

## Comfort for Troubled Hearts

John 14:1-7

Today we are going to consider a passage in which Jesus offers comfort for troubled hearts. Like the original disciples, there will be times when your heart is troubled - either by some circumstance in your life or in the life of someone you love or in the world at large. You may very well be facing some circumstances in your life right now that keep you up at night, that flood your mind whenever you're not busy doing something, or that float like a dark cloud over everything you do.

The past few weeks I've talked with numerous people whose world has been rocked by troubling circumstances. Sometimes it feels like your world is spinning out of control and you're not sure if things will ever be good again.

That's how the disciples felt the night before the crucifixion. Jesus had made a series of troubling statements. He had predicted that one of them (namely Judas) would betray Him, that Peter would deny Him, and that He would be going somewhere that they could not follow. None of these ideas made sense to them: surely Judas wouldn't betray Jesus (he was their treasurer!); surely Peter wouldn't deny Jesus (he was so zealous and committed); and surely Jesus wouldn't abandon them after demonstrating over and over that He was the Messiah who would establish God's kingdom on earth! They had left careers and families to follow Jesus, and now He says he's leaving them. Some of you know what it's like to move across the country (or the world!) for a person or a job and then the thought crosses your mind, "I've made the biggest mistake of my life." That's what the disciples were thinking.

Consequently, they were "troubled in heart." Even though Jesus was the One facing crucifixion, **He** was concerned about **their** troubled hearts. In the first seven verses of John 14 He tells the disciples what would comfort their troubled hearts. What Jesus tells His disciples is equally relevant for us.

I feel like this sermon should come with a warning, though. In this passage Jesus doesn't say a thing about changing our troubling circumstances. He doesn't say a thing about what we can learn through troubling circumstances. He doesn't say a thing about how our troubles further the purposes of God in this world. He talks about those things in other places, but here He addresses something much more foundational. In this passage Jesus points to three things that can bring comfort to troubled hearts even if our circumstances never change, even if we can't figure out what God is teaching us, even if we don't see a deeper purpose.

***First, comfort for troubled hearts comes from:***

***Faith that Jesus has prepared a place for us in God's presence (13:1-2)***

A couple weeks ago we noticed that Jesus became "troubled in spirit" when He thought about how Judas would betray Him and that He would soon be crucified (13:21). We even made the point that it's Christlike for us to be "troubled in spirit" when we experience troublesome things. We're like Christ when we enter into our circumstances

emotionally. Jesus gives a complementary (not contradictory) perspective when He says:

1 “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.

Even though there are times that we will be “troubled in Spirit” (just as Jesus was - see 13:21 and 12:27), we don’t have to live our lives in a state of perpetual troubledness. Jesus isn’t advocating that we pretend that everything’s fine when it’s not. He’s saying that there is a type of wholeness and confident well-being that transcends troubling circumstances. Even though there were times when Jesus was troubled (see also 11:33), the tenor of his life was joyful confidence.

Jesus’ command, “Do not let your heart be troubled” presupposes that His disciples have a degree of influence over the condition of their hearts. They aren’t completely at the mercy of their circumstances. They could engage their wills and not let their hearts be troubled.

The antidote to a troubled heart is faith: “believe in God, believe also in Me.” The command, “Believe in God,” wouldn’t have been surprising at all; all Jews in the first century would agree that you should put your trust in God. But to command, “believe also in Me,” was extraordinary. He was saying that He was to be the object of their faith just as God the Father is. This is yet another implicit claim to be God. In verse 2 Jesus tells them the specific reason they should believe:

2 “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

Jesus sometimes used the expression “My Father’s house” to refer to the temple (see John 2:16). But here He is speaking of heaven, the realm where God dwells (e.g., remember the Lord’s prayer which says, “our Father who is in heaven, hallowed be Your name. . .”). Jesus wanted the disciples to know that there are many “dwelling places” in the presence of God. The only other occurrence of this term in the NT is found in verse 23; there Jesus says to everyone who loves Him that He and the Father “will come to him and make Our *abode* with him.” Just as Jesus and God are right at home in our lives through the promised Holy Spirit, one day we will be right at home in the presence of God. If heaven is a house, there are many rooms in that house. There are plenty of rooms for all of Jesus’ the disciples.

I love the way Jesus says, “if it were not so, I would have told you.” If He were going to abandon the disciples without any provision made for joining Him with the Father, He certainly would have let them know. His entire ministry presupposed that they would be with Him and the Father eternally.

To the contrary, Jesus says, “for I go to prepare a place for you.” Some have imagined that for the past 2,000+ years that Jesus has been in heaven working on our accommodations (part handy-man and part interior decorator). But in John’s theology,

Jesus “going” meant Jesus “going to the cross and being raised on the third day.” Jesus would prepare a place for His disciples in the presence of God through the cross and the resurrection.

Instead of telling them, “Don’t let your hearts be troubled. . . Your circumstances will soon improve. . .” Jesus leapfrogs over this life to the next. They would find comfort for their troubled hearts by believing that they would be with Him and the Father in the next life.

Jesus will have plenty to say in the Farewell Discourse about how we can actively negotiate the troubles we experience in this life. Jesus doesn’t advocate that we passively resign ourselves to the troubles we experience in this life. He’ll speak about working (14:12), praying (14:13), bearing much fruit (15:8, 16). But before we pray and act, we need to know that no matter what happens in this life, a room in God’s house will be waiting for us after this life.

If you’re in the middle of some deep, distressing trouble, this may sound rather hollow: “You mean to tell me that I’m supposed to be comforted by believing that one day (perhaps years or decades from now) that I’ll be at home with God?” Yes, that’s what I’m saying because that’s what Jesus told His disciples. He actually taught that when you are confident that you have a home with God in the next life, you can endure virtually anything in this life. At the end of the Farewell Discourse, Jesus made this statement (John 16:33):

33 “These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

Even though we have tribulation and troubles in this world, we can take courage in the fact that Jesus has “overcome the world” through His death and resurrection, preparing a place for us in the presence of God.

***Second, comfort for troubled hearts comes from:***

***Assurance that we’ll be reunited with Jesus (13:3)*** This point follows the first. If Jesus has prepared a place for His disciples, certainly He will get the disciples to that place with Him.

3 “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.

The thing that troubled His disciples the most was the prospect of Jesus going somewhere that they could not follow. After being with Jesus for the past three years, it was unfathomable that He would leave them. Would they just go back to the life they had led before? Their hearts were troubled by the thought of being away from Jesus.

Jesus addresses their fear of being abandoned by Him in two ways. First, we'll see in coming weeks how Jesus assures them that He would be with them ***in this life*** through the indwelling Holy Spirit. He will actually tell them that it's to their advantage that He goes away; the ministry of the indwelling Holy Spirit will actually be superior to walking around with Him all over Palestine. And second, Jesus assures them that He would be with them ***in the next life***: "I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also." The New Testament repeatedly teaches that those who know Jesus in this life will be in His presence in the next life - either upon death or upon the return of Christ, whichever happens first.

John Stott points out that we sometimes dwell too much on "the negative joys of heaven" - the things that we're told ***won't*** be true in heaven: no more tears, no more sin, no more evil, no more hunger or thirst, no more death, etc. It's obviously appropriate to appreciate the things won't be there. But we shouldn't neglect to anticipate the central, dominating presence that ***will*** be there: Jesus Himself and God the Father and the Holy Spirit. Heaven will be the most God-centered existence imaginable. This is why people like C.S. Lewis made the point that if you don't really like being in the presence of God, you really won't like heaven (see *The Great Divorce*). If you love Jesus, you'll love heaven.

Jesus offers comfort for troubled hearts by saying, "When I return, you will be reunited with Me." I understand the tendency to avoid studying and thinking about the return of Christ. The details can be confusing. Putting together everything the Scriptures teach about the "end of the age" requires a lot of study. Plus, every few years somebody grabs the headlines by predicting ***when*** Christ will return - which is downright embarrassing. . . . But the fact of the matter is that ***the return of Christ is taught over and over*** again in the New Testament. The return of Christ is supposed to be a powerful comfort in the midst of trouble and a powerful motivation to live for God.

Listen to one simple statement (we could literally give a dozen Scriptures here). We read this in 1 Peter 1:13:

13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober *in spirit*, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Dwelling on the return of Christ isn't escapism. It's reality. It's a reality that should put the troubles of this life into their proper context. The assurance of being reunited with Jesus should comfort troubled hearts.

***Finally, comfort for troubled hearts comes from:***

***Knowledge of the "way" to the Father (13:4-7)*** In these verses Jesus assures His disciples that they already know the way to the Father. They weren't as lost in this life as they thought they were. Jesus makes a rather enigmatic statement in verse 4:

4 "And you know the way where I am going."

Even though they didn't realize it, they had knowledge of "the way" where Jesus was going. Thomas' question in verse 5 reveals that they were "off" in their thinking about this "way."

5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"

Thomas pointed out that since they don't know Jesus' destination ("where You are going") that they don't know "the way." Jesus redirected Thomas' thinking about "the way" with a statement about Himself:

6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

"The way" wasn't a path or a roadmap; "the way" was a person. Jesus could have given Thomas a detailed description of what the future held, but He didn't. It was enough for Thomas and the disciples to know, "If you know Me, you know 'the way.' If you know the way, you can be sure that you'll make it safely to the Father. The early Christians were known as "followers of the Way" (Acts 9:2, 24:14).

Jesus also said, "I am the truth." Jesus didn't merely speak truth. He *is* the truth. He is truth incarnate. Since they knew Jesus, the truth accompanied them through this life. They wouldn't be at the mercy of the falsehood and lies they encountered; they knew the truth.

Jesus also said, "I am the life." He didn't merely talk about life; He *is* life. Back in John 11:25-26 Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. . ." Since they knew Jesus, they experienced life - even in the midst of troubling circumstances. If you know Christ, you can really live even when you go through troubles.

After saying, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life," Jesus makes a very exclusive claim: "no one comes to the Father but through Me." Jesus wasn't "a" way to the Father; He was "the" way to the Father. The apostles made this same claim about Jesus. In Acts 4:12 Peter told the crowd:

12 "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Jesus' death and resurrection confirm that He is the only way to the Father. Dying a substitutionary death for our sins and being raised bodily on the third day confirmed that Jesus is uniquely the way, the truth, and the life.

In verse 7 Jesus links their knowledge of Him with their knowledge of God - a theme Brian will develop more fully next week in the following verses. In verse 7 Jesus says:

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

I think He’s qualifying his earlier statement, “You know the way. . .” Here he says that up to that point their knowledge of Him and the Father was limited; but from that point forward they would have a deepening knowledge of Him and the Father. Jesus wanted His disciples to live their lives with the knowledge that they already **know the way** - because they know Jesus, they know the way, the truth, and the life.

So often we’re just like Thomas: we want a roadmap through our troubles. If God would only show us ahead of time how our problems would be resolved, our hearts would be comforted. But sometimes God says, “I’m not giving you a roadmap; you don’t need to know how things will turn out. It’s enough that you know Jesus. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. The knowledge that you know Him is enough.”

If you’re going through some tough times, before you get busy trying to figure out what course of action to take, cling to Jesus. Today as we approach the Lord’s Table, take comfort from what Jesus has said. The bread and the cup signify the body and blood of Christ. They remind us that through the cross and the resurrection Jesus has prepared a place for us in the presence of God. And if He has prepared a place for us, certainly He will come back for us so that we might be where He is. In the meantime, as we walk with Jesus, we know the way, the truth, and the life.

Remember these things as we celebrate the Lord’s Table. We invite all who trust in Jesus alone to join in the Lord’s Table today. Please hold the bread until everyone has received, then we’ll eat together. Please hold the cup until all have received, then we’ll drink together.