

A Warning and a Promise

John 16:25-33

For many weeks now, we have been studying Jesus' long and final farewell discourse to his disciples. This all took place on that Thursday evening, the day prior to Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples that evening, converting the OT ordinance into the NT sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Judas left, and the eleven remained with Jesus. To be encouraged.

This great passage began in chapter 14, with the words, John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."

And here the discourse ends,

v.33 "These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."

And what have the disciples learned in all of this? Actually, quite a bit, for they have come to believe and to understand a great deal about Jesus and his ministry. And the greatest lesson they learn is that,

I. JESUS REESTABLISHED FOR US A RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FATHER.

And he tells them that, so very clearly.

v.25-28

And they seemed to understand so very clearly.

v.29-30

That statement is the most general and unanimous profession

of faith that we ever find the apostles' making. It is profound, and important for us. Because that understanding, that knowledge of God, is what we must have as well.

We live in such a practical age, and such an experiential, subjective age. We live in an age that says what you know about God isn't nearly as important as what you feel about God. Thus the study of God, theology, is greatly neglected. And that is terribly, terribly dangerous, for what you feel about God might be altogether incorrect! As it is, for example, with people who claim, among other things, that a God of love would never condemn anyone to the eternal punishment of hell.

Indeed, the clear knowledge of God is one of the foundations of the Christian religion. And Jesus gives us that knowledge.

v.25

Plain teaching. That's the meaning of the word orthodox in our denomination, straight teaching. Ortho means straight, as it is used in the word for straight teeth, orthodontics. In "orthodox," the ending "dox" comes from the Greek word meaning thinking. So orthodox is straight thinking, straight teaching. Nothing strange. Nothing that goes against the historical truths of biblical Christianity. Orthodoxy.

That straight teaching begins with straight teaching about God the Father. And actually,

A. Jesus leads the way to the Father.

One important part of straight teaching is that Jesus is "the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through [Him]." No one has a relationship with God, no one has a true understanding of religion unless he comes to God through Jesus Christ.

Now that is a very exclusive statement, for it discriminates against all those who disagree, and I must say, that if you disagree, then you do not know God. If you do not know Jesus, then you do not know God. And if you do not come to God through faith in Jesus Christ, then you can not come to God at all.

Jesus leads the way, in doctrine and in experience. In terms of his own life and experience, he speaks so clearly that this time, his disciples finally understand!

v.28

Now, that is not at all new. He has said the same thing, and we've studied this several times over the previous months. Let me briefly summarize that consistent, straight teaching. Jesus came from the father, being born as a man conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary. It was a supernatural act, a miracle that has never happened before or after. Jesus is the only man who ever lived who was without sin, being conceived not by the seed of Adam, but by the immediate intervention of the Holy Spirit.

God sent him, according to the eternal purpose which he had determined from before the creation of the world. And Jesus came. In perfect obedience to his father's will. He came into the world in the flesh, the flesh of a man. He was a real man, yet he remained God, with a divine nature and a human nature combined in one person.

Our Confession of Faith puts it this way, "The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the womb of the

virgin Mary, of her substance. So that the two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person."

Now, you won't hear many sermons in too many places today on those sorts of things, because we are too practical. We want things always to be obviously simplistic in their application to our lives. And this doctrine of God doesn't stimulate much interest and excitement today. It's boring--the kiss of death for sermons.

But it is crucial, for the health and strength of your faith. It is crucial for you to know what Jesus did and how he did it. It is crucial if you are going to know God, and study God. And love God.

Jesus leads the way. Jesus is the way. And so that this theology always touches your heart and affections, and not merely your intellect, notice what Jesus tells us what we must know about the Father. He loves you.

B. Jesus reveals the Father's love for us.

v.26-27

Verse 26 is quite interesting. It seems to say that Jesus won't intercede for you when you pray to the Father. But that can't be the case, since Jesus has told us that he is our intercessor, our high priest, our advocate. But in these startling words, he says to us that it isn't necessary for him to ask for us, for we have the freedom to ask ourselves. We do come to God "in Jesus' name," as it says in verse 26, but it is still we who come! We are represented by Jesus, and he does plead for us. It is his blood shed upon the cross that cleanses us and makes us acceptable to God, and it is he who brings us to God and introduces us to him, as it were. But Jesus' point is here that WE are able to

come. We need Jesus' introduction, but don't miss the point. In Jesus, we ourselves are able to enter God's holy presence and speak to him. We can approach the father, with boldness and confidence.

Heb. 10:19 "Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water."

"Let US draw near." Let US have the boldness to enter the holy of holies, and survive! Let us take great confidence and assurance that God will listen to us. BECAUSE HE LOVES US.

He loves those who have loved his son.
v.27

And so we read about our great privileges, in verses such as, Rom. 8:15 "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father.""

You are a son! Whose father loves you. That's what Jesus teaches us. And that is what the disciples finally grasped. And for us, that is such an important element of your spiritual well-being— the complete and total sense of being loved by your heavenly father. In a relationship that is reestablished by Jesus.

But there is a warning. A warning for the disciples and similarly for us.

II. JESUS WARNS US AGAINST OVERCONFIDENCE.

It is a warning against presumption, and self-assured self-reliance. It comes in the form of a rebuke, given to the great statement of faith by the disciples in verse 30. Immediately after they proclaim, "By this we believe that you came forth from God,"
v.31

There is a challenge in that question, a gentle but inescapable inquiry. "Do you REALLY believe?"

In the words of J.C. Ryle, Jesus is warning "the eleven of their self-ignorance. They thought they had believed. They did not doubt their own faith. Let them not be too confident." Ryle adds, "Warnings against self-confidence need to be continually pressed on believers. Nothing is so deceptive as feeling and excitement in religion. We know not the weakness of our hearts."

I hope that you are thinking, AMEN. I hope that you recognize this in yourself, in the weakness of your own heart. From the one who might be the most strong in the Lord to the very weakest of you, you must recognize the deceitfulness of your own heart. You must recognize that your own heart, even as it is regenerated and renewed by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, your own heart is still desperately wicked. There are still many remnants of that old man, lurking deep in many crevices and hidden corners, and just when you think you have finally finished doing battle with a particular sin, out it comes into the open.

So strikes like cancer, growing insidiously in our physical bodies. Just as cancer cells grow, there are renegade pockets of sin in each of us, ready to come out at any time. And Jesus' warning is that,

A. Our faith will be tested by the danger of thinking that we know all that we need to know.

And what a great danger that is. For the disciples, that meant thinking they no longer needed to be taught.

v.30

These disciples knew the truth. They knew Jesus. They knew the Father. But they were in great spiritual danger if they thought they knew enough.

Sometimes, perhaps, we think we know enough. Sometimes, perhaps, I do. We're reformed. We know our theology. We know the system of doctrine. We know what the law says and how it applies.

But the disciples DIDN'T know enough. They didn't know enough to enable them to handle the very practical trials that were about to come upon them. Their experiences will certainly show to us that,

B. Our faith will be tested by the danger of external troubles.

And God will test it that way! God, in his fatherly love, will design specific tests to purify your hearts. And humanly speaking, those tests are of great danger. External troubles.

For the disciples, that meant going on faithfully in Jesus' absence. And Jesus warns them that they will all fall away. They will all reject him and deny him. Peter gets most of the attention in that, because he was so outspoken, and the Lord singled him out. But all the disciples abandoned Jesus' in his hour of need.

v.32

What do we read about the presence of the disciples when Jesus was crucified? Nothing. We only read about a few faithful women, and they at a distance.

Mat. 27:55 "And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, 56 among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons."

All the disciples were scattered. At that particular moment, they failed the test. Just as Jesus had told them they would,

Mat. 26:31 Then Jesus said to them, "All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written: `I will strike the Shepherd, And the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"

That prophecy is from Zechariah 13:7. The point is that none of us can be confident in ourselves. But Jesus doesn't condemn the disciples for their weakness of faith--instead he works to strengthen it. And because of the weakness of the human heart, because of the propensity to forsake and abandon Christ when the going gets tough, Jesus ends this extended conversation with words of incomparable hope.

III. JESUS PROMISE US HOPE.

And do remember that hope is confident assurance and expectation of something to come. There is certainty in hope, when the word is used in the Bible, not the uncertainty that we often associate with it.

With that in mind, Jesus promises,

A. The hope of peace in the midst of tribulation.

We've seen this theme before. It's repeated often in Scripture. The certainty of trouble. And the assurance of God's help.

Never are those things made clearer than in,
v.33

I often quote that verse. “In the world you will have tribulation.” It doesn’t go away the moment you become a Christian. In fact, in many cases, it increases. The tribulation increases. The troubles increase. And Scripture tells us not to be surprised by that. In fact, you should rejoice.

James 1:2 “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”

Peter says it so soberly,

1 Peter 4:12 “Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”

Don’t be surprised! Yet we are. We are caught off guard, unprepared. And we fall. Peter is the preeminent example, but not one of us could claim to be any more secure.

There will be tribulation. Be ready. And be assured! There is peace in Christ. Peace in the objective sense, of peace with God, the peace of a relationship restored.

And peace in the subjective sense. The experience of wholeness and completeness and satisfaction in Christ, despite the surroundings and circumstances. That sort of peace is very much related to the contentment which we studied recently from,

Phil. 4:4 “Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all

understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

Then in just a few verses,

Phil. 4:11 “Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: 12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

No matter what the circumstances, no matter how deep the abasement and tribulation, there is peace in Christ. And, therefore, joy. And along with it, contentment.

Now, I ask you, how many of you want those things? Peace, joy, and contentment. And how many people in this world look for those things in all the wrong places?

They are found only in Christ. They are found only as you “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.” They are found only when you are able to declare, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”

There is no other way to find peace. There is no other source of peace in the midst of this troubled world. There are no other answers to the difficulties and struggles of this life. Jesus is the only answer. “In the world you will have tribulation.” “In Me you may have peace.”

The hope of peace! And Jesus gives us a sure and certain

ground upon which to base that peace, a firm footing upon which to stand. It is,

B. The hope of encouragement in his victory.

v.33

Only Jesus could say that! I could never say that to you myself and offer any encouragement at all! But people try to offer that encouragement, don't they? Things go bad, and someone will say to you, "Don't worry, I know it will all work out well."

But I don't know that! Someone gets quite ill, and is told by a well-meaning friend, "Don't worry, I know you will get better." But I don't know that! They might not get better. They might, in fact, die. And I have no control over that. Because I have not overcome the world! I have not overcome death. I am a mere man, and I have not overcome the evil one. I have not overcome the world. But Jesus has! His cross was a triumph. His resurrection was a declaration of victory. And his ascension was a demonstration of it all.

He overcame the world.

So be of good cheer, there is no trouble that will ever come to you that is beyond the control and sovereign authority of King Jesus. Be of good cheer, there is no sickness and no disease that exceeds the power and of the Great Physician. Those external troubles may well come with great intensity, but God is in control! And God "works all things according to the counsel of His will."

Those aren't just pious words. They aren't a mere platitude. They aren't spoken carelessly nor without compassion for those who struggle with tribulation. They are words of hope.

So whatever your situation and your circumstances, whatever they may be, be of good cheer. And may your faith be strong. Be of good cheer, Jesus says. For he also says, "I have overcome the world."

And perhaps the best explanation of all of that is found in, Rom. 8:35 "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written: "For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter." 37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.