

Making a Home

John 14:23-27 (NIV)

²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. ²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

What makes a home? We know that it's more than 4 walls and a roof. That makes a house, but what makes something a home? Sometimes we talk about home in terms of where we grew up or where we spent most of our lives. We talk about home as where we're currently residing – our address, our state, the place where we put our heads at night. Other times we get a little mushy and talk about home as being where the heart is, that it's not really about the building but the people. Even then, home may not be the people who are related to us by blood, but rather the people with whom we have a sense of belonging.

So, have we made a home with God? The disciples probably felt that they had made a home with God while they were eating with Jesus in the upper room on that Thursday evening, celebrating their last Passover together. However, Jesus took this opportunity to teach them, to tell them in advance one more time, that he was going to leave them so that he could complete his mission and pay for their sins as well as the sins of the whole world. This distressed them that Jesus was not going to be with them for much longer. Would they still have a home with the Lord after tonight?

Anticipating that his disciples would feel abandoned like orphans, he tells them how someone has a home with the Lord. "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." (verse 23) That's a pretty straightforward: obey Jesus' teaching and you will make a home with the Lord. This also kind of lines up with our idea that home is the place where you have a belonging, sharing the same values and mission with someone. We have a home with the Lord when his will and our wills, our actions, are aligned.

Then again, what exactly is Jesus' teaching that we are to obey to make a home with God? I suppose we would start with God's moral law, the 10 Commandments, which are summarized by God himself as "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength," and "Love your neighbor as yourself."

While the teaching is easy to quote and easy to understand, the task of obeying God's teaching is exceedingly difficult. Love God with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength, and not just for a moment, but all the time, through everything that I think, say, and do. I haven't done that. I've tried. I've done better sometimes over others, but my love of God is not perfect. Love my neighbor, the people around me, whoever they are, at least as much as I love myself, even my enemies? I want to help people, show them acts of kindness, but I'm still selfish. I do put myself ahead of others. I still find myself hating people. There's a lot lacking in my love for God and my love for others.

Our troubled hearts then ask: If my love is lacking - and I know that it is - do I really love God? Jesus says, "Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching." (verse 24a) I haven't really obeyed God's teaching. So, I guess that I don't really love God. And since I don't really love God, then I can't make a home with him. And if I don't have a home with God, then with whom do I make a home? Where do I belong? Will anyone make a home with me or will I be left all by myself, orphaned, or, worse, adopted by the evil one? Because I don't obey Jesus' teaching, do I actually make my home with the evil one?

Knowing that our hearts would be troubled, wondering if we had made a home with God or not, Jesus does not end the conversation with "anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching." (verse 24a) No, he continues: "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (verses 25-26) Okay. So, God the Holy Spirit will remind us of all the things Jesus taught and said. His Word will be faithfully and carefully recorded and preserved. We will know his teaching. Yet, just knowing God's teaching, does that change the fact that I have not always loved God with my heart, soul, mind, and strength? Does it change all the times when I have not loved my neighbor as myself? Does it change whether or not I have made a home with God? Am I a spiritual orphan?

Jesus' teaching is not solely commands, as if the whole point of God and the point of the Bible is some kind of divine to do list. Yes, the Holy Spirit faithfully preserved God's commands for us and they do show us how we fall short of obeying his teaching. But the Holy Spirit also reminds us what else Jesus taught.

The day after Jesus fed the 5,000+ people, there was a crowd who sought him out. Jesus preached to them the famous "Bread of Life" sermon that we find in John chapter 6. Early in that teaching, Jesus was asked, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" (John 6:28) He answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." (John 6:29)

Jesus taught that the work of God, the thing that makes a home with God, is believing in the one he has sent, in him. That doesn't seem like a work. Why just believe in Jesus? Don't we have to do more? This is Jesus' teaching because it's not us who makes the home with God, but God who makes his home with us.

God knows that we can't complete his commands. Instead, his commands show us our sins and show us our need for someone to step in and save us from our sins, for someone to love God and love neighbors perfectly in our place. This is why the Father sent his Son. This is what Jesus taught that very day and continued to teach all the time. He, as both true God and true Man, is the one sent as our substitute to keep all of God's laws all the time, to love the Lord your God with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength, and always loving his neighbor even more than himself. God didn't lower his standards so that we could complete some divine to do list and make our own home with God. No, that's not his teaching. His teaching is that he kept his standards by stepping in himself to do it for us. The "work" that God requires is to believe that God already completed all the work for us, that we are complete before God by what he has done. God makes his home with us.

There are plenty of people who will tell you that it's more than just believing that Jesus completed all the works for you. They always want to add more. They are uncomfortable with the idea that it's already finished. They go back to God's commands and say that you have to redouble your efforts. This makes us focus back in on ourselves, that we have to make our home with God and not the other way around. That kind of teaching is man's teaching, not Jesus'. That teaching tries to make us our own Saviors and not let Jesus be the one who does all the work, the one who completes all of it for us. The Holy Spirit reminds us of Jesus' teaching, that he did it all, that he makes the home with us.

Because the Holy Spirit has faithfully preserved Jesus' teaching and reminded us of it, we now have peace knowing that we are already complete before God by his work and no more work is required. This is why Jesus said to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives." (verse 27a) The Holy Spirit has planted this message home in our hearts. Because of that, God has made a home with us. We have a belonging with God through faith, through the completed works of Christ. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dwell within us through faith. It's just as Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies." (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

God has made his home with us! This makes us want to live out the commands of his teaching, to love our God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. It's our way of showing that we already belong to him, not that we are earning a place with him, make a home with him. Instead, this shows that God has already made his home with us and that our heart already belongs to him. Our words and actions show that fact.

For the times when our guilty consciences pick and nibble at us that we don't truly love God, that we can't make a home with him, the Holy Spirit reminds us again of Jesus' teaching. "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." (verse 27b) Don't let your hearts be troubled because Christ already completed all the commandments for us. Do not be afraid that you will be left as spiritual orphans because God the Holy Spirit has reminded us of these truths and made his dwelling with us along with the Father and the Son. God made a home with us!

This is what we celebrate on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus kept his promise and sent God the Holy Spirit to his disciples. The Holy Spirit taught and reminded them of Jesus' teaching. They believed that Jesus had completed all of God's laws for them, that they were already complete before God because of what he had done, that God indeed had made his home with them. They taught this message to people so that God would make a home with them as well, and he did. More than 3,000 were added to their number on that day. That number continues to rise as the Holy Spirit continues to work, continues to teach us all things and reminds us of everything that God has done for us. By his work, God has made his home with us, a forever home. Amen.