

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

## Seeing the Father

### John 14:7-12

**Intro:** We find ourselves in the midst of the last discourse that Jesus gives to His disciples. He has spoken of betrayal and denial, of His imminent glorification and His going away from them. This prompts the disciples to ask Him where He is going and how can they know the way to follow Him there. Jesus' reply is a wonderful declaration of the reality of who He is and the great spiritual significance of His ministry. Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life." Jesus is the only link between God and sinners. He is completely reliable in all that He does and is. The only life worth having is the life that He brings because Jesus is life itself. And just so there could be no confusion as to what He was saying, Jesus added the additional comment that no one can come to the Father except through Him.

But, this was not all Jesus had to say on the subject. In the very next verse, Jesus goes on to explain to the disciples why He is the only way to God. It's because Jesus was and still is the perfect representation of God the Father.

**7-** Simply put: to know Jesus is to know the Father. Now, the grammatical construction of this verse is conditional, which implies that the disciples haven't really known Jesus and thus, they have not known the Father. Of course, there is a sense in which the disciples had known Jesus. They had known Him well enough to leave their homes, friends and livelihoods to follow Him wherever He went. They had certainly learned and had come to know much about the Father during their time of apprenticeship with Jesus. But, they didn't know Jesus in His full significance. These disciples had not yet seen the full revelation of God's love at the cross or His power at the resurrection.

now- this lack of knowledge was about to be remedied in a few short hours and days. Until now, everything had been preparation. They hadn't come to the full knowledge of Jesus and His significance but from now on, it'll be different.

What do you make of this statement? Is it easy to understand? Do you grasp it's meaning quickly or does it make you stop and think? If it has this

effect on us today, what effect did it have on the disciples? Is it possible that Jesus spoke this exactly for that reason, to provoke a discussion on this subject? He was about to leave His disciples and He knew that when He was taken from them, they would fall into a dark despair. In the midst of that despair, God would seem very far away. Jesus is about to teach them that they had already seen the Father and would know Him from this time forward, whether they realized it or not.

**8-9a-** Philip's ears perked up as Jesus finished speaking. Talking about seeing the Father really got his attention. Maybe he thought that seeing the Father would answer a lot of questions and solve many a difficulty they had about spiritual things. No doubt Philip was thinking of those OT examples where folks were said to have seen God: Abraham, Moses, Elijah. Of course, none of these individuals actually saw God as He is in Himself but the event itself was something great and it was good enough for Philip, whatever it was. He's asking Jesus for a theophany.

How did Jesus reply? Instead of granting Philip's request or explaining why his desire was unwise or impossible, Jesus taught them what it really means to see God, and how to see him. The first point He makes addresses the limitation of the kind of seeing Philip had in mind. Note the contrast implied in Jesus' reply in **vs9**. Philip's request restated is: "Lord, we would know God if we could just see Him." Jesus says, "It's funny you say that because I've been with you over 3 years now and you've seen Me the whole time and yet, you still don't know Me. What makes you think seeing the Father would help you know Him?" Clearly, the type of seeing Philip had in mind doesn't lead to a true knowledge of anyone. So, if there's a wrong kind of seeing then there must also be a right kind of seeing.

**9b-** Jesus didn't just talk about the limitations of the kind of seeing Philip had in mind; He also talked about the right kind of seeing and it is a seeing that is focused entirely in Him. There is a seeing that is inadequate and there is a seeing that is completely correct. This right kind of seeing is actually sequential: 1) seeing Jesus with understanding; 2) coming to know Jesus as a result of that seeing and; 3) coming to know the Father through knowing Jesus.

What kind of seeing is this? A great illustration of this kind of seeing is given in **ch20:4-8**; when Peter and John ran to the empty tomb of Jesus. There

are 3 different Greek words used for “seeing” in this story but all are translated as “saw” in our Bibles. The first is blepo (5); the simplest word for “see” just means that the image of the graveclothes in the tomb was impressed on John’s retina. When Peter arrived he pushed past John and entered the tomb where he actually observed the graveclothes; so, the word used for “see” is theoreo—to puzzle over or scrutinize. Here, Peter puzzled over the fact that the clothes were there but the body was gone. If the body had been taken away, why were the graveclothes not taken away with it? Or if the bands had been removed, why were they not scattered around the tomb and the spices spilled? But, the bands were exactly as they had been when they were wound around the body, and the head cloth was set off by itself just as it had been when it was around the head of the Master. John entered, saw what Peter saw, and believed. Now the word is eido - to see with understanding. John “saw and believed” because He saw that the only thing that would account for the arrangement of the graveclothes was a resurrection.

This is the kind of seeing Jesus is referring to in our text. Philip had asked to be shown the Father, which is in effect, a call for a demonstration. Jesus’ response indicates that what’s needed is not a demonstration of the Father but an apprehension. It’s not the seeing that’s important but the perceiving. This has 2 important ramifications for us today.

1<sup>st</sup>, it explains why God forbid the Israelites from making (or worshipping) any graven images, even of Himself. The God of the OT is a personal God – He has a personality. There is no way that an inanimate material image could ever adequately, let alone accurately, depict Him. Only another person could ever provide knowledge of the Father since personality cannot be represented by an impersonal object. Idols or likenesses are subjective to the skill and/or influence of the craftsman or artist who makes them and can never really represent God as He desires to be known by humanity. God doesn’t appreciate being misrepresented to anyone, just ask Moses.

2<sup>nd</sup>, this truth is a great benefit for modern man. If seeing God physically were the important thing, we’re all deprived. Not only can we not see God, we can’t even see Jesus like Philip could. Jesus is no longer physically here on earth. We can’t observe Him (cast an eye). But, if perceiving Him is the true seeing, then none of us are deprived for we can all perceive Jesus and by perceiving Him, we can perceive and know the Father. In fact, we can

know Jesus as well and in exactly the same way as He was known by His own disciples.

**10-11**- A shift has just occurred in the Lord's teaching in this section and it's not that hard to notice. The first half of the discussion, which focused on knowing and seeing, now gives way to a discussion on belief (or faith). In the 1<sup>st</sup> half, the word "know" occurs 4 times and the words "seen" or "shown" occurs 5 times. In the next few verses, none of these words are found but the word "believe" or "believes" is repeated 4 times. It should be no great mystery why. This is just another example of the NT teaching that in spiritual things, belief comes first and true seeing will follow.

Of course, faith is not just the intellectual acceptance of certain facts. True, saving faith is trust in a person. But, this doesn't mean that the content of that faith is unimportant. Yes, the NT calls for a fundamental belief in the living person of Jesus Christ, but it does not insist that this faith be blind. True, saving faith does have an intellectual content. Jesus, here, calls on Philip (and the others) to believe Him (**11a**) not just believe in Him. True, saving faith includes the recognition that what Jesus says is true. Faith in Jesus implies the idea that Jesus is worthy of our faith.

Seeing the Father begins and ends with believing on Jesus, but our faith should not be based on wishful thinking. That's not the biblical idea of faith at all. Thus, Jesus speaks about belief on 2 levels. The 1<sup>st</sup> level is belief in His words – the content of His teaching. Jesus reiterates the fact that He lived and spoke in constant dependence upon the Father and did or said nothing outside the Father's authority or guidance. His words were spoken to multitudes of people but they were only beneficial to those who have ears to hear them – those who had hearts that were ready to accept and willing to respond in faithful obedience.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> level of faith Jesus spoke about was belief in His works – the signs He performed. These were also performed under the authority and guidance of the Father. They were not done to make the people marvel or to show mighty power but were given as signs. For those who have eyes to see, they point people to God. Jesus doesn't call us to a blind faith but rather, to a thinking faith. He challenges our faith by asking us to test His claims on the things He's said and the deeds He's done. Faith is meaningless unless it rests on the words and works of Jesus.

Faith in itself is worthless. It only becomes valuable when it's placed in something of value. Thus, faith, which is nothing in itself, becomes the key to life when it's placed in Jesus Christ. It's through faith in Him that we see God

**12-** Wow! What a promise! But, what is Jesus actually promising here? Remember, He's been trying to comfort the disciples who have become distressed at the news that He was going away from them. He told them He was going to prepare them a place in heaven and would return again for them. Now, He offers this to provide further comfort.

greater works- That's the promise. But, when we think about it, the promise seems unrealistic, if not totally incredible. Jesus healed the sick, calmed the stormy sea, fed thousands with a few loaves of bread and some fish and raised the dead. These were great works, probably the greatest miracles we can imagine! We can't do them. But, if that's true, how could Jesus say this? What kind of works is He referring to? There are 2 possible approaches.

1) this refers to miracles. The problem with this idea is that, if one accepts it, they must then limit the reference or explain why these miracles are not seen today. Some who take this verse to mean miracles then try to limit it by using faith as a qualification. We don't see these miracles today because we don't believe enough. Our faith is lacking. The answer to that line of thought is this: if we are to do greater works that Jesus, our faith would also have to be greater than His, which would be impossible. Besides, Jesus didn't say we had to have a sufficient degree of faith or an intense faith; He just says, "*he who believes in Me*" – Anyone who has faith in Me! This would not only include those who are strong in faith, but any believer in Jesus Christ. Others try to limit the promise by applying it to the disciples only. The obvious problem with this line of thought is that, though the disciples are said to have performed some miracles in the book of Acts, you cannot say that matched Jesus' miracle, let alone exceeded them. No, the answer must be found in a completely different direction.

To properly understand what Jesus is promising here, we should first try to understand what God thinks is a great work. God doesn't look at things like we do and He doesn't share our idea of what constitutes greatness. Why should physical miracles be considered great? They seem great to us

because we can't do them but they weren't a big deal for Jesus. He turned water to wine, calmed the sea, walked on water and raised the dead without breaking a sweat.

One clue that this is not what Jesus is referring to comes from [Luke 10:17-20](#). The disciples had returned from their first successful preaching ministry and were thrilled that they had been able to cast out demons. Jesus weighed the value of physical miracles against the value of having passed out of spiritual death into salvation and He chose the spiritual miracle without any hesitation. If that was true in Luke 10, why would it be any different in our text?

Leon Morris sees it this way. "What Jesus means we may see in the narratives in Acts. There are a few miracles of healing, but the emphasis is on the mighty works of conversion. On the day of Pentecost alone, more believers were added to the little band of Jesus' followers than throughout His entire earthly ministry. There we see a literal fulfillment of greater works than these." The works of the Apostles after the resurrection were not greater in kind than those of Jesus, but they were greater in the sphere of their influence. There were only 120 disciples in the upper room on the day of Pentecost and the rest of the whole world was lost in the darkness of heathenism. But, within 300 yrs, Christianity closed nearly all the heathen temples in the Roman Empire and numbered its converts by the millions. These were the greater works and down through the centuries, the Lord still carries on this ministry.

So, the greater works Jesus refers to here are spiritual, mainly the work of regeneration that takes place when the gospel is proclaimed through the power of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for every Christian. This means that a testimony that leads to the conversion of any individual is greater in the Lord's sight than any physical miracle and that the combined efforts of all God's people, leading to the conversion of millions, is tremendous.

Of course, there are some conditions to this promise. The 1<sup>st</sup> is found in our text: we must have faith in Jesus. Is Jesus your Savior? Have you let go trusting in your own strength, particularly in spiritual things and allowed Him to be your Savior from sin and your Lord? Without this, none of the promises mentioned are for you. The rest of the conditions are in the following verses which will be dealt with later but they consist of the need for prayer, obedience and the filling of the Holy Spirit.

This verse should be a great encouragement to every believer. When Jesus ascended to the Father, all authority in heaven and earth was given to Him and it's on the basis of His authority and strength that He sends us out as His disciples. He is Lord of sin, death, hell and the devil and He makes us lords over all them as well. Not by our own power and authority but by His.

When He was on the earth, He was here in weakness. Now that He has risen from the dead in power, He delights to do greater works through His people. He promises to draw people to Himself as the gospel is preached. He calls us to preach it. He has commissioned us to go into the world and teach people all He has commanded. He promises to be with us, to bless the message and to cast down the strongholds of Satan by our proclamation of the truth.

With the confidence of that truth in our hearts, how can we ignore His commission any longer? It is His desire to bless our efforts. It must become our desire to be blessed in our efforts for the kingdom of God.

Trusting in Jesus is the most logical and rational thing a person can ever do. Obviously, trusting in Him for salvation is logical since there is no other means by which salvation can be obtained. But, even after conversion, trusting in Jesus, in the promises He gives and the strength He offers; is not just logical, it is commended of us. Are we faithfully obedient to His calling on our lives? If not, do you want to be? 😊