

The Densest Moment | Jesus Christ's Farewell Conversation

"Believe Me"

John 14.1-14

2.5.23

"Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 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. 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. ⁴ "And you know the way where I am going." ⁵ Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" ⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

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

⁸ Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." ⁹ Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ "Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. ¹¹ "Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. ¹² "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. ¹³ "Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ "If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. ¹⁵ "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

We're looking at the major addresses of Jesus Christ and this year we come to *The Upper Room Discourse*, five chapters of discussion and prayer recorded only by John and taking place on the night when Jesus was arrested.

After John sets up the *PATHOS* (emotional intensity in the raising of Lazarus and the perfume incident) John then establishes the *ETHOS* (the credibility of the Speaker in the foot washing) and now we come to the *LOGOS* (the content persuading us to believe).

The content is directed at these students who are about to be CRUSHED by disappointment and shock... AND they don't know it. They're preparing for an inaugural ball... when really, they should be looking for a bomb-shelter. Jesus Christ has to convince them, FIRST, that the nature of His mission is different than what they think AND SECOND that they'll lose HIM ...for a time. *"I will strike down the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered."* (Zec 13.7)

The parallel for US... modern-day believers in Jesus Christ AND modern-day people who don't yet believe is a moment of bliss or easy-going, smooth sailing that is, unbeknownst to you, ABOUT to be interrupted by an enormous disappointment. It's a disappointment so overwhelming that it makes you question everything you've taken for granted... and may leave you in complete despair. It might even cause you to question God or doubt His goodness or even His existence.

Is there power in the gospel (basic message of Christianity) is there power in the gospel to sustain you in the midst of a setback so devastating that it leaves you feeling that the bottom has fallen out of your whole life? And how do you USE the gospel to get the will to go on?

I'll start today by looking at **1)** an interpretive question and then **2)** the parallel situation between the apostles and us and **3)** the logos or word Jesus Christ uses to prepare these young men for a devastating disappointment they don't even see coming.

The interpretive question is, *"To whom is Jesus Christ speaking in the Upper Room Discourse?"* It's a question we should always ask when we read and interpret the Bible. There's always an intended, original audience. Sometimes the audience is stated, *"To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, including the overseers and deacons"* (Phil. 1.1)

Sometimes the audience is NOT identified.

In either case, before we apply a passage to our lives we have to wrestle with that issue. The opening words are sometimes spoken at Christian funerals, "Let not your hearts be troubled..." but those words were NOT spoken at a funeral and before we apply the "derivatively" to our funeral, we HAVE to see the context and audience to whom they were first spoken. AND if we're willing and able to DO that, we'll find the words to be more powerful and pertinent than we first thought.

Here, the listeners were not people at a 21st C funeral but the twelve disciples (now only eleven, since Judas Iscariot has left – 13.30) And where we may find a parallel is by delving into their predicament and their emotional/spiritual response and need in the quandary facing them and THEN seeing if WE ever face a similar difficulty in our modern lives and world.

At the Passover Feast, Jerusalem swells to three times its normal population. There the disciples heard the cheering crowds hailing their Rabbi: "Hosanna to the Son of David" – these were illegal words. They would be viewed by Rome as sedition and treason – a plot to overthrow the government.

The disciples were mesmerized by those words. They were astounded when some Greeks came and asked them if they could see Jesus (like, "Wow! Our little organization is going GLOBAL!"). "Soon, they'll be measuring our Teacher for a crown and a throne" – but we know what kind of crown and what shape of a throne.

When all their hopes are dashed, Jesus knows they will NOT be prepared to weather the storm of disappointment and grief. When He says, "Let not your hearts be troubled" they must be thinking – "Uh... I'm good! 'Can't WAIT!"

And now we can ask, "Though WE were NOT in that Upper Room... have we ever faced something LIKE the shocking and devastating letdown they were about to face? If so, did you wonder what role God was playing in this disaster? And wondered maybe if God was withdrawing from you?"

I realize many of us have "chapter and verse" to prove that God will never leave or forsake us... BUT we also think of Job (who lost everything... lost sight of God... like God was hiding His face/presence from Job). Or David, who faced temptation and fell (couldn't God have prevented Bathsheba from bathing at that very moment?)" God does withdraw.

I think of it as a mother walking her toddler on a very crowded city street and the boy keeps letting go of her hand and trying to go his own way but, of course she won't let him because it's dangerous... but he's determined.

So, she lets go as he rounds the corner and then he realizes that he's alone and is gripped by fear. But all the while Mom is looking through the windows and has always had her eye on him... and when he starts to cry, she pops around the corner and sweeps him up and is totally relieved and at rest (for like 5 minutes).

So, as our older brothers and sisters knew that *"The most wise, righteous, and gracious God (sometimes, even) oftentimes leaves, for a season, His own children to various temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts... to raise them to a closer and more constant dependence for their sustenance on Him..."* (Westminster Confession of Faith 5.5)

As we'll see next week, He won't leave us as orphans and we are never out of His sight or influence but YES... God does allow us to stray... to harbor our illusions of independence so that He can draw us closer to Him.

For THEM it was going to be a let-down like they'd never even imagined. They were SURE... they "knew, that they knew that they KNEW..." that Jesus would be crowned King right after Passover but instead He would hang to death like a bloody pulp...would die...in apparent defeat. And they would not be able to shake the idea that God had abandoned them... IF God was even real at all!

And though we were NOT there...and though comparing the severity of disappointments (Like, "MY let-down was WAY more terrible than YOURS!") that's fruitless but I can't help thinking that some of YOU have suffered shocking and devastating reversals where relative peace, success and thriving was suddenly interrupted by injustice, by injury or sickness, by personal failure, the death of a loved one, a relationship

that ended... a career-path wrecked.

In the whole scope of things, the unexpected collapse they were about to witness was worse than anything (because it involved God and His mission and the entire history of all humanity... but the FEELING of abandonment and fear and grief are similar and parallel. And if it hasn't happened YET... if you're life has never left you wondering, "Lord, are You against me?... Have You given up on me? Left me?" Well, give it time...sooner or later... you'll find yourself, face in your hands discouraged, disappointed in despair. See the Psalms of Disorientation – #s 22, 44, 66, 88 (easy to remember).

So, what does the Teacher do? Well, He emphasizes His Person and His work – who He is and what He's come to do. He's come to give us access to God. His work, when it's finished, will cement the place of all believers with God.

"I am indeed going away from you...but it's to prepare a place for you... a dwelling... a residence for you in the Presence of My Father..." Jesus Christ is summarizing all that's about to happen in those brief words, "I go to prepare a dwelling place for you..."

"Having LIVED the human life that the Law required, a life NO ONE has ever lived of flawless truth, beauty and goodness – a life of joy (17.13) and unbroken love toward God and man – having lived in the place of My people from all ages (so as to achieve a record of perfect obedience not BY you but FOR you) I now go to be sacrificed... to be engulfed in the death/justice you deserve... to pay for your sins to balance the books and reconcile My people to God..."

I will then rise from death... My sacrifice accepted by My Father... I will appear to you and give you My peace and My forgiveness and My Spirit..." (He emphasized His work!)

And again, His Person: "I am indeed going away from you...but it's back to where I originated... I came from above where I had been with My Father in eternal love and infinite harmony... I go back Home to My Father."

And then the questions come. It's as if they see the Teacher and He's not His normal self. He's troubled (13.21 et al) and they're just beginning to sense that something unexpected and HEAVY is about to happen... Thomas asks: "Lord, we don't know where You're going; how can we know the way?"

Jesus says, "I am THE Way, THE Truth and THE Life – no one comes to the Father but through Me..." No one! Not Abraham or Elijah, not Ruth or Deborah, not Mother Theresa or Mr. Rogers...not the Apostles... (nor any of US) It's impossible for US to climb to God – He had to come to us, to live in our place and die in our place (a ransom) and to kill Death... to give you knowledge of God, My Father!"

Then Philip asks, "Lord, show us the Father and we'll be happy."

Jesus says, “Do you not see that I am God... IN the Father and the Father IN Me... the manifestation of God has been with you these three years... but if seeing God in human flesh is too earthy for you to believe...at least believe the miracles.”

We’ll see in this speech that Jesus Christ repeatedly puts Himself on a par with God the Father... the Son is God and He is NOT the Father; the Father is God and He is NOT the Spirit and the Spirit is God and yet He is NOT the Son – three distinct Persons in One God, the infinite, eternal and unchangeable Spirit...

The Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity is the church’s attempt to harmonize all of Scripture and that ancient seal or shield has helped many to see the basic relationship of the Three Divine Persons in the One God.

Three final thoughts: First: Really? They’re about to face the bottom dropping out of their world and Jesus Christ gives them... theology...and deep, sublime mystery? Seems pretty lofty and removed from their suffering...right?

Let’s not forget – their suffering would be (at least for now) limited to the emotional and relational kind but HE is about to suffer in every way like no one has EVER suffered... He’s saying, “I’m TROUBLED so you don’t have to be troubled.”

“If you know who I am and what I’m come to do, it will turn your deepest darkest disappointments into a deeper sense of rest and triumph... but yes, you have to muse, think, ponder, wonder, sing, reflect on the deeper things.

Second, it’s sad that the disciples were that hard-headed and hard-hearted and culturally bound in their wrong assumptions about God. Jesus is basically saying, “You wanna see God? Where have you been the last three years?” On the other hand – if your spiritual growth and moral change has been slow – you’re in good company. They had the best Discippler, Spiritual Director ever... Our hearts and minds are slower and harder than theirs... We need the Spirit (more on HIM next week).

Last, did you notice anything to DO in the passage? If YOU or a friend is facing crushing disappointment, what should you or they DO? How do we prepare for the big letdowns, horrific diagnoses, loss, times when the bottom falls out?

The imperatives are in the first and eleventh verses – a negative and a positive – “Don’t let your hearts be troubled” and then the positive, “Believe in God, believe also in Me.” Again, He puts belief in HIM on a par with believing in God... But He’s basically saying, “Rejoice with Me! I’m about to finish My mission... “I got this! I’ll turn the ultimate disappointment into the greatest achievement and encouragement.

“Believing Me as you believe in God will NOT end in disappointment but for now – a closer intimacy with God and a desire to DO the will of God (Father, Son and Spirit) and eventually “joy unspeakable and full

of glory” **Trust Me.**”

QUOTES:

“Every day the bucket a-go a well, one day the bottom a-go drop out.”

– Bob Marley, “I Shot the Sheriff”, (from the 1973 album, *Burnin’*)

The most wise, righteous, and gracious God oftentimes leaves, for a season, His own children to various temptations, and the corruption of their own hearts, to correct them for their former sins, or to uncover in them the hidden strength of corruption and deceitfulness of their hearts, so that they may be humbled; and, then to raise them to a closer and more constant dependence for their sustenance on Him, and to make them more aware against all future occasions of sin, and for various other good and holy purposes.

– *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (CH, 5 “On Providence”; modernized from the original 1647 version)