

JOHN — WEEK 19

THE PATH TO FAITH



F. Michael Slay
A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

The cover image is *Ecce Homo* (Behold the Man) by Caravaggio

This section starts off with Peter making his infamous claim that he is willing to die for Jesus, and Jesus predicting his thrice denial before the rooster crows. Jesus then adds some encouragement, which includes the claim that He is the only way. Thomas's follow-up leads to Jesus explaining the coming Holy Spirit.

He's going away, but He'll be back.

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1 John 13:36–38

Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?”

Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.”

Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

Jesus answered him, “Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.”

Belief in God means belief that the universe has a conductor. Things aren’t random; they’re orchestrated.

However, different faiths have different views of the level of orchestration. The Reformed Christian view (to which this author subscribes) is that the orchestration is total—to include even the fall of every sparrow. Other branches of Christianity believe in a lesser level of orchestration.

In any case, the events of this passage are totally orchestrated. Thus, we can interpret them as fitting together in accordance with an unfolding plan. That helps answer the key question in this passage. Where is Jesus going that Peter cannot follow?

It’s the place that Peter’s denial keeps him from going to—death.

Peter’s response even refers to death, which is a massive coincidence given that Peter obviously doesn’t know what Jesus is talking about.

Jesus’s comeback ties a bow around the whole thing. This is all about His upcoming death, and Peter *cannot follow* now because he’s not ready.

But that makes the last part all the more chilling— *but you shall follow Me afterward*.

That part of the orchestration will come true with striking precision.

Just as the crucifixion of Jesus wasn’t the defeat it looked like at first, the martyrdom of Peter and most of his associates wasn’t a defeat either. Their martyrdom served to certify the early church as something different, something based on a unique kind of agenda. They weren’t in it for the money, nor anything else people would expect.

But it also serves as a stark example of the cost of discipleship. The real disciples, the original ones, were almost all killed for their faith. That’s a difficult thing to accept.

But it’s even more difficult to accept the idea that their deaths, many by torture, were orchestrated by God. Yes, a higher purpose is easy to see. Yes, they were warned. Yes, they were willing; they even signed up for it. But how could a loving Father allow such incredible evil?

For the same reason He “allowed” the crucifixion—pain avoidance just isn’t His thing.

2 John 14:1–6 (ESV)

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 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? 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. And you know the way to where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Remember, Jesus just lit Peter up by predicting his triple denial of Him. That’s gotta be tough to hear, and not just for Peter either. Everyone within earshot must be taken aback a bit.

So now Jesus gives them some encouragement. Good things are coming. *“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 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?”*

My Father’s house is a reference to heaven; Jesus has always referred to God as His Father. So, His saying, *“I go to prepare a place for you,”* is yet another reference to His impending death.

But Thomas doesn’t understand. He says, *“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”* He acts like Jesus is talking about His parents’ beach house or something.

That’s understandable. Thomas has been following Jesus around for years. Now he’s being told that they’re going to separate. Jesus has gone off to be alone on occasion, so Thomas seems to be thinking along those lines. He’s stuck in a literal thinking mode and that doesn’t fit what Jesus is saying.

Jesus’s reply is a source of great difficulty. *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

The problem is that this bluntly declares that He is the only way. There is only one path to God.

That’s not going to be popular.

People object to this, not by arguing that it’s false, but that it’s offensive. They don’t believe it because they don’t like it. That’s illogic. I don’t suppose I “like” all the laws of physics, but I believe them because they’re true. Whether I like them or not shouldn’t matter.

C.S. Lewis illustrates this thinking in his legendary depiction of a demon’s advice in the art of deception.

He doesn’t think of philosophies as primarily “true” or “false,” but as “academic” or “practical,” “outworn” or “contemporary,” “conventional” or “ruthless.” Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church. Don’t waste time trying to make him think materialism is true! Make him think it is strong or stark or courageous—that it is the philosophy of the future. That’s the sort of thing he cares about. — The Screwtape Letters – Letter 1, C.S. Lewis

3 John 14:7–11

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

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.”

Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves.”

We have oft noted that Jesus is the image of the Father.

The one who looks at me is seeing the one who sent me. — John 12:45

who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, — Hebrews 1:3a

Philip should understand this. But what, in practical terms, does “image” mean? Does Jesus have His Father’s eyes? Hair color? What?

It’s not some physical characteristic; it’s His personality. He walks like His father; He talks like His Father; He thinks like His Father; He loves like His Father. So, Jesus is a bit taken aback by Philip’s request.

“He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me?”

In other words, “What do you think I’ve been doing for the last three years?”

“Show us the Father”

And he said, “Please, show me Your glory.” ... But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” — Exodus 33:18, 20

Everybody wants to see God. Knowing God, seeing God, feeling His presence, is man’s greatest desire.

Yet these guys had that, in spades, and they still weren’t satisfied. How can that be?

*As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So pants my soul for You, O God. — Psalm 42:1*

We’re hardwired for God. It’s in our DNA.

We’ll never be satisfied—this side of eternity, anyway.

4 John 14:12–18

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do it.”

“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.”

There’s a world of theology in one word here—*because* (ὅτι “hot-ee” in Greek).

The idea that believers can do works even greater than those Jesus did is exciting, albeit puzzling. How can that even be possible?

Because I go to My Father.

That’s what makes it possible. Wow, what a mystery. How does that work?

Part of the answer is in the second paragraph. The Father *will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth ... He dwells with you and will be in you.*

The Holy Spirit (*the Spirit of truth*) is the *Helper* that *dwells with you and will be in you*. That Holy Spirit empowers us to do *greater works than these*.

But how is it that this happens *because* Jesus goes to His Father?

As with all things holy, some details are beyond our comprehension. What we are told is that this is a causal sequence. Incarnation is a round-trip mission. Then the Holy Spirit is delivered, *and will be in you*.

And because of that we will be empowered to do *greater works than these*.

This passage is crystal clear on who gets the Holy Spirit. *“If you love Me, keep My commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He will give you ... the Spirit of truth.”*

This is **not** works-based salvation. The word translated as love here is “*agapē*”—sacrificial love. In other words, dedication to Christ’s agenda rather than our own. This is implied by a proper confession of faith.

because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. — Romans 10:9 (ESV)

A confession of, “*Jesus is Lord,*” is a pledge of fealty. Christianity is a kingdom, and Jesus is its king. The way you join any kingdom is by pledging fealty to its king.

That fits, “*If you love Me, keep My commandments,*” to a tee.

5 John 14:19–21

“A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

This wraps up Jesus’s point and gives us a thrilling conclusion—one that some of us undervalue. *At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.*

The most peaceful feeling in the world is certainty. The greatest peaceful feeling is certainty about God.

We see, and feel, samples of this when we are sure of a decision. We pray, and sometimes the pieces all fall into place, or we get a clear sign, or some doors open and others close. Then we know what God wants us to do. Even when the result is not what we hoped for, the peace of being sure is comforting.

Here, Jesus says that they can be sure the gospel is true, *“Because I live.”*

That’s how we can be sure too.

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. — Hebrews 11:1 (NIV, 1985 edition)

Many Christians don’t act like they’re sure. They’re cowed by the forces arrayed against the gospel. Instead of explaining their beliefs, they make excuses. Could this be why churches are failing all across America?

There is great benefit to studying the evidence of the resurrection, and not just so you can explain it to others. Knowing the facts behind our faith brings peace, even if some of the facts are stomach-turning. This DEEP series walks through the essential facts in a logical order:

<https://www.ailbe.org/resources/item/14728-faith-in-what>

When we’re confident in our beliefs, we’ll act confident.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. — Romans 1:16

We need a revival in America, but not a revival in numbers—a revival of faith. There’s no substitute for hard work here; we need to do our homework.

If you’re reading this devotional, then you’re already serious about studying God’s word. That pays off.

and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. — Philippians 4:7

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Which example of martyrdom is most glorious?
2. What should we say to people who insist that there must be many ways to get to heaven?
3. How do you satisfy your longing for God?
4. Do you think of your relationship with Jesus as "fealty"?
5. How familiar are you with the evidence of the resurrection?

Items for prayer: