

***Gospels: Lesson Nine,
The Olivet and Upper Room Discourses
Matthew 24-26, John 13-14***

Subject: Jesus delivered His Olivet and Upper Room discourses in the couple of days prior to His arrest.

Main Idea: Jesus prepared His disciples for the trauma of their separation by talking to them about the future and promising to send the Holy Spirit.

Principles:

1. *Christ's followers must be ready for His return, even though the day is unknown.*
2. *Because of Jesus' death, believers will go to heaven and in the meantime, the Holy Spirit will indwell them.*

Introduction

Many years ago, when our younger daughter was five, she had a life-threatening surgery to remove a large tumor that was resting against her brainstem. We praise the Lord that she is alive today, but at that time we were not expecting her to live. Needless to say, it was a very intense time for our family. One of the many things that weighed on me was what I should say or do to prepare our daughter for her death. Knowing she had received Jesus as her Savior, the only other thing I knew to do was to comfort her in every way possible.

In this lesson, we study the events and words of Jesus in the couple of days immediately prior to His arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Jesus was very conscious of His upcoming death, and leaving His beloved disciples behind was heavy on His mind. They were about to experience a major change. Although He would appear to them after His resurrection, their daily life together as they had known it over three years wouldn't be the same. Jesus wanted to prepare and comfort His disciples. He did so by talking to them about the future and promising them the Holy Spirit.

Although coming up with an exact timeline for the Passion week is challenging, following Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem on Sunday, He apparently spent a great deal of time at the Temple. At the beginning of Matthew 24, we find Jesus leaving the Temple and heading up the Mount of Olives. Thus, Matthew 24-25 record what is sometimes called the Olivet Discourse. It appears that He said these things on Wednesday (or possibly Thursday) just before His crucifixion on Friday. The Last Supper (including the washing of the disciples' feet) occurred on Thursday evening just hours before Jesus' arrest. Since the meal was shared in an "upper room," the words Jesus spoke in John 14 have come to be known as the Upper Room Discourse. The Olivet and Upper Room Discourses are about the future. They were not only intended to prepare and console the twelve apostles, but they were also meant to prepare and console *us* for the troubles we face.

I. The Olivet Discourse – Matthew 24-25

A. The Disciples Questions

- i. The Grand Temple Complex: As Jesus departed from the Temple, His disciples called to His attention its buildings. As previously stated, the Temple complex was the greatest architectural wonder of the Middle East. Herod the Great enlarged Mount Moriah on which the Temple sat by leveling the land surrounding it and creating a much larger “Temple Mount.” Alongside the Temple was the Antonia Fortress, from which Herod’s soldiers could overlook the Temple complex, ensuring that zealous worshippers were not inciting riots and rebellion against Rome. Solomon’s Colonnade, where money was changed, animals were sold, and other business conducted, was also on the Mount. The Jews thought there was no more beautiful sight than the Temple complex. Perhaps Jesus’ disciples were also admiring it when they drew Jesus’ attention to the buildings. Little could they have anticipated that He would say, “Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down” (24:2).
- ii. One Question or Two?
 1. The surprised disciples took in this information as they descended from the Temple Mount, crossed the Kidron Valley, and ascended the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives is directly across from the Temple Mount and affords a wonderful view of it. As they sat overlooking the buildings, their questions spilled out: “When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” They probably assumed that the destruction of the Temple and Christ’s return would be concurrent. However, with the perspective of time, we know that the Roman general Titus destroyed the Temple in AD 70, roughly forty years after Jesus’ ascension. Nearly 2000 years have since past and Jesus has not yet returned. Thus, many conclude that Jesus’ answer included information about two distinctly different events.
 2. The Greek word used by the disciples for Jesus’ coming in Matthew 24:3 is *parousia*. Although this is a general word for one’s arrival or appearance, the term has come to denote the Second Coming of Christ and appears four times in Matthew 24 (verses 3, 27, 37, 39). At the end of chapter 23 (23:39), Jesus alluded to His departure and return, but the disciples simply weren’t capable of understanding all these things until after Jesus returned to heaven and the Holy Spirit came to indwell them at Pentecost (John 14:26, 16:13). This is why the epistles (written after Pentecost) develop theological themes such as Jesus’ return that are only hinted at in the Gospels.

B. The Signs of Matthew 24:3-35:

- i. Which Verses Answer Each Question? According to Matthew 24 and 25, Jesus first answered the disciples' questions by listing signs that would signal the Temple's destruction and His second coming (24:3-35). Although there is general agreement that Jesus speaks solely of His return beginning in verse 36, attempts to determine which signs in the preceding verses (24:3-35) refer to the destruction of the Temple and which refer to Jesus' second coming leave Bible students divided. Furthermore, verse 34 is especially difficult. It says "this generation" won't pass away until "all these things" have happened. To which generation was Jesus referring? His own or some future generation? There are three primary interpretations of Matthew 24-25.

1. *All Signs Refer to the End Times*

- a. Since the nineteenth century, a school of thought known as Premillenarian Dispensationalism has grown in popularity. Although the Temple of Jesus' day was destroyed long ago, dispensationalists anticipate the erection of another Temple immediately preceding Christ's return. They believe that Jesus spoke of the destruction of this future Temple in Matthew 24 and interpret all the signs in this chapter as occurring immediately prior to Christ's return.
- b. Furthermore, they believe the Church will be raptured (1 Thessalonians 4:17) prior to all the events described in Matthew 24 and 25. Thus, the warnings therein are not for us or for any generation of Christians living prior to the rapture but only for those who receive Christ after the rapture (most of whom they believe will be Jewish converts).
- c. According to this view, "this generation" of verse 34 refers to the generation that will be alive at the time these things occur.
- d. While this view enables us to take the most literal understanding of all the signs and does not require us to pull the verses apart to choose which belong to the Parousia and which to the Temple destruction in AD 70, it does not allow for the most natural interpretation of the words "this generation." Jesus used that term elsewhere when He clearly meant His own generation (Matthew 11:16, 12:41-42, 23:36).

2. *Some Signs Refer to AD 70 and Some to the End Times*

- a. A second view is that some of the signs and events in 24:3-35 refer to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 and some to the Second Coming of Christ. Most of us have probably heard very little about the incredible suffering and slaughter that followed the Jews' rebellion against Rome from AD 66-70. According to the historian Josephus, 97,000 people were taken captive and 1,100,000 were killed by sword or starved to death in the final overthrow of Jerusalem.¹ It was like the end of the world to the generation who lived through it! The magnitude of suffering that occurred is what makes this view plausible.
- b. Those who see Matthew 24 as referring to two distinct events divide up the verses in a number of ways.
 - i. For example, some see the signs in verses 4-14 as referring to the Church Age in general and not necessarily as a portend of the end of the age (see verse 6b). They see the suffering at the time of the Temple's destruction foretold in verses 15-20 and all the years beginning with the Temple destruction right up to our present day and continuing until Jesus' Second Coming in verses 21-28. They would attribute only verses 29-31 to the immediate time of Jesus' return.
 - ii. Another example of the way the verses have been divided is by taking verses 4-28 and 32-35 as referring to the events of Jesus' generation and those in verses 29-31 referring to Christ's return.
- c. An advantage to seeing this chapter as referring to two distinctly different events in time is that it resonates with the pattern of Old Testament prophecy, where events belonging to different eras are often set side by side. Another advantage is that it allows for the more natural understanding of "this generation" in verse 34, since Jesus could have been referring only to the signs of the Temple destruction in AD 70 when He made the statement. A criticism is the difficulty in explaining why "*all* these things" (all the signs of verses 4-34) would not have occurred before Jesus' generation passed away (since Jesus used the word "all").

3. *All Signs Refer to AD 70*

- a. A third view is that all the signs in verses 4-35 refer to events that preceded the destruction of the Temple in AD 70. In other words, they have all been fulfilled. Verse 34 serves as a summary of Jesus' answer about the signs of the Temple destruction: "this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened." Then, in verses 36 and following, where Jesus moves on to answer the second question about His coming and the end of the age, Jesus does not offer *any* signs, but on the contrary states that *no one can know* the time. We must simply be ready.
- b. Verses 30-31 refer to the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, the mourning of the peoples of the earth when they see Him coming in power and glory on the clouds, and the trumpet call indicating the gathering of the elect. Those who hold to this third view don't see these verses as referring to Jesus' Second Coming but as Old Testament apocalyptic symbols of *the beginning* of Christ's kingdom and the calling of the elect from all parts of the earth *to form this new order*.
- c. Like the second view, this view can take the natural and easier understanding of "this generation." However, many strongly object to the symbolizing of verses 30-31.

ii. A Proper Attitude Toward Prophecy

1. There is much disagreement about the details leading up to and immediately following Christ's return, including the Millennium, the Great Tribulation period, and the salvation of the Jewish people. While the Scriptures may be obscure about these things, all orthodox Bible believing Christians agree that Jesus *is* coming back again one day! Furthermore, the Bible plainly teaches that:
 - a. although we do not know when Christ will return, His return will be sudden, personal, visible and bodily;
 - b. Christians should eagerly long for His return;
 - c. the final results of Christ's return will be the judgment of unbelievers and the final reward of believers, and that believers will live with Christ in a new heaven and a new earth for all eternity;
 - d. the triune-God will reign and be worshipped in an eternal kingdom where no sin, sorrow, or suffering will be present.ⁱⁱ

2. Perhaps you have heard the saying about Bible study, “The main things are the plain things, and the plain things are the main things.” It is important not to become so absorbed with knowing the order of end times events that we stop focusing on living a Christ-honoring life or fail to be humble in our opinions. All three of the views of Matthew 24 presented above are within the mainstream of Christian orthodoxy. Understanding how end times events will unfold, as interesting as that is, is not as critical as understanding that Jesus *will* return and that we must *be ready* for Him. On the other hand, the Bible exhorts us to correctly handle the “word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15) and to be ready to give an answer for our hope (1 Peter 3:15). The Book of Revelation even carries a blessing to all who read and “take to heart” its prophecies. So we are also wrong if we take the attitude that the prophecies are just too hard to bother trying to understand them. Study prayerfully and come to the best conclusions you can about end times prophecies, but avoid becoming dogmatic.

C. The Need for Preparation – Matthew 24:36-25:46: Whether Jesus spoke of AD 70, His return or both, He was preparing His disciples for their separation by speaking of events that were future to them. Beginning in 24:36, Jesus clearly spoke of His return, repeatedly emphasizing the need to keep watch and be prepared (24:42, 44; 25:13).

i. No One Knows When – 24:36-44

1. Jesus made the astonishing statement that no one knows the day or hour of His return except the Father, not even the angels nor the Son. Therefore, we can be certain that anyone who claims they have figured out the day of Christ’s return is going to be wrong! From this verse, we also learn something about Jesus Christ: while on earth, He voluntarily chose to limit the exercise of His divine attributes. Philippians 2:6-8 tell us that while He is God, He chose to empty Himself in order to serve mankind. He voluntarily limited His rights and abilities.
2. Jesus compared the unexpectedness of His return to the days of Noah. The flood came while people were going about the normal course of their lives and took them by surprise. Jesus’ return will happen in the same way. When His disciples were separated from Him, these words would help them to focus on the future. Likewise, when present sorrows overwhelm us, we too must look to the future and keep watch.

- ii. Parable of the Homeowner and the Thief – 24:43-44: Jesus gave three parabolic illustrations of the need to keep watch. In the first, the owner of a house returned home and surprised a thief who had entered the house.
- iii. Parable of the Wise and Wicked Servants – 24:45-51: In a second illustration, when the master of a household returns earlier than expected, a faithful servant is prepared but an evil servant is unprepared. Interestingly, this parable depicts Jesus as returning sooner than expected and the next depicts Him returning later than expected.ⁱⁱⁱ
- iv. Parable of the Ten Virgins – 25:1-13: The third illustration of the need to keep watch is of ten bridal attendants, only half of whom are prepared for the bridegroom's arrival.
 1. Those who take a dispensational perspective believe the church is not in view in chapters 24 and 25. Thus, in this parable, they see the attendants as representing Jews in the period of the Great Tribulation just prior to Christ's return. Some will be truly ready and thus saved, while others will not.
 2. Another view is that this parable and the next represent the Jews in Jesus' day who were not prepared for His first coming.
 3. However, since Jesus was giving this discourse to prepare His own disciples for His return, it must be relevant for us as well. As the parable teaches, we should not be discouraged by the delay in Christ's return or think we can wait until the last moment to receive or begin serving Him. We must be prepared for His coming! Following Christ takes perseverance.
 4. We also see in this parable that each of the ten virgins was responsible to have herself ready. Each person must choose Christ for themselves. No one can do that for us and we cannot do it for anyone else. But we can encourage fellow believers to look ahead and remain alert, for Jesus is coming!
- v. Parable of the Bags of Gold (Talents) – 25:14-30:
 1. The parable of the bags of gold (or talents) tells *how* we are to prepare for Christ's return. We are to be wise stewards in light of future judgment. In contemporary usage, the word talent denotes skills and abilities, but in New Testament times, a talent was the largest denomination of currency in the Roman Empire. Luke 12:48 summarizes this parable with the words, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded." A master entrusted three servants with different amounts (five, two, and one talent), each according to their ability. The first two invested wisely and were praised by the master on his return. The last servant thought pleasing the master would be too difficult and never tried. He overlooked his obligation as a servant.

2. The parable teaches several lessons.
 - a. First, a day of reckoning will come.
 - b. Second, we are not all expected to perform at the same level but according to what we have been given. What will matter is not how much money or ability we've been given but what we have done with it.
 - c. Third, the judgment of believers will include rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10).
 - d. Fourth, heaven will be a place of responsibilities and joys.
 - e. Fifth, true believers prove their faith by faithfully using what He has given them. On the other hand, those who ignore their obligation to their Creator are just as guilty as those who are overtly hostile to Him and both will be separated from God and all His goodness throughout eternity.
- vi. Parable of the Sheep and the Goats – 25:31-46
 1. Jesus concluded His discourse with a story that emphasizes the need for preparedness in light of final judgment. The parable portrays Jesus the King as an exalted conqueror, sitting on His throne to pass judgment. Dispensationalists believe that because Jesus referred to the sheep and the goats' treatment of "these brothers of mine," the sheep and goats must be a second and third category of people. They believe the sheep and goats are Gentiles who will be alive at the time of Christ's return and judged on the basis of their treatment of Jesus' "brothers" (fellow Jews). Others see it as representing Christ's judgment of all nations at the end of the age.
 2. Regardless of one's position, the main truths of this parable include:
 - a. Whether you are a sheep or a goat is what really counts. Some have used this parable as support for a "social gospel" that hinges our salvation upon works. It is important to note that Jesus separated the sheep and goats prior to His words about their behavior. The social activity rendered or not rendered wasn't the factor that determined their destiny but their identity: some were sheep (saved) and some were goats (unsaved). This is emphasized by the sheep's surprise at Jesus commendation: "When did we do these things?" (25:37-39). The goats, on the other hand, had already rejected the Messiah.

- b. Proper response to fellow believers matters in light of eternity. Christians who are in need are to be the special target of our assistance and generosity.
- c. Claiming to belong to Christ is not the same as acting as one who belongs to Him.

Summary Statement: While Jesus' answers about the "when" and "how" of the Temple's destruction and His Second Coming contain an element of mystery, His pastoral interest in *preparing us* for the future is clearly communicated.

Principle: *Christ's followers must be ready for His return, even though the day is unknown.*

Application: Jesus' death would leave His disciples in shock. How do you respond when a surprising turn of events leaves you feeling numb or depressed? Many of us, without even realizing it, draw inward. Jesus taught His disciples to look beyond their own present trials and focus on the future. According to these words of Jesus, focusing on the future does not mean selling our possessions, moving to Jerusalem, and singing hymns on the Temple Mount until He returns. Rather, He urges us to exercise faithful and wise stewardship. "It will be good for that servant whose Master finds him doing so when He returns" (Matthew 24:46).

All of us need periods of rest and renewal, but it is important that we do not become drawn into prolonged periods in which we are not actively serving the body of Christ or witnessing to others. If we pull away from kingdom work every time we are in crisis, we may eventually stop preparing for Jesus' return altogether, for life is full of trouble (John 16:33). Jesus may come tomorrow, so don't lose heart, dear friends! Are you wisely and faithfully using the talents and resources He has given you?

Transition: Matthew 26:1-2 say that "when Jesus finished saying all these things," He reminded His disciples that the Passover was only two days away and that He would be crucified. Knowing that He would be crucified on Friday (the traditional time of the Passover meal), on Thursday morning, Jesus asked His disciples to make preparations for them to eat the meal (26:17-19) that evening, one day early. We call this "the Last Supper." However, before telling us about it, Matthew records the preparations being made for Jesus' arrest.

II. The Last Supper and the Upper Room Discourse – Matthew 26:1-30, John 13-14:

A. Preparations for Jesus' Arrest and Crucifixion

- i. Preparations by the Religious Leaders – 26:2-5: Verses 2-5 present the irony of the religious leaders' plot. Although Jesus said He would be crucified at Passover, the Jewish religious leaders determined to arrest and kill him but *not* during the festivities. Their plan defied the plan of God. We are reminded of the Proverb that says, "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (19:21).
- ii. Preparations by Mary – 26:6-13: In our last lesson, we studied Mary's anointing of Jesus in John 12. Although John had it occurring prior to the Triumphal Entry, Matthew (who was less concerned with chronology) listed it along with other preparations for Jesus' crucifixion.
- iii. Preparations by Judas – 26:14-16
 1. Judas agreed to betray Jesus for thirty silver coins. Despite all of Jesus' teachings on the cost of discipleship and the importance of serving others, Judas was self-serving. According to John's account of Mary's anointing, it was Judas who was indignant over the "waste" of the perfume (Matthew 26:8, John 12:4-5). Jesus insisted she was anointing Him for His death. If Jesus was, in fact, to die rather than establish an earthly kingdom, as Judas had hoped, Judas had no chance of an important political role. Furthermore, if Jesus was sentenced to death, His followers would also be at risk. Therefore, Judas determined to profit from Jesus and distance himself from Him all in one treacherous act.
 2. Perhaps Matthew mentions Judas' meeting with the chief priests immediately after telling of Mary's anointing to suggest that that the anointing gave Judas the final impetus to betray Jesus. In turn, it may have been Judas' offer of betrayal that changed the priests' minds about the timing of Jesus' arrest. Despite the self-serving plans of man, the plan of God was thus set in motion.

B. The Last Supper – Matthew 26:17-30

- i. Judas' Last Chance – Matthew 26:20-25, John 13:18-30: On the night of Jesus' arrest, He celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples in an upper room. In Mediterranean fashion, they would have reclined on their side around a low table and dipped bread or meat (or since it was the Passover meal, bitter herbs) into shared bowls. During the meal, Jesus announced that He would be betrayed by one of them.

1. In the culture of the day, dining together was a sign of friendship. There was no worse offense than eating with someone while plotting against them at the same time. This fact sheds light on the reason for which Jesus quoted Psalm 41:9: “He who shared my bread has turned against me” (John 13:18). The statement wasn’t made to reveal Judas as the guilty party but to comment on the evil of the treachery that was about to occur.
 2. Of course, Jesus knew that it would be Judas. When He lovingly dipped a piece of bread and offered it to him, it was as if He was offering Judas a final opportunity to change his mind. Judas ate the bread but rejected Jesus’ offer. Thus, having made his choice, Satan entered Judas and Jesus told him, “What you are about to do, do quickly.” At the time, the disciples didn’t understand what Jesus meant when He said this. Only Judas knew.
 3. John wrote, “As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night” (13:30). The words “and it was night” are more than a factual detail. They serve as a spiritual commentary on Judas’ betrayal and the condition of his heart. Darkness is a symbol of evil (John 3:19). Judas left the glory of the presence of his Creator, never again to enjoy His fellowship.
- ii. The Eucharist – Matthew 26:26-29: With Judas gone, Jesus shared further information with His disciples, instituting what we call the Eucharist, the Lord’s Supper or Communion.
1. “*This is My Body*:” Christians are divided over the meaning of Jesus’ words, “Take and eat; this is my body.” Although the Greek word “is” in this statement is not emphatic, Roman Catholics take Jesus’ words literally and believe the elements of Communion literally become Christ’s body and blood. This belief is called *Transubstantiation*. The Lutheran tradition (following Martin Luther’s teachings) holds a modified position known as *Consubstantiation*, in which Christ’s physical body is believed to be present “in, with, and under” the bread.^{iv} The remainder of Protestantism sees the elements of the wine and bread symbolically. Jesus often used symbolic language when speaking of Himself. He said, “I am the gate” (John 10:7) and “I am the true vine” (John 15:1).
 2. *Jesus Gave Thanks*: Jesus “gave thanks” (Matthew 26:26). The Greek word is “eucharisteo,” from which Eucharist, a term sometimes used for the Communion meal, is derived. The celebration of Communion is a commemoration of Jesus’ death and our identification with Him in it. We celebrate Communion in our churches today to give thanks for what He has done for us.

3. *The Communion Symbols*: Communion was instituted at a Passover meal. Jesus identified the bread and wine as symbols of His body, which was broken in His death on the cross and His blood, which was spilt out at His death. The meal is also a symbol of the New Covenant God has made with believers, a covenant of grace rather than law. Since Passover foreshadowed the death of the Lamb of God and the Communion celebration was instituted at Passover as a commemoration of His death, there is a sense in which the Communion celebration of the church today is a replacement (a fulfillment) of the Old Covenant Passover meal.
- iii. Departure From the Upper Room: 26:30 concludes Matthew's record of the Last Supper with the words, "When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (the place where Jesus would be arrested). But John has more to tell us about the evening in the upper room. Therefore, we now turn to John 13-14 for further details, including what is known as the Upper Room Discourse.

C. The Upper Room Activities and Discourse – John 13-14

i. Feet Washing – John 13:1-17

1. Open sandals and dusty roads made for very dirty feet. It was the job of a servant, not the host, to wash a guest's feet. Yet out of love for His disciples, Jesus "got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him" (13:4-5). He did this as an example to us (verse 15). Leaders are especially accountable for serving those they lead. Jesus said that we will be blessed if we do this (verse 17).
2. John comments that Jesus had full knowledge that it was time for Him to return to His Father (verse 1) and that He knew the Father had put all things under His power (verse 3). When one finds his or her identity and confidence in God, serving others is not demeaning but fulfilling! Additionally, this commentary confirms that Jesus was not forced to go to the Cross but did so voluntarily.
3. Since the washing of feet generally occurred when one entered a home, Jesus apparently washed His disciple's feet before the meal. Thus, Judas' feet were also washed. How it must have strained Judas' guilty conscience!

4. Peter was hesitant to allow Jesus to take on the role of his servant and wash his feet. Little did he realize that this symbolic act foreshadowed a much greater act of service: Jesus' death on his behalf! His service in dying on the cross on our behalf must be received by us, if we are to belong to Him.
- ii. Judas' Betrayal Predicted – John 13:21-30 (covered in II.B.i.)
 - iii. A New Command – John 13:31-35: With the burden of Judas' presence lifted, Jesus focused entirely on preparing His disciples for what would take place in the next hours. He told the remaining eleven that He would be with them only a little longer. They would look for Him, but they could not go where He was going (13:33); thus, there were other things He must tell them. He had already spoken to them of things in the more distant future. Now He spoke to them of things pertaining to the near future. First, the new community they would form was to be characterized by love. By their love for one another, the world would recognize them as His disciples (13:34-35).
 - iv. Peter's Denial Predicted – John 13:31-38: Peter couldn't focus on this new command because He was still unsettled by the information that Jesus would soon be leaving them. Clearly the disciples had not accepted the fact that Jesus was about to die, even though He had clearly told them so. Peter asked Jesus where He was going (13:36), claiming he would follow Jesus anywhere, even die for Him. Jesus shocked Peter by telling him that before the rooster crowed at dawn, Peter would in fact disown Him three times.
 - v. The Upper Room Discourse: Comfort for the Disciples – John 14:1-31: In John 14, we have the last words of Jesus before leaving the upper room to walk to Gethsemane where He would be arrested. In light of the disturbing announcements of His betrayal, death, and Peter's denial, Jesus now sought to comfort His disciples. He did not want them to be troubled.
 1. *Preparing A Place* – 14:1-4: First, Jesus assured His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them in Heaven and would return for them. What a thrill and encouragement to know that Jesus is preparing a special place for us and is eager to come get us and bring us there with Him. The disciples were about to enter dark hours. These words would comfort them, even as they are intended to comfort us in our darkest hours. In addition, Jesus comforted His disciples by reminding them that they knew the way to the place where Jesus was going.

2. *Thomas' Question About the Way* – 14:4-6: Thomas asked, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus answered emphatically, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” It is no wonder that this statement has been the source of such offense to those who reject Jesus. In this single statement, He not only claimed to be the only way to heaven, but also the only answer to the deepest questions of life (the truth) and the only satisfaction for the hunger within us (the life). Some say Jesus was arrogant for making such a claim, but if it is true, it is not an arrogant statement but a loving one. The wrong would be in withholding this information! Thus Jesus assured His disciples that they did, in fact, know the way to where He was going.
3. *Philips Request to be Shown the Father* – 14:7-21
 - a. *The Assurance of Heaven*: Jesus said that if His disciples really knew Him, they would know the Father as well. Yet Philip replied, “Lord, show us the Father.” Jesus patiently reiterated that to see Him *is* to see God (verse 9). Nowhere is it clearer than in this verse that Jesus claimed to be God. But it was not a truth the disciples clearly understood until after Pentecost. Nevertheless, they would then recall Jesus’ words and be comforted by the fact that they had indeed been with God Incarnate, they knew the Way to heaven was through Him, and that the glorified Jesus would be there awaiting them.
 - b. *The Assurance of “Greater Works”*: Philip’s question led Jesus to talk to them about the importance of belief in Him. He was indeed the Way, the Truth, and the Life, but belief in Him was essential. In fact, it is so important that Jesus said that those who believe will do even greater things than He had done on earth (verse 12). It’s hard to imagine that when Jesus said “greater things,” He meant more dramatic things. How then are we to understand it? The Book of Acts and the worldwide spread of the Gospel attest to the fact that because Jesus has gone to His Father and sent His Spirit, the “greater” work of building the Church has been accomplished through believers over the past 2000 years. Over 3000 people were converted as a result of Peter’s first sermon at Pentecost alone (Acts 2:41)! Our redemption was the goal of His death and resurrection.

In the face of present grief over separation and potential loneliness, Jesus called His disciples to “greater works,” thus shifting their focus to the future.

- c. *The Promise of Answered Prayer:* Additionally, Jesus said that He would do whatever we ask in His name so that the Father may be glorified in Him (verse 13). Let us note that this statement includes conditions. First, we must ask “in Jesus’ name.” This doesn’t mean merely tacking “we pray in Jesus’ name” at the end of our prayers. In the words of Leon Morris, “It means that prayer is to be in accordance with all that the name stands for... prayer which seeks to set forward Christ Himself.”^v Additionally, the goal of the requests must be glory to the Father. Stated more simply, they are prayers prayed in line with God’s will.
- d. *The Promise of an Advocate:* Then Jesus explained that while they waited to go to heaven, heaven would, in a sense come to them. He would not leave them orphaned. He would send another advocate, the Spirit of Truth to live with them and be *in* them.
 - i. *To Indwell:* Up until that time in history, the Holy Spirit came on people (anointed them) for special tasks, but it was only after Jesus returned to His Father that the Holy Spirit permanently indwelt believers. Jesus comforted His disciples that He would indwell them in the person of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts confirms this first occurred shortly after Jesus’ ascension at Pentecost (2:1-4).
 - ii. *To Teach and Sanctify:* In this section focusing on the giving of the Holy Spirit, obedience to Jesus’ commands is stressed. On the day of Pentecost, when the Spirit first indwelt them, the disciples understood truths they had not previously been able to grasp (verse 20). Specifically, Jesus said the Spirit would teach and remind them of His words. Not only would the Holy Spirit teach them (verse 26), He would also empower them to obey Jesus’ commands (verses 15, 21). This explains why those who have never been able to make sense of the Bible and never been able to break free from bondage to specific sins suddenly find the Bible alive and interesting and their behavior changing after they come to Christ. It is evidence of the Holy Spirit at work within us.

4. *Judas' Question and Jesus' Answer – 14:21-27*

a. *The Promise that He would Make His Home with Them*

- i. Jesus consoled His disciples that He would continue to show Himself to those who loved Him (verse 21). Judas (not Iscariot) asked, “Why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” Jesus replied that He and the Father would make Their home (in the person of the Holy Spirit) with those who love God and demonstrate their love by obedience. The Holy Spirit “shows” us the Father. The world does not see Him as we do because they do not have the Holy Spirit living in them and instructing them. The implication for the believer is intimate fellowship with Jesus!
- ii. Can you attest to the fact that the more time you spend studying the Scripture and allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to you personally about them, the more you have experienced a dynamic relationship in which you “see” God? Can you attest to the fact that the Holy Spirit gives you a power that is not your own to obey Him? And can you attest to the sense of God’s pleasure with you when you obey so that with the eyes of your heart, you “see” Him?

b. *The Promise of Peace:* Finally, Jesus told His disciples He was leaving them with His peace. Peace is also a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22). To the degree that we live in fellowship with Jesus and under the control of the Holy Spirit, we experience a dynamic peace that the world cannot give or explain.

5. *Jesus' Final Words Before Departing – 14:27-31*

- a. *Jesus Returning to the Father:* The Upper Room Discourse concludes with Jesus’ reminder that He was going away but would come back. The disciples should have been glad that Jesus’ mission was almost over for Jesus had accepted an inferior position in coming to the earth and He would now return to His Father who was “greater” (or had remained all along in the glorified state).^{vi} This too should comfort them.
- b. *“Come now, let us leave” (14:31b):* This departure from the upper room correlates with Matthew 26:30 (“When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”). Jesus was headed to the Garden of Gethsemane with His disciples.

Summary Statement: On the evening of His arrest, Jesus hosted a Passover meal at which He washed His disciples' feet, inaugurated the remembrance of His death, and comforted His disciples over their upcoming separation. He comforted them by promising to prepare a place for them in heaven and until that time, sending heaven to them in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Principle: *Because of Jesus' death, believers will go to heaven, and in the meantime, the Holy Spirit will indwell them.*

Do you sometimes wish Jesus was still on earth with us? Do you need His comfort? According to Him, we are better off because He is in heaven (John 14:2-3, 18-21, 23, 25-27, 28; 16:7)! When our daughter was sick, I comforted her with my presence, lying down with her when she slept, sitting beside her while she ate, accompanying her to every appointment, and holding her in my lap and wrapping my arms around her when she felt distressed. But Jesus comforts us in a way that is far better! He comforts us by His *indwelling* Holy Spirit! We have the joys of heaven to anticipate and comfort of His Spirit in the meantime.

Application: Maturing believer, have you recently taken for granted the precious gift of the Holy Spirit? If you are a disciple of Christ and need comforting, will you ask the Holy Spirit to remind you that He will never leave or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5)? Ephesians 1:13b says, *“Having believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing your inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession, for the praise of His glory.”*

Conclusion

The hour was late and Jesus still had more instructive and comforting words to say. It appears that John 15 and 16 were delivered en route to the Garden of Gethsemane. They are included in our next lesson on Jesus' trials, crucifixion, and resurrection.

ⁱ Schroeder, David. *Matthew: The King and His Kingdom*, pp. 252-253. Christian Publications: Camp Hill, PA, 1995.

ⁱⁱ Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology* (pp. 1092-1095). Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1994.

ⁱⁱⁱ Blomberg, C. (1992). *Matthew* (Vol. 22, p. 364). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{iv} Grudem, p. 992.

^v Morris, Leon. *John* (p. 646), as quoted in: Bryant, B. H., & Krause, M. S. (1998). *John* (John 14:13–14). Joplin, MO: College Press Pub. Co.

^{vi} Guthrie, Donald (1994). *New Bible Commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed.) (John 14:1–31). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press.