

THE CURE FOR TROUBLED HEARTS

by Ray C. Stedman

It is probably more than coincidental that Dr. Philip Caves, a heart surgeon, led us in prayer this morning, because this message is going to deal with heart trouble of a somewhat different nature, one which is more common even than heart disease, which has become one of the foremost killers in the world today. As we move into the Upper Room again, we find the Lord facing the troubled hearts of his disciples. This passage opens with his words to them:

"Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me." {John 14:1 RSV}

As our Lord looked at these men, he knew what was going on in their minds and hearts, knew how disturbed and upset they were, and knew what was causing it. He knew the remedy for it, as well. Perhaps there are many among us here who are suffering from the same affliction as these disciples -- troubled hearts, fearful hearts, upset, disturbed, agitated hearts because of what was going on. Our Lord knew that these men were afraid -- afraid of what was coming. They were afraid of death, afraid that they, with him, were going to be executed by the Jews. They knew of the opposition which had developed against them in Jerusalem, the bitter hatred of the Pharisees, their determination to eliminate Jesus and all his disciples. They knew they were in danger, and so their hearts were deeply troubled as they gathered here with him.

But more than that physical danger to themselves, they were aware of his words about leaving them. This had struck terror into their hearts. They were afraid that even though they might survive, might escape death, they would have to go on living without him, and that was unbearable to them. They could bear to die with him; they could not bear to live or die without him. So as he gathers with them he says these words to them, "Let not your hearts be troubled."

Some weeks ago, when I was experiencing a period of this kind of "heart trouble" myself -- distress of heart -- I thought of these words, and they came home to me with tremendously new significance. I saw something in that simple phrase, "Let not your hearts be troubled," which I had never seen before. What impressed me were the words, "Let not." They mean that these disciples could do something about their problem. They held in their own hands the key to their release from heart trouble. It was possible for them either to let it happen, or not to let it happen. Our Lord is saying this to all of us. There is a way out of heart difficulty -- this distress and fear concerning both death and life -- and our Lord goes on to give the answer to them.

The remedy for heart trouble is contained in the two phrases which follow: "believe in God, believe also in me." "Let not your hearts be troubled." How? Why, "Believe in God" -- God who is still in control, who knows what he is doing, who is capable of exercising infinite wisdom, infinite power, and infinite love -- and, "believe also in me," Jesus said, who is the means by which all that wisdom and resource and power of God is made available to you. That is the secret. We are going to see, as we go on in this account, how our Lord strove to impress anew upon these disciples' hearts the fact that something was hidden in the remarkable relationship between him and his Father: "Believe in God, believe also in me." For between the Father and the Son there is a relationship which is so important, so foundational, so fundamental, that everything else will grow out of it. The rest of the chapter is built around this great secret.

Based upon this relationship our Lord promises to end their fears by coming to them again. Their basic fear was that he was going to leave them, and that they would have to face death, and life, without him. His reassuring word is, "I am not going to leave you, I am coming to you again." You find this developed in the rest of the chapter. Let me outline the structure of it for you. You will understand this chapter much better if you realize two facts.

- First, the Lord is going to come again in person to end their fear of death, so that death need hold no terror for them (as it need hold none for us). This assurance he gives them in the promise contained in Verse 3, at which we will look in just a moment.
- Second, he is going to come again by the Spirit to end their fear of life. He promises to be with them in all the difficulties and problems of their life -- in a living relationship based upon his relationship with the Father. That is stated flatly in Verse 18, "I will not leave you desolate [i.e., orphans]; I will come to you."

Both of these comings are made possible by that strange relationship which our Lord had with his Father, and which led him to say to these disciples, "Believe in God, believe also in me."

Now, the answer to fear is faith. The next time you are afraid, reach out for a promise of God, and lay hold of it by the power of Jesus, and your fear will vanish. There is no other answer to fear but that. Anything else will permit the fear to come back again and again. But the promise of God remains steady and sure, and the availability of the resources of Jesus to lay hold of it is the way of deliverance.

So let's look at Jesus' promise to come to end the fear of death, found in Verses 2-3:

"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? And when 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." {John 14:2-3 RSV}

Our Lord is looking on into the future with his disciples. Here he unveils the nature of the future beyond death, beyond this life. What happens beyond that? I don't think there is one of us who hasn't, at one time or another, sensed the fear which lies in the unknown, beyond death. We have all felt that strange solemnity of spirit which comes when you confront the fact of death, the fact that we are all someday going to die, and that our loved ones will die. Life here must end, and what lies beyond? This is what our Lord is facing here with his disciples.

He reassures them with four revelations about that life:

First, he states that what happens is going to be within the Father's house. Of course, he is talking to them as believers. They belong to him, and on that basis he assures them, "In my Father's house are many rooms." What do you think he means by "my Father's house"? This is the only time that phrase is employed in the New Testament. Therefore it is very difficult to say exactly what this means by trying to compare it with other passages -- until you go to the Old Testament. There you see that some of the prophets clearly indicate that God dwells in the universe. The whole universe is the Father's house. God, speaking through the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, says,

**"Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool;
what is the house which you would build for me," {Isa 66:1b RSV}**

**"and what is the place of my rest?
All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things are mine," {Isa 66:1d-2a RSV}**

Our Lord on many occasions had been out with his disciples under the brilliant sky at night. And as they looked up into the heavens and saw the stars and galaxies whirling in space, he must have reminded them many times that this was the Father's house. Oftentimes I am asked, "Does the Bible say anything about whether there is life on other planets?" And the answer is, "No, it doesn't specifically say that." But hidden in this reference there is a suggestion, I believe, that this is the case. What Jesus says here is, "In my Father's house are many abiding places." It should not be translated "mansions," as it is in the King James Version. That is an interpretation which is not very accurate. It is not even "rooms," as we have it here in the Revised Standard Version. It is, literally, "places to live." "In my Father's house are many places to live." Earth is one; we live here. This is our address. But God has other addresses elsewhere. What is happening in these other places out in the vast universe around us? It is hard to say. But Jesus assures us that there is an abundance of

places to live, plenty of them. Therefore there is room in the Father's house.

Second, he assures us that this is a certain revelation. I like the rendering of the King James Version here. It is more in line with what the Greek is saying: "if it were not so, I would have told you," {John 14:2b KJV}. That verse has been a comfort to me many times. Oftentimes people say to me, "You know, Jesus said many things which were simply an accommodation to the way people thought in his day. He didn't try to correct everything, but instead he reflected their errors." I think this verse stands as a clear refutation of that argument. Jesus said, "If it were not so, I would have told you." That is, "I have come to correct the thinking of men, to set right their delusions, to reveal the ways in which they have been wrong, to straighten out the twisted, distorted ideas among men" -- "If it were not so, I would have told you."

Third, he says, "I go to prepare a place for you." Now, I don't know, fully, what that means. I don't think anyone does. But it indicates that there is a need for preparation of some sort. I am impressed with what the Apostle Paul tells us -- that the creation, including not only this planet and this solar system but the entire universe in all its vast complexity, is in the grip of a remorseless law, which science calls "the second law of thermodynamics," the law of entropy, the law of decay, or as Paul calls it in Romans 8, the law of "futility." Creation is in the grip of futility -- it is running down, its energy is being transposed into a form in which it is no longer available. It is like a great clock, once wound up, which is gradually running down. And Paul suggests in Romans 8 that this process will be reversed one of these days, that the Lord Jesus, as Lord of the universe, will reverse this law of thermodynamics and change it, so that the universe will no longer be running down but will become a new heaven and a new earth, built on entirely different principles. Perhaps that is what Jesus has in mind when he says to the disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you." At any rate, it was necessary for him to do this. He came to prepare them for heaven; he left to prepare heaven for them.

This takes us on, fourth, into the specific promise of his coming again. "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Notice the elements of that promise:

First of all, it is a certain coming. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again..." Did he go? Yes, history is unanimous. The record shows that he went away. The tomb is empty. There is no grave of Jesus Christ anywhere on earth. He has gone away. And if he goes away, he says, just as certainly he will come again. Do you remember how the angels underscored that fact in the account of the ascension in the opening chapter of Acts? The disciples were gazing up into heaven as Jesus was ascending, and when he disappeared from sight, hidden by a cloud, suddenly two men were standing there. They said to them, "Why do you stand gazing up into the sky? This same Jesus will so come in like manner as you have seen him go," {cf, Acts 2:11}. This is an amplification of Jesus' promise here: "If I go away, I will come again." Everywhere in Scripture this coming again of Jesus Christ is referred to as the hope of the world.

And our Lord further reveals that it will be a personal return. He himself will come again. He isn't going to send an angel, nor anyone else; he personally will return. And it will involve a departure of the saints, of his own, to be with him. "I will receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also." In the coming in the Spirit, which Jesus mentions in Verse 18, he comes to the believer, and the believer receives him to himself. But in this verse it is the other way around. He comes to the believers and takes them to be with him. Thus there is a clear distinction between these two comings of Christ. This is the coming which Paul must have been thinking of when he wrote to the Christians at Thessalonica:

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. {1 Th 4:16-17 RSV}

Paul's words echo the words of Jesus here: "I will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." What an answer that is, not only to the problems of history, but also to the personal fear of a believer facing death! Because other passages make clear that this event, which is yet to break into history -- the return of Jesus for his own -- is the very event which every believer experiences when he dies. When we step out of time and into eternity we step into the coming of Jesus for his own. This, then, is the hope, and the

experience, of everyone who dies as a member of the body of Jesus Christ. What an answer this is to the fear of death!

There was an editorial column on the church page of the *Palo Alto Times* last night which took Christians to task for the inconsistent way they treat death. So many Christians seem to echo the fear and pessimism and despair of the world when they think of death as a somber, gloomy occasion. This editorial brought out the fact that it ought to be a time of triumph, and of joy, because a believer has gone home to be with the Lord.

I remember listening years ago to a radio broadcast of the Bible Study Hour, when Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia, was the speaker. I'll never forget his telling of the occasion when his first wife had died. He, with his children, had been to the funeral service for her. As he was driving his motherless children home, they were naturally overcome with grief at the parting. Dr. Barnhouse said that he was trying to think of some word of comfort that he could give them. Just then a huge moving van passed them. As it passed, the shadow of the truck swept over the car. And as the truck pulled on in front of them, an inspiration came to Dr. Barnhouse. He said, "Children, would you rather be run over by a truck, or by its shadow?" The children said, "Well, of course, Dad, we'd much rather be run over by the shadow! That can't hurt us at all." Dr. Barnhouse said, "Did you know that two thousand years ago the truck of death ran over the Lord Jesus ... in order that only its shadow might run over us?" And he went on to explain how David had said in the 23rd Psalm,

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; for thou art with me. {Psa 23:4a KJV}**

This is the promise which every believer has from the lips of Jesus himself: "I will come again and will receive you unto myself, that where I am, there you may be also."

Then he goes on in the remaining verses to show us the way, the way to the Father, the way in which all this will be accomplished. And it all relates to that remarkable word with which he began: "Believe in God, believe also in me." He says to them, in Verses 4-7,

**"And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him."
{John 14:4-7 RSV}**

Here is the way to the Father at death, or the way to the Father in the midst of life, for the secret of both is found in this passage. I believe that Jesus deliberately made this statement to these disciples in order to bring to their knowledge something which they hadn't realized. He said to them, "You know the way where I am going." And Thomas, dear old "honest Thomas" -- we should never call him "doubting Thomas"; he was simply "honest Thomas," too honest to say that he knew something which he didn't realize that he knew -- Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" But Jesus had said that they did know. And the truth is, they did! They knew him. But they didn't know that they knew.

Do you remember those distinctions we used to make between the four classes in school?

- Freshmen, we were told, are those who know not, and know not that they know not.
- Sophomores are those, having advanced a little, who know not, but know that they know not.
- Juniors, on the other hand, are those who know, and know not that they know. And
- Seniors are supposed to be those who know, and know that they know.

On that basis, Thomas and the other disciples here are classified as juniors in the school of faith. They know, but they don't know that they know. And Jesus is making clear to them that they know the way. Thomas shook his head, "No, Lord, we don't know the way. We don't even know where you're going." And Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. That's what I meant, Thomas. You know me; therefore you know the way. For I am the way."

Here is this unique and most remarkable claim of Jesus. How it reveals the grandeur of his character and being! There is the inclusiveness of this statement -- it all relates to the Father. "I am the way to the Father," he says. If you come to know Jesus, he will bring you to God. As Peter puts it, "He will bring you to the knowledge of the Father." And I want to testify that when I began my Christian life, as a boy, many years ago now, my awareness of the One with whom I was dealing was that of the Lord Jesus. He filled my horizon. I remember how I loved the hymns which sang of the cross and of the work of Christ, and I loved to think about him as the Savior, the One who redeems. But as I have lived as a Christian, gradually the Father has come into focus. More and more my thoughts are drawn to the Fatherhood of God, and I revel in the glory of that relationship, in the closeness of my sonship with the Father.

This is what Jesus says. He is the way to the Father. He brings you to the Father. You know the Father through him, for he is also the truth about the Father -- as Paul puts it, "The truth as it is in Jesus," {cf, Eph 4:21}. All the knowledge of God which we human beings hunger for is revealed in the words of Jesus about the Father. He unveils the Father's heart, what kind of a Father he is -- his power and his wisdom and his love. He is the life of the Father. That is a most amazing claim! The Father has given all life into his hands, that he may give it to whomsoever he will. This is Jesus' claim recorded in the fifth chapter of John. Only those who come to the Father by the Son can receive life. Matthew 11 tells us, "no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him," {cf, Matt 11:27}. This meets fully the need of man. He is the way, in order that the will of man may choose it; he is the truth, in order that the mind may comprehend it; he is the life, in order that the heart of man can experience it. Thus to know Christ involves the whole man and leads to the full expression and experience of the fullness of God.

But note also the exclusiveness of his claim: "No one comes to the Father, but by me." Every now and then I run into somebody who will say, "You Christians are so bigoted, so narrow. Why do you insist that Jesus is the only way by which you can come to God? Other religions have their ways; other religions are striving to know the same God, and other religions are more tolerant; but you Christians are so narrow!" And I have to say, "That is true; we are narrow. At that point Jesus himself was narrow, and we dare not go beyond what he said, because truth itself is narrow."

And there are certain illustrations that I use which help to indicate how narrow truth can be. Have you ever thought how narrow the telephone company is? If you want to call somebody up, the phone company insists that you use a certain series of numbers in exactly the proper sequence, and it leaves absolutely no room for you to play around. It is utterly narrow-minded at that point!

Truth is that way. Jesus is the fulfillment of his own word: "There is a narrow way which leads unto life, and few there be who find it," {cf, Matt 7:13-14}.

Others may teach about God. They may say that they teach the truth and seek the life. But only Jesus says, "I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life."

Jesus' words in Verse 7, "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also," do not mean that these disciples didn't know him. He is simply saying, "To know me is to know my Father; henceforth you know him and have seen him." That statement caused Philip to break out in an unpremeditated cry,

**"Lord, show us the Father, and we shall be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves."
{John 14:8-11 RSV}**

In this paragraph our Lord is dealing with the secret of his own being. In some ways this is the most profound revelation that we have in the entire New Testament of the nature of the Lord in his relationship with the Father. And it is absolutely fundamental. This is what he meant when he said to his disciples at the beginning of this chapter, "Believe in God, believe also in me." That is, "Understand there is a unique relationship which

is the secret of my life, and which will be the secret of your life, too. You must understand that I have not come here simply to demonstrate how God works, how God looks, how God acts; I have come to demonstrate how a man acts who is in right relationship with God, who is filled with God. The Father dwells in me, and he does the works. I do them, but I do them by a secret relationship in which, though I perform them -- my mind thinks, my hands work, and my body acts -- it nevertheless is really the Father who is doing all this through me. I live in him; he lives in me."

"And if you want proof of this," he says to Philip, "look at two things: my words, and my works. My words prove that I am in the Father. I could never say what I say if I were not in the Father, for what I say is truth, it is reality, it is the way things are. And my works prove that the Father is in me. A man could never do what I do, but God can. And you must understand this, Philip. Otherwise you will have no understanding of the secret of your own life." For, in Verse 20, he is going to go on to say (though we won't look at this today), "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." That is, "The relationship which I have with the Father is the pattern which I will have with you. Just as I live by means of the Father at work in me, so you will live by means of me at work in you. I will come to you, I will live in you, I will work through you. And you can face every problem of life on that basis. I will be adequate to handle anything that comes your way, on that basis. Whatever life throws at you of fear, of upset, of discouragement, of disappointment -- whatever its nature may be -- you can handle it in the same way that I have handled life: You in me, and I in you, as the Father is in me, and I am in him."

This, then, is the key relationship in all this passage. We are going to stop here. There is much more that our Lord went on to say which relates to the handling of the difficulties of life, but it all grows out of his wonderful explanation to them, in answer to the cry of Philip, that they might know the secret of his being: "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me; just as I will be in you, and you will be in me."

Prayer

Our Father, we thank you for this tremendous reassurance to us as we face the unknown. As we face death, as we face life, we have these marvelous words of Jesus to rest upon. "Let not your hearts be troubled. I will come again. I will come again at death; I will come again in life." And in all ways, Lord, his presence will be with us. We thank you for that. Help us to live on this basis today, in this present 20th century hour, and to demonstrate the quality of life that he lived. We ask in his name, Amen.

Title: The Cure for Troubled Hearts
Series: Secrets of the Spirit
Scripture: John 14:1-11
Message No: 3
Catalog No: 3123
Date: May 6, 1973

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