

Calming Words for Troubled Hearts

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 January 2024

Preacher: Brian McDowell

[0 : 00] What is the Christian to do when the worldly nose falls in?

What's the believer to do in the day of great trouble? Well, as always, our answer comes from the Word of God.

And in the passage we read together from the lips of Jesus in John 14. Martin Luther, a great reformer, called this passage, the best and most comforting sermon that the Lord delivered on earth.

He said, it was a treasure, a jewel, not to be purchased with the world's goods. The situation, as you know, Jesus was in Jerusalem with the disciples.

He was just ours from being arrested and tried and crucified. He's having supper with the disciples. These 12 men who for three years, maybe even a little bit more, had traveled with them.

[1 : 14] They left home and family and work and friends. They'd listened to them preach. They'd never heard anything like it before.

They'd watched them heal and perform miracles. And here they were having supper with them in Jerusalem and some amazing things transpire.

And their world just falls apart. After supper, he takes a basin of water and a towel and he washes their feet.

An amazing thing to do. They saw him as their leader, and yet that was the sort of thing a slave, a servant would do. But then he begins to talk to them.

And he says, first of all, one of you is going to betray me. And then he says to Peter, the guy who always talks first to maybe sees himself as the leader of the 12, he says, Peter, you're going to deny me the next 24 hours.

[2 : 29] And worst of all, he says, I'm going away. I'm going to leave you. So the world just collapses.

Not their outer world, they could just have gone back to their homes and what the occupations they used to have. But their inner world, the very center of their personal lives has just fallen apart. Because this is not how they saw the future. And what Jesus was doing was actually stripping away that false veneer that they had placed, that they thought was coming and was going to take part, going to happen.

They did believe that Jesus was the Messiah. They did believe that he was the promise deliverer. You know that all through their scriptures and what we call the Old Testament, they had been promised Israel, the children of Israel, the Hebrews, the Jews, a deliverer, a great savior, a Messiah.

And they believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They did months and months earlier, a way up in the north of the country at Caesarea Philippi, when they were on the road with Jesus, he used to talk to them away from the crowds and he said, look, who are people saying I am?

[4 : 07] Because by this stage, he'd been in modern parlance, a celebrity. He was really well known. And they said, well, some people think you're John the Baptist, come back to life.

Some people think that you're Elijah, and others think you're one of the prophets, they're not quite sure. And then of course, he asked them, but who do you say that I am?

And Peter, speaking on behalf of them, said, you're the Christ, you're the Messiah. So of course, Jesus knows at that stage that when he goes to the cross, he will have left behind witnesses.

He would believe in earthly witnesses. And as you read the Gospels, you discover that he really is just making his way slowly south to Jerusalem and what's going to happen.

But as he sees these disciples reacting deeper and deeper in despair, he says, look, you believe in God.

[5 : 19] Do you know who I am? I am God. I am the Messiah. You believe in God, believe also in me.

And what he was doing was he was taking away the ideas that they had. They must have had of an earthly utopia, a kind of dream world.

This kind of escapist place where Jesus' followers, the followers of the Messiah, they wouldn't know pain and illness.

They wouldn't know grief and distress. They wouldn't be troubles and problems. They'd be different to other people here on earth.

And Jesus is saying, no, no. That's not what's going on. And he's reminding these disciples that Christians, those who follow Jesus Christ, are amphibians.

[6 : 21] We live in two worlds. We live in the natural world, the physical world, the world we can touch and see and smell and hear. But we also live in an inner world, the world of the soul, the spiritual world, what Jesus called the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven.

And he says to them about this inner world, let not your heart be troubled. Now you probably know there are false gospels and false teaching, a kind of polyana sort of Christianity where once you become a Christian, well, that's all your problems.

So you're not going to get ill and you're not going to have relationship difficulties. You're going to get the job you always want and everything.

Jesus never promises that. And what he's promising here and is reminding us all that our inner lives, our hearts, no matter what's going on outside, do not need to be troubled.

We can live at peace. We can face this new year of 2024, whatever it brings with peace and content and joy in our hearts.

[7 : 50] Now, Jesus gives them three reasons here why they shouldn't be troubled in heart. He says, first of all, he reminds them of a triumphant faith.

And then he speaks to them about a particular hope. And finally, he shares with them a personal love.

He reminds them of a triumphant faith. He says, you believe in God, believe also in me. These men were Jews. They were Hebrews.

They were of the tribes of Israel. So however varied their backgrounds were, they all knew the scriptures, what we call the Old Testament, they called the law and the prophets.

No matter how lightly they sat to their Jewish faith, they would have known. They would have known the stories of creation and the fall.

[8 : 54] They would have read about God's covenant with Abraham, the promises he made to Abraham's descendants. They would have known how God used Moses to bring the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt into the promised land.

They would have known all the stories about the judges, how again and again when the children of Israel built idols and disobeyed God, and then because they were invaded and enslaved, they cried to God and God delivered them.

They would have known all of that and the words of the prophets and the psalmist. They would have known all that. David in Psalm 27, I had fainted, he said, unless I had believed, unless I'd had the faith to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

And he goes on to say, but mine eyes are unto thee, O Lord, and thee is my trust. There it was. That's what happened.

David delivered because of his faith in God and Jesus is reminding them of that. You believe in that God, believe also in me.

[10 : 13] And of course, they would have known. We read the passage in Isaiah, wonderfully encouraging passage where God says to the children of Israel, look, don't be afraid.

I've redeemed you. You belong to me. So when troubles surround you, you know the way a water surrounds you when you're in a river? Well, you're looking everywhere and all you see is troubles.

Don't be afraid. Whenever they're overflowing you, like drowning you, don't be afraid. Whenever you think you're going to be destroyed because you're walking through a fire, don't be afraid.

Don't be troubled. I'm with you. You will be delivered because you are mine and I love you. That's the promise of God.

So Jesus is reminding them how personal faith delivers the Hebrew people, delivers believers again and again.

[11:17] And of course, Jesus isn't only speaking to his disciples, is he? He's speaking to us as well. So if you're a Christian here this morning, I hope I pray you are, don't let your heart be troubled about outward things.

Your Heavenly Father is possessed of infinite power and wisdom and compassion and goodness and love.

He knows what is best for you. He is working all things out for your good.

Believe in his absolute sovereignty, his unfailing faithfulness as we sang about earlier, his infinite wisdom and above all, his wondrous love.

But not just believe in your Heavenly Father. Believe in Jesus because he says you believe in him. Believe also in me. I am the one who took your place.

[12:24] I'm the one who paid a debt you could never pay. I'm the one who took punishment that you wouldn't have to take it. I'm the one who went to the cross for you and I'm the one who rose again to new life so that you could have a new life, that your heart could be transformed and changed.

You could have a life living in the kingdom of heaven. What a God and Savior we have, men and women. But let me urge you to remember.

Remember because it causes problems if we don't, that the faith of which the Bible speaks, the faith that God and Jesus is a matter of the will.

This faith will bring us comfort in time of trouble but does not lie in your feelings or your emotions.

They can always play you false. How you feel at any one time is no great guide and there's certainly no great help.

[13:37] Emotions are feelings. They come and go. They rise and fall. They flare up. Sometimes we feel good, sometimes we feel not so good. We're not really quite sure why that is.

Our faith depends on the willed tendency of the heart. Jesus said, whosoever will may come to me. You have to will to believe and God will help you to do that.

The late Reverend Eric Alexander has a wonderful couplet about the danger of Christians trusting in their feelings.

He says, fact and faith and feeling walked along the wall. Faith looked back to feeling and soon began to fall.

That's it. Do not trust in your feelings but in the promises of God and what Jesus had said to you.

[14:40] In his wonderful book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan has a great picture of how we can claim the promises of God in faith to help us in times of trouble.

John is on his way to the Celestial City but he's daydreaming and he wanders onto the estate of the giant despair who captures him, takes him to Doubting Castle, throws him in a dungeon, beats him, starves him and Christian is nearly at the end of himself.

Then he suddenly remembers and he says, what a full life being. I have in my breast, he says, the promises of God which are a key to get me out of here.

He uses the promises of God to open the cell door and the castle door and how he gets on his way to heaven. A reminder that the promises of God are true and we should lean on them every time we are in trouble of whatever kind and not allow our feelings to bring us to despair.

Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. A triumphant faith. He spoke to them also of a particular hope.

[16:13] Last week apparently over 37 million people bought lottery tickets hoping that last night they would win millions of pounds.

Now today their hope is dashed apart from a few I suppose but all the rest of them, millions, their hopes are dashed.

Christian hope is not like that. It is a sure and a certain hope. Jesus says, I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again and take you to my cell.

Now Jesus is speaking to them about the thing that is immediately troubling them. He is a wonderful savior.

You know, he doesn't deal with problems that we don't have. He deals with the problems that we have. They were concerned about the future. What was going to happen when he went away?

[17:15] And the writer to the Hebrews when he is talking about Jesus and his role as a priest for us, you know, bringing God to men and men to God, he says, we do not have a great high priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities but was in all points tempted like as we

are.

That's a double negative isn't it? It gets a bit complicated. What he is simply saying is, look, we have a high priest who feels what we feel, who knows what it's like because he was fully human. He lived our life. He knows our life so he can give us sympathy and mercy and hope. And that is what he is doing here.

He is telling the disciples, look, don't be worried or anxious about the days to come. Your future is assured. Yes, I'm going away but I will come back and I will take you unto myself.

You will come and you will be with me. That hope of him. Is there a better description of heaven to be with him?

[18 : 31] That's the best description that we have. I know in the book of Revelation there is a description of heaven. It was a beautiful place with the river of life running through the middle and trees of life adorning it.

There's no pain or illness. There's no crying or mourning or death. All will be light. There will be no darkness there.

Jesus will be there. That's what it's, you know, it's being prepared for us by Jesus so that when our body sees the work and our mortal life is over, our souls, our spirits will go to be with him.

Now, for many people, of course, that's one of their problems they think with religion in general and Christianity and pretty much, it's just escapism, you know?

Die in the sky when you die by and by and yeah, you're just running away from life. No. The Christian isn't running away from life. The Christian is running towards life because the life that is to come for you and me is a better life by far than any that we have here.

[19 : 51] And of course, we're challenged, aren't we, that while we are still in this world, in this mortal life, we're the work, we're the labor, we're the witness to show people how good is our God and to honour him in the world.

And of course, this great hope takes away, doesn't it, the sting of death? It takes away any fear of death.

You know, if you were a poor man or woman and you knew that after you slept, the next morning you'd wake up and you'd be rich, you wouldn't be afraid to go to sleep, would you?

Or if you were in pain and really ill, bad health and you knew the next morning after sleeping, you'd be well, you'd be fit and healthy, you wouldn't be afraid to go to sleep.

Well, it's the same with the Christian. You knew fear death because it's really just a passing through, a passing over. Going back to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, you know, he has a wonderful picture of what it's like.

[21 : 03] At the end of the book, he has a number of people going to the celestial city to heaven. And he says about Mr. Valiant for Truth that was noised abroad that Mr. Valiant for Truth had received the summons.

And when the day arrived, a great crowd went with him to the river. And as he took a step in, they heard him say, oh death, where is thy sting?

And as he went further, they heard him speak and say, oh grave, where is thy victory? And so he passed across. And all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

That's all death is. That is our hope in Christ that we will just simply pass across. So he spoke to them of a triumphant faith, a particular hope.

And you know, this is the heart of our faith here whenever we think of it.

[22 : 15] And he's telling the disciples about this hope. And he goes on to speak about a personal love. He says, I go to prepare a place for you.

For you. It's probably the case that most of us when we read that passage, and some of us have read it a lot, we concentrate on the promise that Jesus is going to prepare a place.

And we think what will heaven be like, you know? But if we were to focus on the words for you, I go to prepare a place for you.

What would that do for our souls? Because we wouldn't be concentrating on the architecture or the landscape, but rather the fact that he's going to prepare a place for each of us.

It would be the promise that in that great home of our heavenly Father, where we will one day reside, there is a place prepared just for me, just for you.

[23 : 29] Personal, personal. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, you know, the rest of the verse. He loved John Gazondice in his first letter, hearing his love.

Not that we loved God, but that he loved us. And this is the heart of our faith and beliefs and inner life.

God's love. Jesus' love. I go to prepare a place for you. There's God's promise this morning as the new year begins.

It's for us, just for me, just for you, to know that we're loved by Jesus. What does that do for your spirit? He's thinking of each one of us.

Many years ago when our two sons were very young, sometimes Mary and I. We needed babysitters. And there's a story from back then that I've never, ever forgotten.

[24 : 38] And I feel the pain of it still. A young woman babysat for us. And it was a very sad situation.

She was very devoted to her parents. She wasn't married. And they both died very suddenly and unexpectedly within a month of each other.

I mean, her world really just fell apart. She had a brother, but he was married and lived away. So she was on her own.

And one time we were just talking together. And she said, you know, there's nobody in the world to whom I'm really special.

Don't not break your heart. There's nobody in the world to whom I'm really special. Well, for the Christian, there is.

[25 : 37] Because each one of us is special to God. I, you know, here in St. Columbus, we think of Derek and Katrina, we think of Corey and Heather, think of some of the elder and that.

We think they're special. You know, they're really, they are powerful Christians, you know. But actually in God's eyes, you are every bit special.

And he shows his love for us when we're in affliction, when we're in trouble, in times of great sorrow. And then there is that he comes and he supports you and he gives you strength and he delivers you.

And above all else, it was his love for you that took him to the cross. Each Sunday morning and evening here in St. Columbus at the end of the service, when the announcements have been made and our ministers send us away with this admonition, guard your heart.

That's advice from the scriptures. In Proverbs chapter four, the wise man says, guard your hearts with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

[26 : 57] There's probably no better advice than this in the whole of scripture. But in that passage and in those few verses in John 14, Jesus tells us how to guard our hearts so that in the midst of all that's going on, we will be at peace with our Lord.

He tells us have faith in him, trust him and his promises, for they are for you. Look forward in hope for the days that are yet to be, for they're prepared for you.

And know that you're loved with the most wondrous love by your Savior, the Lord of Heaven and Earth. Let's pray together.

Our loving Heavenly Father, all through this new year, help us, we pray, to know Jesus better, to trust him with all our hearts, to look forward in hope and Lord to know that we are loved and help us to make him better known by yielding to him in all things and our lives to the service of others.

In Jesus' name we pray this. Amen.