean He will die, even that He will be lifted on a cross to die, betrayed by one of them and denied by at least Peter in the process. What they can't see is how Jesus' death on the cross will save them from their sins, how He will rise again from the dead, defeating death forever, and how He will ascend to the right hand of the Father, in a position of power and authority to pray for them, guide them and bring them safely home to Himself.

Sometimes we just can't see the reality of something until we've experienced it for ourselves. I just began pre-marital counseling for a couple, and the book we're using has a 6-week, a 6-month and a 1-year checkup after the wedding day, because pre-marital counseling tends to be received with nods and smiles by two people so smitten with puppy love who have no real clue what's in store for them. In a sense, the disciples are ignorant in exactly the opposite way: A couple about to get married has very high hopes and great excitement and little clue about the difficulty of two sinners truly loving one another. The disciples have had their hopes dashed and they have no excitement at all about what is coming, and they have very little clue as to how the departure of

Jesus in death will accomplish God's purpose for the glory of Christ and their salvation.

A. Rejoice that Jesus is Going Away?

Jesus begins this closing section of His opening teaching of the evening with a bit of a rebuke: *"You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I."*

You would have rejoiced at My going away? What kind of logic is this: "If you really loved Me, you would be happy to see me go"? When I go away on a mission trip, my family is not happy to see me go. They're happy when I return to them. So, how would the disciples show their love for Jesus by rejoicing at His departure? Because love always rejoices in the good of the one we love.

Jesus was going to the Father. This was going to be very good for Him. This is why they could not follow Him, for He was going back to heaven, back to glory, back to the presence of His Father. True love would rejoice in how good this is for Jesus, not to mention the benefits for the disciples.

You can follow the logic of the argument like this: Jesus had been telling the disciples of the blessings they will receive when He goes away. (He will return to this theme in Ch. 16.) He has told them of the place He goes to prepare for them and of "another Counselor" or "another Helper" whom He will send to be with them. Their sad faces evidently told Jesus: "We don't want another Counselor, We want You. We don't want you to go and prepare a place for us. We want you to stay here with us."

So Jesus responds to their downcast looks by saying, in essence, "Have you thought about My good? If you loved Me, you wouldn't want to keep Me here."

So often in the Christian life, we get downcast and anxious because we're very self-centered. We're worried about what might happen to us, and we're fixated on what benefits we're getting or not getting. A focus on Jesus lifts our eyes from our immediate circumstances, draws us out of ourselves, and empowers us with a true, eternal perspective on ourselves and our situation

Asking ourselves these questions can help us lift our eyes and focus more on Jesus than on ourselves:

- What is God's will for me here and now?
- How can I honor Jesus through this?
- What does love for Jesus look like in this situation?
- What is God teaching me? How is He growing me?
- How can I draw near to Jesus in this moment?

For the disciples on this last night, lifting their eyes and getting a better perspective involved knowing and remembering that Jesus was leaving them to return to the Father, and this would be so much better for Jesus.

B. The Father is Greater Than the Son?

Jesus says returning to the Father would be better for Him *"for the Father is greater than I."* What does Jesus mean by this? How is the Father greater than Jesus? Some people have latched onto this verse and others like

it and have insisted that Jesus is not fully and truly God. Jesus must be less than true God, for He said *“the Father is greater than I.”* This was the position held by an early church leader named Arius and his followers and is the position held by the Jehovah’s Witnesses today.

Arius taught *“There was once a time when Jesus was not.”* This despite the opening words of John’s Gospel, *“In the beginning was the Word.”* These two statements are irreconcilable” You cannot affirm *“In the beginning was the Word”* and know that the Word is Jesus while at the same time saying, *“There was once a time when Jesus was not.”* Arius taught that Jesus was divine, the first creation of God, superior to the rest of creation, but denied He was true and full God, equal to the Father.

The Jehovah’s Witnesses also have problems with the opening lines of John’s Gospel. Their New World Translation says, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was a god.”* A god, but not *THE* God. So, how many gods are there?

We believe Jesus taught His disciples He was equal to God the Father as One who is Himself true God. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus had said to Philip: *“Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.”* Even more clearly, earlier in John 10, Jesus had given His disciples assurance with these beautiful words: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”* – John 10:27-30, ESV

And John 1:1-3, rightly translated, begins the whole Gospel with a clear affirmation of Jesus’ full deity: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”*

So, if the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father, if the Father and the Son are one, and if Jesus was in the beginning with God as God, how is it He can say, *“the Father is greater than I”*?

First of all, Jesus is referring primarily to His current state compared to His Father. Jesus, when He is speaking to His disciples, is on earth and His Father is in heaven. Jesus is suffering in a state of humiliation, far from the glory of the worship of the angels in heaven, living in the weakness of flesh and subject to all the infirmities of the flesh – sickness, hunger, loneliness, pain, rejection. He has put Himself in this state so He can fulfill all righteousness for us and taste death for us in our place, taking our sins upon Himself and becoming our righteousness and our peace, our salvation and our covenant mediator, as One who is truly human and who became sin for us. The Father, by contrast, remains in a state of glory, unchanging and eternal glory, not subject to pain, weakness, hunger, or any of the infirmities of life in this world.

Notice Jesus did not say, *“The Father has always been and will always be greater than I.”* No, it’s just, *“you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I”* At the heart of this statement, Jesus is expressing His longing to return to the Father and to the state of glory He enjoyed with the Father before His incarnation. We know this is on His heart this night, because He later prays, *“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. And now,*

Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” – John 17:1-5, ESV

But does Jesus mean anything else when He says, “*The Father is greater than I*”? After all, He doesn’t just say “the Father is in a better place than I” or “the Father is enjoying more glory than I,” but “*The Father is greater than I.*” I believe the secondary meaning of Jesus’ statement is that the Father is greater in His office than the Son.

In eternity past, the Father, Son and Spirit entered into a covenant together, called by theologians “the covenant of redemption,” in which the Three Persons of the Godhead each covenanted to do what needed to be done for our redemption. The Father agreed to send the Son, anoint the Son with the Spirit, accept the offering of the Son in our place, and then raise and exalt the Son. The Son agreed to come, sent by the Father, take on a true human nature forever, live a life of perfect obedience, and then offer Himself up as a willing sacrifice in our place. The Spirit agreed to empower the Son for His earthly ministry, and to be sent by the Father and the Son to give God’s chosen people spiritual life, saving faith in Jesus, and repentance from their sins. He also agreed to indwell believers, comforting, counseling, guiding, empowering and interceding for them until they come to glory.

In this covenant of redemption, God the Father is the fountainhead of divine, redemptive activity, just as He was the fountainhead of divine, creative activity. God the Son accomplishes redemption, sent by the Father. God the Spirit applies the redemption accomplished by Christ, sent forth by the Father and the Son. So, within the economy of the covenant of redemption, God the Father has a greater office than God the Son, and God the Father and God the Son both have greater offices than God the Holy Spirit. That’s why the Father is the First Person of the Trinity, the Son is the Second Person of the Trinity, and the Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity.

A close human analogy can be found in human government. Think of the President, the Vice-President and the Secretary of State: The President has the highest office, the VP has the second highest office, and the Secretary of State has the third highest office. But in terms of their personhood, their humanity, you would not say that Donald Trump, as a person, is a greater or superior human being than Mike Pence or that Mike Pence is a greater or superior human being than Mike Pompeo. They are equal in personal worth as human beings. So it is with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

C. The Ruler of This World is Coming?

Jesus then says, “*And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place you may believe. ³⁰ I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, ³¹ but I do as the Father has commanded me*”

Jesus may have made His disciples sad by His talk of going away, but it’s important that He tell them ahead of time, so they can be prepared and might believe in Him when they see everything He has said to them coming true. But the time He has to teach them is coming to an end. “I will no longer talk much with you” For three years, they had sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His masterful teaching, but now they have just a few more moments with Him. Once they head out to the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus will withdraw from them to pray alone to His Father. Then, He will be taken from them.

Jesus says, “*I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming.*” Satan is coming. Jesus knows the Garden will be a place of battle, where He will wrestle with the devil. Jesus also knows Satan has entered Judas Isacriot, who is on the way to betray Him. Behind the actions of Judas, the Jewish High Priests, the Sanhedrin, Pontius Pilate and the Roman soldiers, Satan is at work, seeking to destroy Jesus.

While Satan is seeking to destroy Jesus, Jesus says, “*He has no claim on me.*” Literally, the Greek says, “*In Me, He has not nothing.*” In street slang, we could say, “He ain’t got nothin on me!” That’s a double negative and would get you corrected by an English teacher, but it’s excellent Greek to emphasize that Satan has absolutely no charge or accusation he could bring against Jesus. Jesus is clean. Satan is the adversary, the accuser of the brethren, and he has nothing to say against Jesus, nothing to accuse Him of, for Jesus has done everything the Father has commanded Him to do, perfectly.

The devil loves to make accusations. He loves to condemn God’s people. But this is a beautiful assertion of the perfect righteousness of our substitute, our redeemer, who is Himself our righteousness. If we connect this statement, “*He has no claim on me*” with what Jesus said earlier about our intimate union with Him, “*In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you,*” we get a powerful weapon to fight off all the accusations and condemnations of the devil. When the devil accuses you, you remind him that you are in Christ and Christ is in you, and he has no charge he can bring against Christ!

Accuse me and condemn me, and you may be right. I may be unreliable, unfaithful, a failure and a fraud, but I am in Jesus and Jesus is in me, and Jesus is my perfect righteousness. No claim can ever be made against Him!

The very last thing Jesus says in this chapter is “*Rise, let us go from here.*” But in the next verse, Ch. 15, verse 1, Jesus keeps right on teaching. It’s not until chapter 18 that we read of Jesus and the disciples actually going out and crossing the Kidron Valley to the Garden of Gethsemane. So, even though Jesus says these words here, He continues teaching His disciples for a few more minutes before they actually leave.

That the World May Know!

I want to close this morning by looking at what Jesus says right before His last words. He says, “*I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father.*”

“*That the world may know*” – These few words show us so much of the heart of Jesus and give us so much of our calling. Jesus came into the world as the light of the world. He came to manifest the glory of God to the world. He obeyed and went to the cross, as the Father commanded Him, so that the world would know who He is and what He has done for us and for our salvation.

If Jesus was willing to go to the cross “so that the world may know,” what are we willing to do, following Him, taking up our cross and walking in His footsteps? Where are we willing to go? What are we willing to sacrifice, in obedience to the Father? May we live our lives as Jesus did, “*that the world may know*”!