

1. How Jesus quietens the troubled heart

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[0 : 0 0] Chapters 14, 15 and 16 of John's Gospel, and you might well add chapter 17 as well, they form a distinct and unique section within John's Gospel.

And they have no parallels in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. They are unique chapters. And extraordinary chapters they are too. Comforting, illuminating and designed to stiffen the spines of their original readers and listeners.

Indeed, the Apostles who heard these words. And also designed to stiffen the spines of those who read them today, in 2010. And what I'd like to do, God willing, is to bring you four sermons from chapter 14 over this coming month.

And then I hope to take chapters 15 and 16 later on in the year. So let me take a few minutes, first of all, to introduce this whole section of three chapters, 14, 15 and 16.

As you look down them, you'll see that they are more or less a monologue from Jesus. But they're not quite a monologue. He does almost all the speaking.

[1 : 0 5] But every now and again, one of his listeners, one of the Apostles, asks a question, or makes a comment, which he then answers. Now the listeners are the 11 Apostles.

That is to say, the 12, minus Judas Iscariot, who, as we read in chapter 13, has gone out to arrange for Jesus' betrayal. And the occasion here is the night immediately before the crucifixion.

So Jesus and his 12 Apostles have just shared supper together, the last supper. Judas has left them, you'll see back in chapter 13, verse 30. And then we have this long section, which begins really at chapter 13, verse 31, in which Jesus speaks to his 11 friends and teaches them.

Now John the Evangelist, the Gospel writer, who was of course himself one of the 12 Apostles, has two main reasons for including this section in his Gospel.

The first is to show how Jesus is preparing the disciples, the Apostles, for their future mission and work. Now at the time, the Apostles were fairly clueless and fairly upset as well.

[2 : 1 5] They were perturbed because events were unfolding rapidly around them, too fast for them to grasp properly what was going on. In fact, Jesus says to them in chapter 16 that he has a lot more to say to them, but they simply can't bear it now.

They're distracted, they're unhappy, they're incapable of taking in much that he's saying to them. So although this is an extended teaching session given to the 11 Apostles, you mustn't think that it was like Monday morning at the Cornhill training course, if you like, with the students there sitting all in their neat rows with smiling faces, eagerly taking notes and saying thank you, teacher, at the end of the session.

It wasn't that sort of thing at all. The Apostles here are bewildered. In fact, they weren't going to get their heads around all this teaching material for some time. But when they did so, they would realize that Jesus had been preparing them for life after him.

In other words, life after his ascension back to heaven. Central to these three chapters is the fact that he is about to leave them. And his departure is not going to be the end of their great adventure.

Really, it's just the beginning. It's the beginning of their life's work. So he is preparing them for what lies ahead. He's preparing them to be, if you like, the first line of troops to go over the top and out into the battlefield.

[3 : 41] He's preparing them to be missionaries. He's going to describe to them the equipment with which he will provision them. And first and foremost, that is the person of the Holy Spirit.

He's going to tell them also what conditions will be like on the battlefield. How those conditions will be extremely tough. But that they will be victorious in the end.

So these three chapters, which are sometimes known as the farewell discourse or the upper room discourse, are spoken by Jesus to prepare his friends for their future mission.

But they're full of instruction for us today, for our mission. We're not, of course, quite the same as the apostles. At one level, they are unique. They form a foundation layer of the Lord's new covenant people.

But at another level, we do today very many of the same things that they did. And the same Holy Spirit who was given to them is given to Christians in every generation to enable us to bear witness to the truth about Jesus.

[4 : 46] And the teaching in these chapters about the world's hostility towards Jesus and his followers applies just as much today to us as it did to the apostles back in the first century.

So there's the first reason for chapters 14, 15 and 16. These are marching orders or instructions for mission for the apostles. But there's a second reason for these chapters.

And this may seem rather surprising. And that is that they have an evangelistic purpose. They are for people who are not yet Christians to read.

Now you'll perhaps think that I've gone soft in the head when you hear me say that. So let me justify what I've just said. Look on to chapter 20, if you will, verses 30 and 31.

John chapter 20, verses 30 and 31. And here John tells us, in very clear words, why he has written this gospel. So let me read chapter 20, verses 30 and 31.

[5 : 45] Now Jesus, says John the evangelist, Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

So he's writing here to his imaginary readers, whom he calls you, and it's a plural you. And he's saying, I'm writing this book of mine to help you to become believers in Jesus.

Now I gladly concede that in those two verses, 30 and 31, John tells us that he's writing about the signs that Jesus did, that is, the miracles, the works of power.

Now, he's saying to his non-Christian readers, look at these extraordinary miracles and acknowledge on the basis of them that Jesus is the Christ and the Son of God.

But surely John is not expecting his non-Christian reader to miss out chapters 14, 15 and 16 simply because they don't record any miracles.

[6 : 52] John has written the whole of this gospel, all 21 chapters of it, as an evangelistic tract. A short book designed to persuade the non-Christian to become a believer, to become a follower of Jesus.

So, and this is my point, as the non-Christian reads chapters 14, 15 and 16 with their instructions about mission and their description of what it's like to be a Christian and to live the Christian life in a hostile pagan world, the non-Christian is going to have his eyes opened.

He will realize that if he comes to Christ, it will be tough. But equally, he'll realize that if he comes to Christ, he will receive the Holy Spirit and he'll be able to live a fruitful life.

He'll be able to relate to God truly as his Father. And he will be given both the peace and the joy that only Jesus can give. And therefore, he may say to himself as he reads these words, I would be a fool not to want these things.

So, the non-Christian is being given a detailed view of what life is like for the Christian. And he needs to know that. And let me say, if you're here tonight as somebody who is not yet a Christian, these chapters will give you a view of what it's like to live the Christian life.

[8 : 13] And you might be surprised. You might say to yourself, I want this. This is the very thing I need. All right, well, let's turn back now to the first six verses of chapter 14.

And let me give these six verses a title. How Jesus quietens the troubled heart. Now, when the Lord says in verse 1, Let not your hearts be troubled, He's not about to dispense a kind of general Prozac to the human race.

He's not saying, There, there, little ones, everything's going to be all right in the end. Not at all. These words in their setting are very specific. Now, they do have a wonderful application to all Christians in the end.

But we need to see why Jesus said these things to his friends at this point in the story. The problem was that Peter and the other apostles, had plenty of reasons for feeling very troubled at heart.

Just look back to verse 21 in chapter 13. After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit and testified, Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.

[9 : 28] Isn't that striking? That the one who is about to say in chapter 14, Let not your hearts be troubled, is himself troubled in spirit. Why? Because Judas, one of the men that he'd chosen and loved and taught, was about to go out to the Jewish leaders and hand Jesus over for the price of 30 pieces of silver.

And worse than that, Jesus faced the unspeakable cross on the very next day. Just look back a page to chapter 12, verse 27.

12, 27. Jesus is speaking. Now is my soul troubled. You see the word there again? Now is my soul troubled. What shall I say?

Father, save me from this hour. But for this purpose, I've come to this hour. He's troubled, isn't he? You'd be troubled too, wouldn't you? If you faced those four-inch iron Roman nails on the next day and knew that you were about to bear the righteous divine punishment for the sins of the world.

Now it was inevitable that Jesus' sense of agony and foreboding should communicate itself to his friends. They knew that they were not dining that evening with a relaxed and carefree teacher.

[10 : 50] His agony of soul must have been written all over his face. And then look at the final three verses of chapter 13. Jesus foretelling Peter's denial.

Peter, you are going to deny me three times before cock crow. Judas will betray me. Peter will deny me. Isn't it extraordinary that his very next words should be let not your hearts be troubled.

There's no break in the original text between the end of chapter 13 and the beginning of chapter 14. And yet, the trouble that Jesus is having to endure himself is the direct reason why he's able to say to his friends that they need not be troubled.

His trouble is the price of their being free from trouble. It's because of his betrayal and death that his friends can have their sense of anxiety lifted.

Now, if you're a Christian, you'll understand that. But if you're not yet a Christian, it's something to ponder. It's the cross of Jesus which finally spells the end of our troubles.

[11 : 59] All right, well, let's look beyond the first sentence, the first half of verse 1. And let's see how Jesus explains why the hearts of his followers can be free from trouble.

I'll try and set this out now under four headings. First, he teaches us, he teaches the disciples, but also us, he teaches us to trust him.

Now, just look at the second half of verse 1. Believe in God, believe also in me. Now, friends, that is breathtaking because he's setting himself there on a par with God the Father.

He is saying the way to respond to God, the way to relate to God the Father, is the way to respond to me and to relate to me. Now, this aligning of himself with God the Father is part of the heartbeat of John's Gospel.

So, for example, in John's Gospel, Jesus will say, if you see me, you see God the Father. To know me is to know the Father. If you accept me, you're accepting the Father.

[13 : 09] If you reject me, you're rejecting the Father. He even says in chapter 10, I and the Father are one. The teaching of John's Gospel is that the Father and Son are distinct as persons, but they are one in very nature.

And here in chapter 14, verse 1, he is commanding our heartfelt trust, trust in him and trust in God the Father. It's a command. But it's not just a general and vague trust in him and in the Father which he's commanding.

It's very specific. He's commanding our trust concerning the matter of our eternal future. So look on to verse 2. In my Father's house are many rooms.

If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? So if our first point is that he teaches us to trust him, our second point is that he teaches us to trust that heaven is real.

That heaven is real. Let me try to explain how extraordinary it is for Jesus to begin to speak of his Father's eternal house at this point in the story.

[14 : 27] And we don't know exactly how old Simon Peter was at this stage. We don't know exactly how old the other apostles were. But almost certainly they were all young men.

Late 20s, early 30s. You might say more or less contemporaries of Jesus himself. Now young men of 25 or 30 or 35 don't often think very much about dying or eternity.

They've got very practical concerns, haven't they? They're thinking about their work. If they're married they've got a young wife and family to support. When they get to the age of 50 or 60 they'll start realising that the late afternoon shadows are beginning to fall across the cricket pitch.

But not when they're young men like this. And not only were they young men but they were fairly clueless about what was going to happen to Jesus. In fact Thomas says to him in verse 5 Lord, you talk about going somewhere but we don't know where you're going.

How can we know the way? Now we know where he was going because we have the advantage of hindsight. We have the whole Bible. We know about the cross and the resurrection and the ascension.

[15 : 34] But these things were mystery really to the eleven apostles. When Jesus had sought to teach them about his coming death and resurrection very often they simply couldn't understand. So these young men would not have been surprised if Jesus had instructed them about how to love their wives or how to teach their children the law of Moses, how to work hard at their trades, how to be financially self-sufficient, even how to eat plenty of fresh vegetables for the sake of their health.

It wouldn't have surprised them for Jesus to give them instruction about how to live a useful and godly life. Any young man of about 29 who's recently got married thinks about those things.

But for Jesus to direct the thoughts of these young men to his father's eternal house is very striking. Isn't he saying then that the way to have an untroubled heart is to believe deeply and firmly that the father's house is real?

Heaven is real. He's saying to them don't let your hearts be troubled about Judas' betrayal or even Peter's coming denial. Believe in God and believe in me especially when I tell you that my father's house is real.

Now friends, we need to hear this afresh because the culture that we live in, the culture which very much seeps into our own understanding, doesn't believe it, does it? Do our friends and contemporaries out there believe that there is a reality of heaven?

[17 : 08] Let me give an example. I guess we've all seen the kind of film where you have a young couple, young man and woman who've got a young child and let's say the mother of this young couple is killed in an accident and in the film the grieving father is left with this very difficult business of trying to help the little child to come to terms with its mother's death and you see the father and the little child perhaps sitting close together and the child says to the father, Daddy, where's mummy?

and the father says, she's gone, she's gone, she didn't want to leave us but she's gone and the child says, Daddy, is she in heaven?

and the father says, well, she could be. We've all seen that kind of heart-wrenching scene.

The father, of course, is an agnostic, isn't he? He doesn't know what to say. The assumption underlying that kind of scene is that nobody knows, nobody can know about these things.

Oh, it would be very nice if there was a heaven but it's impossible to know. That's the culture we live in. But here in verse 2, Jesus says, believe me, I'm telling you, you can trust me.

[18 : 26] Now, Jesus is the one who has authority to speak about these things because, if I can put it like this, he knows his father's house like the back of his hand.

He knows it better than you know the house that you were born and raised in. Think of the house where you grew up in. I think of the house where I grew up in. I know every nook and cranny of it, even though I left it many years ago.

I could take you today to the exact spot where I killed a little frog when I was five years old. I could take you to the exact spot when I was about seven, when I first saw a fox.

I could show you the very rhododendron bush, it's still there, under which I sat when I smoked my first clandestinely nicked cigarette at the age of ten.

I know the place intimately. Now in just the same way to move from the ridiculous to the sublime, Jesus knows his father's house as nobody else ever could.

[19 : 30] It's his home from eternity. It's his place. It's his habitat. He knows it's every corner, it's delights and it's joys. And he says to his friends here in verse two, in my father's house are many rooms.

In other words, there's plenty of space for all of my people. I know this thing. I know it. I've been there. This idea of there being many rooms in the father's house has sometimes been spectacularly misunderstood.

I've heard of people saying, what Jesus means by many rooms is that there are places for all sorts of people there. So there's an area there for Christians, there's another place for Muslims, another place for Hindus, and another place for decent-minded, ethically well-intentioned atheists who didn't know any better.

Could you think of a more spectacular abuse of this verse? Jesus is just about to say in verse six that only those who come to the father via him are able to come to the father.

The point of the many rooms in verse two is not that people of all faiths or no faith have a place in God's eternal house, but that there's more than enough room for all who do trust Jesus.

[20 : 46] Jesus is saying to Peter and the others, look my friends, your future is with me in heaven. There's room enough and to spare for all who trust me.

There's room for you, Peter, even though in a moment of cowardice you're going to deny that you know me. There's room for all of you, he's saying. At the moment you're confused and distressed because you can't understand what's about to happen to me or to yourselves, but I want you to be quite sure about your long-term future.

And we of course are not the eleven apostles. These words are not addressed directly to us, but all this has been recorded for our sake because the promise of heaven is given to all who believe and trust in Jesus.

To you. Do you believe and trust his words? Are you willing to do as he says? To believe in God and to believe also in him and in his assurance that there is room in heaven for everyone who takes refuge under his wings.

This is one of the reasons why Christian people can have an untroubled heart. Just look at somebody else in this building for a moment.

[22 : 05] Just fix your beady eyes upon another human. It could be me. If you're too shy to look at the person next to you because you don't really know them. Look at me if you like, but just look at somebody.

Now the person that you're looking at, whoever that is, is a frail mortal. He or she may be somebody who's very young and beautiful and fit and healthy, but that person is still a mortal man or woman.

That person that you're looking at will one day become deceased, demised, departed, the late. I will one day be the late Edward Lobb.

You will one day be the late Jack MacKillop. Unless your name is Tommy Tucker. Now Jesus says to you, don't let your heart be troubled by fear of the future, by fear of death.

Believe me, I'm telling you there's room in my father's house for many. And I can speak of this with complete authority because my father's house is my eternal home. So there's the second thing.

[23 : 12] Jesus teaches us to trust that heaven is real. Now third, Jesus teaches us that he has gone ahead to prepare a place for his disciples.

To prepare a place for his disciples. Look at verse 2. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? Now what does he mean by this preparing a place for them?

Well let's forget curtains and carpets and spring cleaning and that kind of preparation. The point is not that Jesus is preparing every room, making sure that the windows are clean and that there's an electric blanket on every bed.

He's not talking about heaven as if it's a kind of sumptuous country hotel. And he's rather like the chambermaid who's getting the rooms ready. Not at all. The point is in verse 2, I go, I'm going, so as to prepare a place for you.

It's my going, it's my departure from this life, my going to death and resurrection and ascension. That is the means of providing a place for you in my father's house. In other words, if there is no death and resurrection of Jesus, there is no place in his father's house for the likes of you and me.

[24 : 29] Now remember the situation of Jesus' eleven friends here. If somebody had asked them, do you want Jesus to go from you now? They would immediately have said, of course not.

We hate the idea. In fact, if you glance across over the page to chapter 16, verses 5 and 6, you'll see a little exchange of conversation just like that.

16, 5 and 6, where Jesus says to them, because I have said these things to you, these things about my going, sorrow has filled your heart. Their understanding is still very dim.

But the truth of the matter is that his going to the cross and beyond is the only thing that can open up heaven for them. If he doesn't go and do what has to be done, his father's house will be forever barred to them.

But verse 3 in chapter 14 unfolds a further element in all this. Let me read verse 3 and you'll see what this further element is. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

[25 : 47] Thomas, he's saying, Peter, all of you, I'm not going forever, I shall be back. And when I come back, I shall come back to fetch you.

So if Jesus' friends are beginning to tremble at the prospect of his going from them, he's wonderfully reassuring them. He's saying, don't think that I'm going forever. Don't think that you're never going to see me again.

I'll be back. Not to stay with you here, but to take you to be with me there. Now friends, we are right at the heart of what it means to be a human being here.

The great goal of being a real human being is to be forever with Jesus in his father's house. Now is that your goal?

Do you think of your life and its great goal in those terms? Now of course it's right and proper for us to have lesser goals within this life. Especially if you're a younger person, you'll want to make a significant contribution to society during your adult years.

[26 : 55] That's quite right. You'll want to be a teacher or a doctor or an engineer. You'll perhaps want to marry and raise a family. And you'll want to serve the Lord and the Lord's people and be a gospel person.

And you might also want to be a scratch golfer or grow prized raspberries in your back garden. These things are good as long as they don't become too important. But the great goal, the great final goal of being a real human being is not to be found within this world at all.

In verse 3 of our chapter, Jesus is showing us the sweet and glorious purpose of being a human being. It is to be with him in his father's house.

That's where he wants us. That's why he went from his friends to die and be raised so that they and we too should in the end be with him.

Just to give a very simple parallel, at our Cornhill training course we've had one or two students over the years who've had to leave their wives in some country far away so as to come over to Glasgow.

[28 : 03] In fact we have one this year, a lovely Christian man from Delhi. And he's had to leave his wife back at home in Delhi. And he flew over to join us in September last year and he wasn't able to return to India until December.

So he wasn't able to see his beloved wife for about three months. Now during those three months he's been a model student. He's got on with his work industriously doing his study and so on to prepare sermons and preach them and he's been joining in with all the activities of the course wholeheartedly.

But it's clear to those of us who know him that a big part of his heart was in Delhi. And when the last day of term arrived in December, a month or so ago, he was grinning from ear to ear because he was about to fly back to his beloved.

Now that's what it's like to be a Christian. We've got plenty to do here in term time, if I could put it like this. I mean here on earth.

We've got a job to do. We've got a contribution to make to the world, to society and to the Lord's people and to the service of the gospel. Perhaps a family to rear, all that sort of thing.

[29 : 15] But the great vacation lies up ahead. The peace and rest and joy of the Father's house. And therefore a large part of our hearts begins to settle there even while we're here.

If your heart's delight is in Delhi and you're living in Glasgow, of course you'll be thinking a great deal about your return to Delhi.

And the heart's delight of every Christian is in the Father's eternal house. Not primarily because of its splendid rooms or its pillars or its architecture or its streets paved with gold, but because of our beloved.

Look at the second half of verse three. I will come again and will take you to the banqueting hall, the library, the porticos and the colonnades.

No. To myself. That where I am, you may be also. It's to be with him. I wonder if you feel a bit shy at the idea of being with him.

[30 : 33] Shy at the thought that he would look you in the eye as he tells you in a thousand ways how deeply and devotedly he has loved you and how unutterably glad he is to have you with him forever.

That is the final goal of human existence. It is to be with him. For him to look us in the eye and for us to look him in the eye. There are his words in verse three spoken with all authority.

I will come again and take you to myself that where I am in my father's house, you may be also. Isn't that a good reason for our hearts not to be troubled?

In this life, on the human level, of course there's trouble. At this very moment, I know that some of you here have pain of body, others have sorrow of the mind, for all sorts of reasons.

But Jesus' assurance that every Christian will be eternally with him gives us real cause for peace and for joy. Well now fourth and briefly, Jesus quietens the troubled heart because he is the only way to heaven.

[31 : 49] Jesus, you see, moves the discussion forward provocatively in verse four when he says, you know the way to where I'm going. And Thomas, who's a little bit like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh, says in verse five, Lord, we do not know where you are going.

How can we know the way? In other words, we don't know the destination, so how can we possibly know the route? An odd thing for him to say because Jesus has just described the destination, a verse or two before, as his father's house.

So Jesus doesn't need to describe the destination again, but he does here speak plainly about the route. Now verse six is a famous verse. I'm the way, the truth, and the life.

We have three great nouns there. But the emphasis there, amongst those three nouns, is on the first, the way. Thomas' question, you see in verse five, is about the way.

And the second half of verse six is about the way to the father. So here Jesus is emphasizing the way. Yes, he is the truth in the biggest sense of the word.

[32 : 58] And yes, he is the life, because all life originates with him, and he gives eternal life to his people. But what he's telling Thomas here is that he is the way, and he is the only way to God the Father.

And that sixth verse, backed by the cumulative weight of the whole of the New Testament's teaching about Jesus, drives a coach and horses through any argument that suggests the equal validity of all religions.

So Jesus shows us why every Christian heart need not be troubled. We shall have troubles in this world, plenty of them.

Troubles arising from knee ache, belly ache, back ache, heart ache, depression, shortage of money, cars that don't work, computers that break down, and so on.

The list is endless, isn't it? Plenty of trouble. But if we believe his words, the words that he speaks with all authority, the great future is not only secure, it's wonderful, because it will be shared with him.

[34 : 19] Let's bow our heads and we'll pray together. Let not your hearts be troubled.

Believe in God. Believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. Our gracious Lord Jesus, we thank you for your intimate knowledge of your Father's house and your sure promise that all who come to the Father through you will indeed enjoy this eternal and wonderful place and that above all we shall be with you.

Lord Jesus, fill our hearts afresh with love for you and gratitude towards you because you are our reason for living and you are our only reason for becoming real human beings.

And we ask you therefore to give us fresh strength and joy in our hearts as we go our way and about our business this week. We pray that you'll write deep in our hearts the sense of assurance that all is well because you are our Saviour.

We ask it for your dear name's sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.