

The Great Comfort of the Cross

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[0 : 00] I wonder if you would open your sheets at the reading that we read together. And look especially at chapter 14, verse 1, there in the middle of the second column.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe also in me, said Jesus. And again, verse 27. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid.

I want to focus on these words of Jesus this Good Friday because they are words from the lips of our Saviour himself that remind us above all of the great comfort of his cross.

They're very familiar words, aren't they? Even if you're very rarely in a church service, I'm sure you've heard these words read somewhere or another at a funeral. I wouldn't be surprised if right at this very moment, somewhere in a crematorium, somewhere or by a gravesite, that somebody is reading out these very words.

But I rather suspect that perhaps nine times out of ten, when these words are heard, the people listening have no idea as to when they were first spoken.

[1 : 09] And therefore they have no idea just how wonderful these words really are. Because they're far more than words expressing sympathy and comfort to the bereaved.

They're words that promise sure and certain hope to all who will trust Jesus, despite a consciousness of their own frailty, their own failure, their own folly in life.

The great comfort of the cross. So I want to spend some moments today looking at what John's Gospel is really saying to us in recording these words to us here.

These words weren't spoken, of course, to the disciples to comfort them in a bereavement that they'd experienced, but they were spoken in the context of a death. A death that was about to come.

So verse 1, at the very beginning of our passage, Jesus knew his hour had come. And that is, of course, the hour of his death. John chapter 12 really is the climax of Jesus' public ministry.

[2 : 16] And in verse 37 of that chapter, just before our reading, he says this, Though he had done many signs before them, still they would not believe in him.

Instead, the leaders of the people determined to plan his death. And yet Jesus knew that that would bring about his hour, the very purpose of his coming into this world.

To destroy the evil one and his curse, and to accomplish the salvation of his people. Now, he said, will be judgment on this world.

Now is the ruler of this world cast out. And yet the horror of what that would mean for Jesus himself was just as real in his consciousness as the glory of it would be for his people and for his own father.

Now is my soul troubled, he said in John 12. Jesus knew that although that hour would unveil the beauty of God's love for man, it would also expose the terrible betrayal of man's hatred for God.

[3 : 28] And that is what he himself would bear in all its terrible fullness. And so in the upper room, having shared the intimacy of the supper with his closest disciples, Jesus went on to explain, as we see here in verse 18, Yes, just as the scriptures predicted, Even he who has eaten my bread has lifted up his heel against me.

Again, verse 21, do you see? Jesus is deeply troubled in his own spirit. The one who proclaims marvelously, Let not your hearts be troubled, does so from a heart that is itself deeply weighed down with the trouble and sorrow even to the point of death.

Facing betrayal. Facing denial from the very heart of his group of followers. And that's the first thing that we have to notice here in the context of these words, these great words of comfort.

They are words spoken amidst a prediction of great failure. A prediction of great failure. All through the passage we read about Jesus speaking about his going, going out of this world, and to be with

his Father.

You see in verse 37, Peter's indignant. Why can't I follow you now, says Peter. But you see, this is the reason. Jesus himself proclaims the truth about the grim failure of even his closest followers.

[5 : 06] Jesus is the expositor of the truth, not just of the worst that's in the human heart, but about the hearts of even the very best of men.

People like Peter, the lovable, the enthusiastic leader of Jesus' band of disciples. But first we have this devastating blow of Judas' betrayal in verse 21.

Jesus was deeply troubled in spirit and he testified, one of you will betray me. That word troubled really means that he was deeply torn apart inside.

It was a wrench to the very core of his being. Well, that's what personal betrayal does, isn't it? And the closer the relationship, the deeper the agony of that betrayal.

You just ask, ask the spouse who's been betrayed by their partner. Pain, betrayal is agonizing. And yet look at what Jesus did in the face of this betrayal.

[6 : 15] Chapter 13, verse 26. Jesus made a supreme gesture of love to Judas. He was the host. And he honored Judas as a special guest by offering the bread, the special sop from his own hand.

As if to say to Judas, despite the hatred that I know is in your own heart, I offer you my love, my acceptance, my honor. And yet in the face of that expression of willing love, Judas equally, willingly, and deliberately turns away and hardens his heart.

And Satan entered into him. And he departed, says verse 30, literally and spiritually into utter darkness. Immediately he went out and it was night.

The desperate wickedness of the human heart exposed in Judas and his failure. And yet just as painful for Jesus must have been the desperate weakness of the human heart that was exposed in Peter's desperate failure.

Peter protests his loyalty. Surely, surely I can come with you. I'm not a betrayer like that, Jesus. You can imagine how perturbed Peter and John must have been, can't you, to hear this talk of betrayal from Jesus' lips.

[7 : 49] To know that Jesus has been talking strangely about his going, about his death, about leaving them. No, no, you can rely on me, Jesus, says Peter.

I'll defend you to the very last. Will you, says Jesus? No, Peter. You won't. Verse 38.

Long before the last, Peter, you also are going to fail me. Before tomorrow morning, before even the cock crows, you'll betray me. You'll deny me also. Not just once, but three times.

So he did. You read on. Not shrinking away from the swords of soldiers, but from a wee slip of a servant girl and her words. But that's reality, isn't it, for followers of Jesus?

We go home from church on a Sunday evening and we're full of inspiration to stand fearlessly for the Lord Jesus Christ, just like the martyrs of old, even if it means going to the death. My coffee time at work on Monday morning and somebody asks us, oh, what did you do over the weekend?

[9 : 04] You say, oh, nothing really. No mention of church. Not a word about Jesus. So here's Jesus on the brink of his passion in the full knowledge of all that it entails and yet he's surrounded not only by the wickedness and the ferocity of his enemies, but by the weakness and the failure of his friends.

They misunderstood him and his mission and they'll desert him and they'll deny him and he knows that they will.

As one writer puts it, they stand on the brink of catastrophic failure. And yet it is in that context that Jesus looks them in the eye and says, let not your hearts be troubled.

Truly, truly, I say to you, the cock will not crow till you have denied me three times. Let not your heart be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. Isn't that an extraordinary juxtaposition? He doesn't rebuke them for their failure. He gives them an assurance of peace. How can he do that?

[10 : 27] Well, he can do so because assurance and peace for human hearts in the face of weakness and wickedness and failure of whatever kind comes not from what we can do and accomplish but from what Jesus himself was then about to do and accomplish.

Jesus doesn't say to his disciples, don't worry, you'll bear up, you'll rise to the challenge, don't worry, I've got great confidence in you, have confidence in yourself. That wasn't true.

He knows that's not true. So do we, don't we? That's just false assurance, isn't it? If somebody says, how will I know I'll endure to the end as a follower of Jesus?

If we say, well, of course you will. Just think about how much of the Bible that you know. Just think about how faithful you've been. Just think about all the good Christian friends you've got to help you.

Just think, just think what good Bible teaching you get at your church. Jesus' disciples had all of that with knobs on, far more than any of us. And there was no assurance in that.

[11 : 38] None at all. But Jesus does say, believe in God, trust in God, trust also in me.

Trust in Jesus is the only answer there is to human frailty and sin. And Jesus, he says, I'm telling you in advance. He says that at the beginning and at the end here, he says, I've told you beforehand so that when you do fail me desperately, as you will surely do, you won't despair. And you will look to me and you'll trust in me still. And you'll find your strength and your comfort and your hope not in yourselves but in me. Not false comfort but real comfort.

Not pretending away your sin and failure as if it wasn't real and didn't matter but a real answer to real sin and failure, to real wickedness, to real weakness.

And an answer that overcomes it despite the bitter shame of it that is real. Trust in me, says Jesus. Because despite his prediction of their great failure, he lays out before them in verses 2 and 3 of chapter 14, the promise of a great future.

[13 : 04] Jesus is not just the expositor of all truth, he is a revealer of all life. Jesus himself promises the life of a glorious future for all his followers even though he knows that they are and that they always will be just failures in the flesh.

Disciples who deny Jesus so often when the chips are down by quietly not associating with him or his teaching in the university common room or in the coffee room at work or in the playground at school when he is being mocked and when his church is being disparaged.

Or when they are putting their comfort and their safety before his honour. Or when we are putting our career advancement or our bank balances above his great commission or a thousand other ways when every single day we also deny him in thoughts and in words and in deeds done and undone.

See, it is to feeble disciples like that that Jesus holds forth this certain hope of life. Real life.

Fulsome life. Complete life.

Eternal life. All through John's gospel Jesus is speaking about life. In him was life says the prologue and that life was the light of man.

[14 : 33] Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life says John chapter 3. And that life is real resurrection life beyond the grave. John chapter 5.

Everyone who looks at the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life. I will raise him up at the last day says Jesus. I came he says that they might have life and have it abundantly in its fullness. You see right here in these verses before us Jesus describes that life as life at home in the Father's house. In my Father's house he says there are many rooms many dwelling places many and plentiful accommodation for all God's true children who come at last home and who remain at home where they truly belong where they're loved where they can flourish and where they can be all that they're meant to be forever and forever.

Jesus is speaking here of the true life that we're all made for that we long for however unconsciously that may be just because it is what we're made for and because we'll never be complete we will never be at peace as human beings until we find that life.

You see the Bible is very very clear this earth this earth as we know it is not our home as human beings and that's why the human spirit is so restless that's why we're searchers by nature that's why we always want more that's why we're looking for more we don't always look in the right place of course we don't some people think that they'll find the answers down a microscope or through a telescope in outer space or whatever well there are many interesting things we can find there but not the peace that our human hearts crave because God has set eternity in our hearts says the Bible it's what C.S. Lewis calls the inconsolable longing the unappeasable want deep in every human heart and you know that want and so do I the sense that in this universe we're strangers the longing to bridge some chasm to another realm is part of our inconsolable secret says Lewis and he concludes quite logically if I find myself in myself a longing which this world cannot meet then it very probably means

[17 : 14] I was made for something more than this world yes says Jesus yes you were made for the Father's house you were made for that house that home of fellowship and of joy and of expansiveness and of satisfaction that's the answer to the quest of every human spirit that's the

truth about humanity now we we as human beings we hide from that most of the time of course we do and yet there are times aren't there in our lives when something happens to force us to face up to those real longings those yearnings those things deep within maybe it's a time of crisis in our life perhaps a death a bereavement perhaps an illness some other failure in our life and we feel these things keenly friends we feel these things because they are real they're there but Jesus says to his disciples in the midst of the very greatest impending crisis of their life this is what

I'm all about he says verse 3 do you see of chapter 14 my whole mission is to go and prepare a place in my father's house for all of you my friends for all my followers for all those who love me and who follow me even though you will constantly fail me even if at times they're so fickle and so feeble is to deny him so so badly as Peter was about to do you can't come now says Jesus but you will come afterwards and there is ample room never fear there are many rooms and I will come again to bring you to myself so that where I am with the father there you also may be what a wonderful wonderful promise but how can that be how can how can those who have failed

Jesus so badly become honored members become heirs even of the father's house well you can trust me says Jesus because grim failures can have a glorious future because says Jesus of my great faithfulness the promise of a great future he says can come only through the preparation of great faithfulness I go says Jesus to prepare a place for you he's not just the expositor of truth he's not just the revealer of life but Jesus Christ through his cross is the opener of the way the only way for failed and flawed men and women like you and me to come at last to the father's house Jesus himself prepares the way through his great faithfulness as he goes to the father through his death on the cross for our sins for the sins of all who will come through him to the father afterwards be very clear what

Jesus is saying here he's not saying that somehow after his death he'll go and prepare something in the father's house for us no he's saying his death is the preparation it's his death and it's his death alone as an atonement for sin for all human wickedness and weakness for all failure and betrayal it's his death that opens the way back to life to life as it's meant to be but never has been since the very very first rebellion of man he's told his disciples plainly many times before says verse 4 you know the way to where I'm going he was constantly talking about his going he was constantly saying to him that that was plainly his death in John 12 he talks about it like a seed having to fall into the ground and die so that it can bring forth fruit the fruit he says of my mission the defeat of the ruler of this world the reverse of the curse of this world and the fulfillment of God's commandment says Jesus which is eternal life for his own but they still don't get it verse 5 do they

Thomas we don't know how can we know the way and again in the context of Jesus talking about his impending death on the cross he rams it home again in verse 6 I am the way and the truth and the life it's through Jesus' death alone he says that we discover the truth about the way to life real life eternal life in the father's house that's why the second half of that verse makes clear without sharing in that death without trusting in Jesus as the way to life says Jesus no one comes to the father no one not even Jesus' beloved disciples could find their way without Jesus going to the cross you can't come with me now he says only after I have opened the way through taking away your sins on the cross and no one anywhere in this whole world however good or bad however religious or pious however moral however lovable no one comes to the father except through me except through my death on the cross says

[23 : 11] Jesus because as verse seven says to know Jesus is to know the father to have seen Jesus as the disciples had was to have seen and to know the father because Jesus Christ is himself almighty God do you see friends the wonderful comfort of the cross of Jesus if you have come to know Jesus through trusting him through trusting in his death to prepare a place for you in the father's house then you will come to know the father also face to face when Jesus comes again to bring you to that place forever even if your life has been full to the brim of wickedness in the past even if your life is still full of weakness in the present like Peter feeble even if you find yourself falling into a quagmire of sin in the future and you feel that your heart is troubled distressed and overcome with sorrow with self loathing with despair with disgust at yourself because of your weakness and sin comfort of the cross is that it was to feeble failing disciples on the brink of absolute catastrophe that

Jesus spoke these words and said let not your hearts be troubled believe in me let not your hearts be afraid trust in what I'm going to accomplish for you to open the door to eternal life if that can be accomplished as Jesus here in verse 3 if I go to prepare a place for you then you can have that

wonderful security and peace of acceptance indeed glorious welcome into the father's home the abundant eternal life in his kingdom and friends the wonderful truth about Easter is that that was accomplished that was the wonderful message of the risen Lord Jesus that he gave to Mary to take to his disciples after he rose from the dead go to my brothers he said and say to them I am ascending to my father and your father to my

God and your God do you see your hope is secure it has been accomplished I have prepared a place for you your future is secure and friends what that means for us today is that the great comfort in these words of Jesus to his disciples then are an even greater comfort to us here today to everyone who looks to Jesus Christ and loves him and trusts him however feeble however failing your faith has been however shameful your denials of Jesus Christ have been and will still be he says to you let not your heart be troubled neither be afraid believe in God believe also in me I have been already to prepare a place for you and

I shall come again and take you to myself that's the great and the greater comfort of the cross of Jesus Christ for us today and friends if when you take an honest look into your heart if you're faced with anything like what I see when I take a look into my heart there is no greater comfort in this whole world than in these words of Jesus let not your hearts be troubled believe in God believe also in me amen let's pray how we praise you Lord for the comfort the great comfort in your cross for failed and feeble sinners that today your gate is open and all who enter in shall find a father's welcome a pardon for their sin the past shall be forgotten that a present joy be given and a future grace be promised a glorious crown in heaven at home in the father's house hallelujah amen