

God Came Down

(The Fourth Gospel)

Maurice W. Lusk, III

First Farewell Discourse (13:31-14:31)

At 13:31 the first farewell discourse begins. There is a long-standing precedent for this type of speech. Farewell speeches of biblical figures before their deaths are found throughout Scripture, as well as in the non-biblical Jewish writings of the first century AD. In the Hebrew Scriptures there is the farewell discourse of Jacob to his children in Gen 47:29-49:33. The book of Deuteronomy is, in essence, a farewell speech of Moses to Israel. Joshua's farewell to Israel is found in Joshua 22-24. David's farewell speech is found in 1 Chron 28-29. In the non-biblical Jewish writings there is a large collection of such speeches. The most representative of these is, no doubt, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, which was in circulation in first century Judaism. It consists of the farewell speeches of each of the twelve sons of Jacob to their loved-ones just before their deaths. Farewell speeches are found in the Jewish books of Jubilees, 1 Enoch, 4 Ezra, and 2 Baruch for a variety of biblical figures such as Noah, Abraham, Rebecca and Isaac, Enoch, Ezra, and Baruch. In the NT the speech of Paul to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17-38) is a farewell speech, as well as the book of 2 Timothy.

There are common features in all of these speeches. The setting is usually the gathering together of a great person's children, disciples, his people, brethren, etc. to bless them, admonish them, encourage them, recall past teaching, give them new teaching, explain to them how they are to deal with his departure, and the speeches often close with a prayer to God on behalf of those left behind. All of these features are present in the farewell discourses material of Jesus here in John 13-17.

The setting of the first speech is at the last meal (Passover) Jesus eats with his disciples before his death. Jesus uses the meal setting as a time of teaching and/or talking with his disciples (and others) during his ministry. This format was very popular in the first century world; especially as seen in the symposium tradition of the Greeks where friends would eat together, then engage in refreshment and philosophical discussion - a tradition that appears to have been common throughout the Mediterranean world of the first century. It is curious to note with what frequency Jesus uses this format for teaching.

The theme of table fellowship (and teaching within that context) occupies a dominant presence in the Gospel of Luke (cf. 5:29-39; 7:36-50; 9:13-17; 10:38-42; 11:37-52; 14:1-24; 22:14-38; 24:28-32, 36-43; an excellent article on this theme is found in *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol 106 (1987) pp 613-638, titled, "Table Fellowship as a Literary Motif in the Gospel of Luke," by Dennis E. Smith). Given this data from Luke, it appears that what Jesus did in John 13-14 was something very common for him to do; which may help explain why the tradition of the Lord's supper became so strong in the early church. No doubt, every time these disciples ate together after the death/resurrection of Christ, they could not help but think of all of the meals they shared with Jesus. They could remember him more in this activity than in any other - and we must remember that he told them that evening he would eat with them again after his resurrection.

This first discourse (13:31-14:31) is made up of three monologues in which Jesus introduces an idea or concept which leads to a question by a disciple, followed by a response by Jesus (the question and the response forming a dialogue [question/answer] piece). These are as follows:

**Monologue: The Hour of the Son of Man Has Come
(13:31-35)**

When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him. ³²If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. ³³"My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another," (John 13:31-35).

The theme of "the coming hour" began at 2:4; it moves progressively through this composition (cf. 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1) and ends at 17:1. The "hour" is the time of conflict with the powers of evil, considered as a whole. In contemporary jargon, we are here talking about his "showdown" with the satanic forces that had enslaved humankind through the power of sin from the time of man's creation. He would emerge from this conflict in glorious victory; hence, he could speak of this whole conflict as his hour of glory (13:32-33).

He gives them "a new commandment," they are to love one another (verse 34; repeated in 15:12, 17). But what is new about this? The idea of love as an essential characteristic of true religion was clearly present in Judaism. In Mark 12:28-34 Jesus had said that the first commandment of the law was to love God, and the second was to love your neighbor as yourself. This was an essential doctrine of the Dead Sea sect, as reflected in their scrolls. They were to love all the sons of light (i.e., members of the Dead Sea community), and hate all the sons of darkness (i.e., those outside the community), [cf. *The Manual of Discipline*, 1QS 1:9-10].

It appears that what is "new" here is the how we are to love one another. According to Moses we are to love our neighbor *as ourselves* (i.e. to love others as much as we love ourselves). But Jesus says that the new commandment is to love others *as he has loved us*. The love Jesus exemplifies for us is a completely unselfish love. It is, in the Greek, *agape* that is commanded - love that centers in the character of the one loving more than the one loved. *Agape* is loving someone because of who we are rather than who they are. It is loving someone even though that love is not returned, loving that which is not even lovable. It is love that is characterized by acts of kindness or good will toward others, without the expectation of a direct return on our actions. This is what is "new" about this commandment of Jesus. His disciples must become the kind of people who are characterized by this kind of love; and by this all men would know that they were his disciples - if they were capable of loving as he was capable of loving - in a completely unselfish way (v 35).

**Dialogue: "Lord, Where Are You Going"
(13:36-38)**

Simon Peter asked him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus replied,

*"Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later."
³⁷Peter asked, "Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my
 life for you." ³⁸Then Jesus answered, "Will you really lay down your
 life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will
 disown me three times, (John 13:36-38).*

The comment of Jesus in verse 33, "Where I am going you cannot come," prompts the question of Peter, "Lord, where are you going?" to which Jesus answers, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you shall follow afterwards" (verse 36). This answer helps us to understand his comment of verse 33. It is not that the disciples cannot go where he is going (i.e., to the Father), it is that they cannot follow now (i.e., until he goes before and, by means of his conquest of death and entrance into new resurrection existence, makes it possible for them to follow him into that existence, a theme Paul beautifully develops in his letters).

Peter's response was "typical Peter." We must not be too quick to criticize Peter here. To question when we don't know is the proper way to address our ignorance. Someone has said that a man is never more alive than when he is asking good questions. Peter's absolutist mind-set, however, is another matter. He always knew the right thing to do, and at times knew better than Jesus. Peter's greatest lesson of the evening would come later on that night; then he would meet the real Simon Peter (verse 38; cf. 18:15-27; Mark 14:66-72).

**Monologue: "I Am The Way, The Truth, And The Life,"
 (14:1-7)**

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. You trust in God; trust also in me.
²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have
 told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and
 prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me
 that you also may be where I am, (John 14:1-7).*

This monologue of Jesus is keynoted by the word "believe" (14:1). The request of this man Jesus of Nazareth here is astonishing. He asks to be believed in as one believes in God. What are the implications of such a request? Can he be saying that belief in him is belief in God? That is exactly what he is saying. Then follows a revelation just as astonishing. He is going away to prepare a place (realm of existence) for them that they may

be where he is; and then informs them that he is the means of access into that place/realm of existence (14:2-6).

The Greek words used here to describe *where* Jesus is going (i.e., Father's house/many rooms/a place) all mean, essentially, the same thing. The Greek word for "house" is *mone* meaning "a place of dwelling," and can mean anything associated with a location. The expression "many rooms" means simply that there is "room for all." The word for "place" is simply a term for "a definite location." By this language Jesus is saying that there is another realm of existence beyond this realm of existence. One does not go into non-existence at death; there is something else there, another realm or dimension of existence. Jesus calls it, literally translated, "the dwelling of the Father" (i.e., the existence of God). Then he tells them that *he* is the means of access into that place – God's existence.

There is also a very esoteric statement made by Jesus here in the last part of verses 2-3. To get the full implications of what Jesus is saying here, it must be read in Greek. Although Jesus very likely uttered these words in Aramaic, John's expression in Greek, however, gives a very significant insight into what John heard Jesus say. The Greek text, translated very literally, is as follows:

In the dwelling place (en te oikia – dative of location) of the Father of me (tou patros mou – genitive, the case showing possession) many places to dwell (monai pollai) there are (eisin- present indicative active 3rd person plural), an if not (ei de me) would I have told you (eipon an humin – the conditional particle ei used with the subjunctive case and the particle an is a 2nd class condition and conveys a statement assuming the answer “no”) that (hoti) I am going (poreuomai is present indicative middle) to make ready (hetoimasai – and aorist infinitive) a place (topon) for you (humin – dative “with reference to”)? And if (ean used with the subjunctive is a 3rd class condition meaning, the “if” statement is undetermined and will be determined when the “then” statement is shown to be true) I should be taken away (poreutho is the aorist subjunctive passive of proeuomai communicates action done to the subject) also (kai) I will make ready (hetoimaso is the aorist subjunctive first person singular of hetoimazo – to make ready) a place (topon) for you (humin – 2nd person plural pronoun in the dative case meaning “with reference to”), again (palin – to repeat) I myself am coming (erchomai - present

indicative middle implying that the Jesus himself will come) **and** (*kai*) **I myself will take/receive** (*paralempsomai* – future indicative in the middle voice) **you** (*humas* – 2nd person plural) **to** (*pros*) **myself** (*emauton* – reflexive pronoun) **in order that** (*hina* – introduces purpose) **where** (*hopou*) **I am** (*eimi* – present indicative active), **I**, (*ego* – first person personal pronoun, here in an emphatic position emphasizing the speaker’s intention to do the action himself) **also** (*kai*) **you** (*humeis* – 2nd person plural) **you may be** (*ete* – present subjunctive 2nd person plural of *eimi*), (John 14:23 my translation-mwl).

Reading these words of Jesus without the grammatical notations, we have the following:

In the dwelling place of my Father there are many places to dwell, and if not, would I have told you that I am going to make ready a place for you? And if I should be taken away, also I will make ready a place for you, again I myself am coming and I myself with take/receive you to myself in order that where I am you may be also,” (John 14:2-3, my translation-mwl).

Prior to this comment, the subject of conversation was Jesus’ impending death. He is going away or, more literally, “he will be taken away;” and where he is going they cannot come now but they will follow later. He then tells them that where is going, although inexplicable to them, is an existence great enough to receive them all; and in going there he will make ready a place for them. He then adds that if what he was saying was not true, he would not be telling them such a thing. He is going away and they cannot come with him now, but they will come later; and when that time comes he will come himself to receive them himself, in order that where he is they will be also. Here Jesus is speaking to eleven of his chosen disciples whom he has designated his apostles. He has indicated to them earlier that they will drink of the cup from which he must drink, and they will experience the same baptism with which he is to be baptized; speaking, no doubt, of their suffering in his name. But here he appears to be saying to them that he will come for them at their time of death. Whether this is a promise for all those who experience death in Christ is not specifically taught in this passage. Jesus words here, however, to whomever applicable, communicate a piece of imagery that causes the soul to swell with anticipation and expectation. If this is a glimpse of the manner in which all

those in Christ will join him in death and be received by him in his new creation existence, we have been given something that could be greatest possible blessing to those in Christ at their dying hour.

You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him," (John 14:1-7).

"I am (*ego eimi*) **the way** (*hodos* - the means of access or location), **the truth** (*aletheia* - that which is what it is thought to be, not unreal or an allusion), and the life (*zoe* - the word for life which is associated with *aionios* - eternal); no one comes to the Father but by me" (verse 6). How can we make sense of this? John has given us the key to this and all such esoteric sayings of Jesus in this Gospel. It is found in John 1:18 (the last line of the prologue), "No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom (within the midst of) the Father, he has made him known (in Greek "to exegete or explain the meaning of"). Here is how Jesus gives us access into the existence of God - by revealing him to us.

Jesus is the revelation of God. He shows us **the way** to God (or into God's presence); he shows us **the truth** of what God is (moral existence as defined by the moral attributes of God); and he shows us **the life** (i.e., eternal life) by showing us the one who is the sum and substance of life, who has the power of life over death. The point we cannot miss here is that Jesus **himself** is the revelation of God and the means of access to God. **He** is the way into the existence of the Father. **He** is the truth of what God is and who we are to be as being created in his existence. **He** is life as it was created to be, and with him life goes on into the ages - it not confined or limited by time, it is life eternal. As the Apostle John says in 1 John 2:17, "The one doing the will of God abides/remains into the ages - "*menei eis ton aiona.*"

As astonishing as the words of Jesus have been thus far, his next statement is even more astonishing: "If you had known me, you would have know my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him" (verse 7). Can Jesus be saying what he appears to be saying? Is he saying that these men are in the very presence of God, or is he saying something else? This may have been the question in Philip's mind, which leads into the next

dialogue.

Dialogue: "Show Us The Father"
(14:8-14)

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.¹² I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it (John 14:8-14).

What does Philip mean by "show us"? The Greek word used here may be translated, "explain, set before, display, or bring to light." Philip was probably asking for further explanation. These next few lines of text are, possibly, the most astonishing and profound of the whole of the NT. Here the Christological claim of Jesus of Nazareth finds its grandest expression. He is the Messiah (the Christ), the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the Holy One of God, the Son of Man, the Suffering Servant of God, the Lamb of God, the one who is come into the world. As wondrous as these claims are, they are overshadowed by the claim made here by Jesus of Nazareth:

Have I been so long with you and you do not know me, Philip? The one having seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I am speaking to you I am not speaking of myself, but the Father dwelling within me he is active. Believe me, that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or else believe because of the things God is doing (14:9-11, my translation-mwl).

The Messianic expectation of Judaism was that God would send a redeemer to Israel. The very thought that God would become one of us in

order that he himself may come into our world to redeem us takes one's breath away. But that is what did happen; and this is what Jesus is telling his disciples. God had said he would do this, but the very idea of it was so hard to imagine that those passages implying this were interpreted away. The clearest statement of God's visitation among the human race is to be found in Isaiah 9:6-7,

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold with justice and with righteousness from henceforth, even forever. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this, (Isaiah 9:6-7).

This translation reflects exactly what the Hebrew text says; the Hebrew scribes who translated the Greek Septuagint (LXX) reworked the text so that such expressions as "Mighty God," and "Everlasting Father," were not applied to the Messianic figure in this prophecy. But the "Mighty God" and "Everlasting Father" is just who Jesus is claiming to be, and John will not let that fact escape us (cf. John 1:1-18; 14:1-9; 20:26-29; and in Paul see Titus 2:13, where he calls Jesus "Great/Mighty God").

Monologue: Promise of the Spirit (14:15-31)

What follows here is filled with as much mystery and/or wonder as what has gone before. Jesus promises his disciples that God's presence and power would continue to be with them. "I will pray the Father, that he will give you another Counselor" (v 16). What is meant by this expression "Counselor"? The Greek term here is *parakletos* (i.e., one who counsels, encourages, advises, instructs, comforts, or strengthens). The root idea in this Greek word is "to call;" it has a prepositional prefix which gives it the meaning "to call along side;" i.e., to call along side to counsel, advise, instruct, encourage, strengthen." The verb form of this word is *parakaleo*, which means, "to call along side, to call upon, invite or invoke." Jesus is presenting the idea of calling upon or invoking the presence of God. God's response to that call is manifested in the noun form "*paraklatos*" - "one called along side" or "one who manifests his presence," i.e., he is along side

or present with the one who has called upon him. Throughout this speech, Jesus has been telling his disciples that he is departing from them. Here he is telling them that they will not be left alone. In fact, in v 18, he says, "I will not leave you desolate." The Greek word for desolate here is *orphanos*, the word from which we get our word orphan.

The promise he gives them is that shortly after his departure, they will again experience God's presence. The first promise is found in vv 16-17; the Father will send *the Spirit*. Then in verses 18-21 he promises, "*I (Jesus)* will come to you." This promise is followed in verse 23 with the promise that *he* and *the Father* would come to them. There is a presence of trinity imagery here in these verses. Jesus clearly speaks of one divine presence the disciples would experience in their lives, but he speaks of three distinct personalities of deity.

Significant here also is the fact that Jesus not only promises his disciples the coming of these personalities of the divine presence, but a presence which would manifest divine power in their lives. This Counselor, the Holy Spirit, would teach them all things, and bring to their remembrance all that Jesus had said to them. The "divine presence/power" in their lives would give them insight into the many wondrous mysteries of God, and he would give them faithful and accurate recall of all that Jesus at taught them during his earthly sojourn with them (14:26). Jesus will speak more on this divine personality, the Spirit of God, as they walk on the way to the garden (cf. 15:25-16:15). He concludes the "table-talk" here with the words, "Peace I leave with you." In Hebrew this would no doubt be, "*Shalom!*"

Shalom is not just a greeting or salutation; if it comes from God, it is a gift - God's gift of peace or rest for the anxious soul, which took the form of salvation that was to come with the appearing of God's Messiah (cf. Isaiah 9:6; 42:7; 57:19; Ezek 37:26; Zech 9:10).

Jesus recaps his comments thus far (vv 28-30), then says to his disciples, "Rise let us go hence" (v 31). Jesus has eaten his last meal with his disciples; from here they proceed to the garden call Gethsemane on the edge of the Kidron valley.

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