

## John 16:29-33

### Introduction

We saw last week that throughout Jesus' discourse on the night of His betrayal, the disciples have had many questions. Part of the reason for their questions has been their own misguided expectations. That's on them. But another, bigger reason for their questions has been the fact that they *can't* fully understand until *after* all things have been fulfilled. That's why Jesus has been speaking to His disciples in "figures of speech" (or with veiled language), because He *Himself* is still veiled by His fleshly weakness.

Remember that even the figures of speech have been a perfect revelation of the Father. And yet for the disciples the day has not yet come when Jesus will speak plainly and when that plain speaking will give them understanding of the currently still veiled meaning of Jesus words. For us that day *has* come. So when Jesus says, "I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father" (16:28), what do we hear? We hear, encapsulated in these words, the whole Gospel, viewed in the person of Jesus. We hear, encapsulated in these words, the "all things" that we know so that we no longer have any questions.

"I came forth from the Father and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again and going to the Father." Jesus said this to His disciples on the night before His crucifixion. And this is how the disciples responded:

**I. John 16:29** — His disciples said, "Behold, now You are speaking plainly and are not using a figure of speech."

What did Jesus say just seconds earlier?

➤ John 16:25b-26a — "...**an hour is coming** when I will no longer speak to you in figures of speech, but will tell you plainly of the Father. **On that day** you will ask in My name..."

In verse 23 Jesus said:

➤ John 16:23 — "**In that day** you will not question Me about anything.

Are the disciples suggesting that after the passage of only a few *seconds*, that coming "day" and "hour" has suddenly arrived. That's probably not what they're thinking, but it only shows again just how much they don't—and can't—understand. Jesus says, "I am speaking to you in veiled language"; and the disciples respond, "but behold, now you're speaking plainly." They think they can understand *now*, and therefore they can handle plain speaking *now*. After all, Jesus just spoke to them plainly, and they got it! But did they really?

When Jesus said, "I came forth from the Father," do they see in this the deity of Jesus – His divine person and authority? Do they understand that Jesus is, Himself, the revelation of the Father? When Jesus said, "I have come into the world," do they see in this Jesus' humbling of

Himself by becoming flesh and living among us and suffering and dying for us and in our place? Do they understand the saving mission of Jesus as the true light and life of the world? When Jesus said, “I am leaving the world again,” do they see how this fallen world can no longer be the home of Jesus in His resurrection glory? Do they understand Jesus’ victory over the world insofar as the world has no hold on Jesus? And when Jesus said, “I am going to the Father,” do they see in this the Father’s full acceptance and approval of Jesus’ finished work on the cross? Do they understand Jesus’ office as our great High Priest who intercedes for us at the Father’s right hand? Do they understand Jesus’ office as our King who rules over us and directs all things to the end of His return and the consummation of His kingdom? Most of this, the disciples couldn’t see at all. And none of it could they understand at more than the most elementary level. That’s because Jesus did *not* say these things plainly. He was still using “figures of speech” (veiled language). That’s because the days of fulfillment had not yet shed their light backward to illuminate what Jesus did say. And yet how do the disciples respond? “Behold, *now* You are speaking *plainly* and are *not* using a figure of speech.” They’re confident that they *do* understand and that they *can* understand. They believe they can handle plain speaking *now*. So they go on to say in verse 30:

**II. John 16:30** — “Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God.”

On the one hand, this is a sincere and genuine confession of faith. The disciples aren’t being arrogant or cocky. They don’t say, “We know all things,” but rather, “We know that *You know* all things.” The Samaritan woman at the well said to Jesus:

➤ John 4:25 — “I know that Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare *all things* to us.”

So when the disciples say, “we know that You know all things,” they’re confessing that Jesus is the Messiah. They’re not thinking so much of omniscience as they are of Jesus’ prophetic knowledge of the Father’s saving purpose and plan. Having spent probably three years with Jesus, they’re convinced that when Jesus speaks of the Father He speaks truly and faithfully. And they know that for anyone to speak like that, He must have come from God. So they conclude: “By this we believe that You came from God.” Jesus said to the disciples just a moment ago:

➤ John 16:27 — “...the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me and have believed that I came forth from the Father.”

What a beautiful, simple thing is faith. The disciples don’t understand very much at all, but they do believe. They *are* convinced of this simple fact: that all that Jesus says to them is truth, and that therefore Jesus is the Messiah who has come from God — the God who created the world, and who revealed Himself to Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and who made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, and who promised salvation through a son of David. The disciples have a real and genuine faith. And yet why, suddenly, do they feel compelled to confess their faith *now*? They’re afraid they’ve been letting Jesus down with all their questions. That’s why they say in verse 29: “Behold, now you are speaking plainly and not using a figure of speech.” They want Jesus to know that all their questions are only the result of His “figures of speech.” If He would

only speak plainly now (as He just did, they think), then they wouldn't have all these questions and then Jesus would be more assured of their true support and loyalty. The disciples' questions are making the disciples uncomfortable. Just a minute ago, they were saying to one another:

- John 16:17-18 — “What is this He is telling us, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me’; and, ‘because I go to the Father’?” So they were saying, “What is this that He says, ‘A little while’? We do not know what He is talking about.”

You can hear the frustration in their voices. And then we read in verse 19:

- John 16:19 — Jesus knew that they were wishing to question Him, and He said to them, “Are you deliberating together about this, that I said, ‘A little while, and you will not see Me, and again a little while, and you will see Me’?”

Can you hear the gentle rebuke in these words? Why are the disciples deliberating among themselves about something they don't understand when Jesus is walking right there with them? Is it because they don't want to come across as dull and dense? Is it because they're afraid of more “figures of speech”? Is it because they want Jesus to know that He can count on them, but feel that asking more questions will only send the opposite message? Probably the answer is “all of the above.” And so we see that in the midst of the disciples' genuine faith, there's a subtle self-confidence that's still at work. That's why Jesus' figures of speech are frustrating them so. They think that if Jesus would speak plainly *now*, they wouldn't have all these questions. They think that if Jesus would speak plainly *now*, He would feel more just how supportive and how loyal they are. What they really want is for Jesus to “let” them be there for Him. That's why they “assure” Jesus here in verse 30: “Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You.” This is, at one and the same time, an “apology” for their questions and also a request that Jesus would “trust” them. We know that You don't need all our questions to provoke you to further reflection. We know that You don't need all our questions to show up something you still need to learn. That's not why we've been asking these questions. So won't you trust us with plain speaking?

“We know that You [already] know all things; [and] by this we believe that You came from God.” Here's a genuine confession of faith. And yet in the very midst of this confession is a naïve and misguided self-confidence. You can trust us. You can depend on us. You can count on us. In their love for Jesus, the disciples want Jesus to know this. So we come to verse 31:

**III. John 16:31** — Jesus answered them, “Do you now believe?”

Jesus knows our hearts. He knows our hearts far better than we know our own hearts. On the one hand, Jesus knows that the disciples *do* believe (v. 27). He's not questioning their sincerity or the genuineness of their confession of faith. What He is questioning is the naïve and misguided self-confidence within this confession of faith (cf. John 1:47-51; 6:69-70; 13:37-38; 20:28-29). Have they really believed on the strength of their own convictions (convictions they've come to on their own)? Do they really understand? And *could* they understand even if Jesus did speak plainly now? Will they really “be there” for Jesus? Can He really trust them and depend on them

and count on them? And even *if* He could, is it really their support that Jesus “needs” – and that He’ll need especially in the approaching darkest hour of His life? Jesus continues in verse 32:

**IV. John 16:32** — “Behold, an hour is coming, and has now come, for you to be scattered, each to his own place, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me.”

Jesus isn’t accusing the disciples, or even rebuking them. Neither is He warning them or exhorting them. He’s just telling them the way things are about to be – even the way things must be. When the Shepherd is struck down, then the sheep will be scattered (cf. Zech. 13:7 & Mat. 26:31). The disciples won’t be there for Jesus. For that matter, they can’t be. In just a little while, on that very night, they’re all going to be scattered, leaving Him alone. And then it will be clear just how much they didn’t and couldn’t understand.

But it’s not the disciples, after all, that Jesus needs or that He will depend upon in His darkest hour. In that saving work that Jesus has come to accomplish, what part can the disciples possibly play? For them to die now with Jesus would be a fruitless waste of life. To walk with Jesus, now, through His “trial,” and beatings, and crucifixion would require a faith and understanding that will only be possible later, when all their questions have been taken away. Jesus must go to the cross alone, without any other human help or support. So in just a little while, when Judas comes with the Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, Jesus will say to them: “If you seek Me, let these go their way [let these go, each to his own place]” (Jn. 18:8). But even then, Jesus wasn’t alone. Even when Jesus cried out on the cross, borrowing the words of the psalmist, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me” (Ps. 22:1; Mat. 27:46), even then He was crying out to one who still heard Him and who was, in some mysterious and wonderful way, still with Him. When Jesus accomplished our salvation He did so alone, without any other human aid or support. And yet He wasn’t alone, because the Father was with Him. And so we come to the conclusion not only of this section, but of this entire “upper room” discourse in verse 33. Jesus says:

**V. John 16:33** — “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.”

Could there be any more comforting and encouraging words than these? Why does Jesus expose the disciples’ true inadequacy and weakness? Because they need to be stripped completely of their self-confidence, so they can learn what it truly means to put all their confidence in Jesus. Because they need to be disabused of this idea that Jesus is depending upon them for anything, so they might learn what it truly means to depend wholly upon Him.

Jesus doesn’t depend upon us for anything. He never has and He never will. If that’s an offense to our pride, it’s also the most liberating truth in the world. Jesus only calls us to depend wholly on Him. He only calls us to put all our confidence in Him. So that in Him we may have peace. So that even when we’re confronted with our own weakness and frailty and inadequacy, in Him, and in His word and promise to us, we may have peace. In the world, yes, we have tribulation. In the world, we’ll be constantly confronted with our weakness and even our helplessness. But it’s precisely when we see these things the clearest that we can take courage, because Jesus—alone—has overcome the world.

He looks to us for nothing. We look to Him for everything. He finds in us nothing. We find in Him everything. When the disciples understand this, that's when all their questions will have been answered. That's when they'll ask the Father in Jesus' name, and in full dependence only on Jesus, they'll bear much fruit.

### Conclusion

Have we been stripped completely of all our self-confidence? Do we even embrace the daily reminders of our own weakness and frailty and inadequacy in this world so that in Him (who has overcome the world) we might have peace, and so that in Him (who has given to us His word and promise) we might bring forth much fruit? Have we made the words of the Apostle Paul our own:

- 2 Corinthians 3:4–5 — Such confidence we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.
- Philippians 4:12–13 — I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Finally, we remember Jesus' words to Paul and Paul's response:

- 2 Corinthians 12:9 — He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, *so that* the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Most gladly, therefore, let *us* boast about *our* weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in us.