

## **“John: The Great Promise”**

*Exodus 3:1-14 • John 14:1-14*

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Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • November 12, 2023

Promises are funny things, aren't they. It seems like promises are easy to make and easy to break. But they can be hard to keep. From the time we are very young our lives are filled with promises and with the hurt of broken promises. I promise we will go to the park as soon as I finish this. I promise I won't forget. I promise I'll be on time. I promise you'll have the check tomorrow. The truth is that much of the work of lawyers deals with either making promises (think contracts) or dealing with broken promises and how to make it right for the person who was harmed.

The Bible is also filled, cover to cover, with promises from God. After the flood waters had receded, God told Noah, “I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” God promised Abram, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” But perhaps one of the greatest promises in the Bible is the one Jesus makes in our passage this morning.

But before we get to the promise, we need to see the context. We need to remember that when John wrote his gospel, he didn't include the chapter and verse numbers we have today. Those were added much later. When Jesus tells his disciples, “Let not your hearts be troubled,” this comes after he has told them some *very* troubling things. He began by telling them in John 12:27 that HIS heart was troubled as he faced taking on the sin of the entire world on the cross. Then at supper he told the disciples that one of them would betray him, that Peter would deny him, and that he was going away and they can't follow him. Naturally they were quite anxious and troubled.

Jesus tells them that they don't need to be troubled. They don't need to worry. Why? He says, “You believe in God, therefore believe in me.” Once again, as we have seen over and over in our study of John, Jesus explains that he is God in person. If anyone had reasons to believe what Jesus said it was these disciples. They had lived and traveled with him for three years. They saw him turn water into the finest quality wine. They were there when he restored sight to a blind man and they watched people who were lame get up and walk simply because of Jesus' words. They had watched as more than 5000 people were fed with five little loaves of bread and two small fish.

It should have been obvious to them by this point that Jesus did these things by the power of God, and yet they were still blind to what they meant. Jesus rightly scolds Philip saying, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?” Jesus then pulls back the curtain and lays it out plainly for them and for us. He says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. I am in the Father and the Father is in me.”

This is the very heart of the Gospel. Jesus is God! God has revealed Himself to us in the very person of Jesus Christ. If you want to know what God is like, look at the things Jesus says and does. Do you want to know what God has to say? Read the words that Jesus said. He tells His disciples, “The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.” He means that his words don't have a human authority but are God's words. He is not working for God, He IS God. He says, “if you don't believe me because I say so, believe on account of the works themselves. Believe because the miracles you've seen are things that only God can do.”

Jesus tells his anxious disciples that the cure for their anxiety is to trust in him. That's the cure for your anxiety and troubled heart,

also. After telling them to trust him, he gives them one of the greatest promises in the Bible, and I think maybe even the greatest promise ever made. Jesus says, "In my Father's house are many rooms. I fit were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 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." These words of Jesus are some of the most comforting I have ever heard.

We kind of miss some of the deeper meaning in our culture today. Most of us get that Jesus is promising that we will be with him in heaven. What we miss is the wedding metaphor Jesus is using. Some of the most exciting promises people can make to each other are their wedding vows. They are promising to give all of themselves to each other, holding nothing back. The two shall become one. Part of that promise is the excitement that comes with the engagement. That's where the promise begins.

In Galilee, where Jesus and many of his disciples grew up, extended families all lived together in a house called an *insula*, which was built around a courtyard. The custom when a couple was going to get engaged was for the groom and his father to go to the prospective bride's father and negotiate the terms of the marriage. When they had reached an agreement, the groom would return home and add on to his father's *insula*, creating a place for the new couple to live in the family home.

Jesus says, "I am going to prepare a place for you in my Father's *insula*." The promise is that you are loved and belong to Jesus and that he is preparing a place for each of us to spend eternity with him. When the groom finished adding on to his father's house he would go with his wedding party to get the bride and her attendants and bring them back to his house where the wedding would take place. Jesus says that when the time is right, when it's your time, he will personally come and take you to

be with him forever. And I am here to tell you that he really does that.

It has been my privilege to visit with a number of people from this church in their last weeks and months and several of them have told me similar stories that they had a dream or vision that Jesus came to visit them and he told them that they would be with him forever. Some of you have heard me say this before. I think our idea that heaven is far away is probably not accurate. I think we live in the midst of heaven and we just can't see it. There's a veil that separates us from the spiritual world all around us. When it's our time, Jesus comes and parts the veil and takes us to the other side. It's not a long trip. It's local. Hearing these saints of the church tell me about their experience has convinced me beyond all doubt that Jesus keeps his promise to prepare a place for each of us and to come take us there personally.

After making the promise to prepare a place for them and to come take them there himself, Jesus says, "And you know the way to where I am going." But His disciples think he's talking about taking a trip somewhere. Thomas says, "wait a minute. We don't even know where it is you're going. How can we know the way?" It's really a logical response from our standpoint. If you've ever used your phone or the computer to get directions somewhere, you basically need to know at least two things: where you are and where you're going.

The problem is that Thomas, like most of us, has not really paying attention to what Jesus has been telling him. He is filtering Jesus' words with his own expectations. So he says, "tell us which way." And Jesus responds with one of his best-known sayings, "*I am* the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

This is also one of the hardest of Jesus' sayings to accept. In today's culture it is politically incorrect to claim that Jesus is the only way to God. What society tells us is that religion is OK but not if it excludes others. The

argument is that there are many ways “up the mountain” to God. Most people will tell you it’s fine to believe that Jesus is a way to God but you can’t say he’s the only way. Remember, though, that Jesus *is* God. He says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

The way to where Jesus is going, the way to the presence of God, is through the cross. In Jesus, God willingly went to the cross on your behalf. He loves you so much that he was willing to suffer and die on your behalf, to have a relationship with you. If Jesus is God, then of course there can be no other way *to* God. Jesus is the way and that way is the only source of life for those who believe.

Finally, Jesus says, “whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater

works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. 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.” Does this mean Jesus will grant whatever we want as long as we ask “in Jesus’ name?” No. What he’s saying is that when you and I understand who Jesus is and what he has done for us, we will want others to know this great news. When we ask God to use us to share the good news of Jesus, when we ask him to prepare a place for us, when we ask him to give us his peace in place of our anxiety, that brings God glory and he will answer those prayers.

*Amen.*