

The King's Speech

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Published by Central Peninsula Church
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Using This Guide

This is an inductive Bible study guide. It is meant to help you study the Bible for yourself and draw your own conclusions as to what the text of scripture means and how it applies to your life. It does this by asking questions that direct your attention to certain aspects of the text. This guide will not “spoon feed” you and will require a good amount of effort on your part to be of benefit.

Each study is approximately 20 questions long and should take 2–3 hours to complete. It is important to answer the questions in the order they appear and to not skip around. Each study has an introduction and an “Opening Up” question to help you think along the lines of the main theme of the passage. The questions in the main body of each study are divided up according to the paragraph divisions given at the outset of each study. Each study concludes with “Summary and Application” questions to help you review and apply what you have learned.

The questions in each study are based on the New American Standard Bible. It is highly recommended that you use this version as you use this guide. Additional study tools that you might find helpful are a Bible dictionary, a concordance and a commentary. It is best to use a commentary only for difficult-to-understand verses, or after you have completed each study on your own to check your conclusions. For your study on the Upper Room Discourse, I recommend the *Tyndale New Testament Commentary on John* by R.V.G. Tasker.

1 | Washing Between the Toes

John 13:1–17

Introduction

A story is told of a young student of a struggling seminary in a Third World country. The school was almost broke. It had teachers who were deeply committed, but the facilities were very inadequate. One morning, after experiencing the seldom-cleaned and grotesque bathrooms, the student burst into the principal's office and complained angrily. The principal, a well-known, godly scholar and preacher, listened calmly to him and promised that a change would be made. After just one day, the change was very apparent. The student was an instant hero with his peers since it was clearly his complaint that evoked the change. He even became vocal about other areas needing attention. Then one morning, after getting up unusually early to catch a train, he entered the bathroom and found the principal on his hands and knees scrubbing the floor. As he looks back today, he feels that no other experience so profoundly shaped his view of ministry as that one.

It is often said that actions speak louder than words. In John 13 we read that Jesus began His last evening with His much loved disciples with an action they would never forget. It was an action that would reveal His deep love and humility. It was an action that would forever mark their view of what true ministry was all about.

Read and re-read John 13:1–17

Outline

- I. The Setting 13:1–3
- II. The Act 13:4–11
- III. The Lesson 13:12–17

Opening Up

Describe the one job around the house or at work that you hate to do the most.

I. John 13:1–3 | The Setting

John doesn't spend much time giving the historical detail behind the Upper Room Discourse. His concern is more with the inner feelings of Jesus than with outward circumstances. Read Mark 14:12–21 and jot down any significant details as to who was there and when and where it took place.

John tells us that this all took place “before the Feast of the Passover.” What event did this feast commemorate and what relation did it have to the ministry of Jesus? See Exodus 12:1–14 and 1 Corinthians 5:7.

How does John describe the love of Jesus? Who was it for and what was its extent? How does this love relate to Judas? (Note that the NIV translates this verse, “Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”)

We are told that Jesus knew certain things about Himself prior to washing the disciples' feet. What did He know? How did this affect what He was about to do?

II. John 13:4–11 | The Act

John tells us that during supper Jesus proceeded to take the attire of a slave and wash the disciples' feet. It was a first century Jewish custom for people, when they entered a home, to have their feet washed by a slave provided by the host. For some unknown reason, the disciples hadn't washed upon entering the upper room. Jesus takes the opportunity to do it for the disciples Himself. As we will see, this acts as something of a parable of His entire ministry.

vv. 5–6

Imagine yourself in the place of Judas Iscariot as Jesus came around to wash your feet. Describe your feelings.

vv. 7–11

These verses record a dialogue that took place between Jesus and Peter as it came to be Peter's turn for footwashing. Why did Peter object so emotionally to Jesus washing his feet? What does this reveal about Peter?

Which is more difficult for you—washing someone else's feet or allowing someone else to wash your feet? Explain.

One of the remarkable things about the Gospel is that it always brings us to the lowest point. We must stand before God in utter humiliation and abjectness in order for Him to minister to us. All human pride must be brought low before we can receive what God wants to give us from His hand. But that is where we struggle. We don't like that. We don't like to be brought to a place where we have nothing to offer. We always want to add something of our own. Peter is a clear picture of this.

—Ray Stedman

In Jesus' response to Peter, we can see that there was a deeper purpose and meaning to what He was doing than simply providing an example for them, or simply getting their feet clean. In your own words, explain what you think Jesus meant by the following statements to Peter:

"What I do you do not realize now, but you shall understand hereafter."

"If I do not wash you, you have no part with me."

"He who has bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean; and you are clean, but not all of you."

Having looked carefully at the exchange between Jesus and Peter, what did the foot washing symbolize? In what sense was this act a parable of His work upon the cross?

Jesus is giving some teaching that they will presently understand in connection with His death. That death will be like the bath: it will cleanse them wholly. But life is a difficult affair, and from time to time they will pick up defilement from the evil world in which they live. Then they will need to come back to their Lord for cleansing.

—Leon Morris

III. John 13:12–17 | The Lesson

Whereas vv. 4–11 describes the deeper purpose of the foot washing in the disciples' relation to Jesus, this next section describes the purpose of the foot washing in the disciples' relation to one another.

vv. 13–16

What was the purpose of the foot washing in the disciples' relationship with one another?

In Luke's account of the events in the upper room, he says that "there arose a dispute among them as to which one of them was regarded to be the greatest" (Luke 22:24). How do Jesus' actions serve as a rebuke of their desire to be great?

It needs more skill than I can tell to play the second fiddle well.

—C.H. Spurgeon

We may easily be too big for God to use, but never too small.

—D.L. Moody

The branch that bears the most fruit is bent the lowest to the ground.

—Anonymous

What is it about the fact that Jesus Himself does the foot washing that makes the whole thing additionally compelling?

v. 17

Why is it that Jesus makes a distinction between knowing and doing? How is this distinction especially relevant with regard to servanthood?

Define “blessed.” Why is a person blessed only if he does the truth?

Summary and Application

In vv. 3–4 we saw that Jesus’ strong sense of His identity in relation to His Father allowed Him to be the servant of men. What is your identity in relation to the Father? How does this help you become a servant?

Have you recognized your own need to be washed by Jesus or are you resisting His advances like Peter did? How do you maintain the discipline in your own life of coming to Jesus for regular foot washings?

Give at least three specific examples of how you can wash the feet of those around you (family, friends, fellow-workers). As you think of these examples, remember that Jesus washed the feet of those who would later betray, deny, or at least, desert Him.

Since it is clear that the dirt on one's feet is used in this passage as a picture of sin, it can be said that one of the ways we can wash one another's feet is by gently restoring a brother or sister who has fallen into sin. Are you willing to both give and receive this kind of ministry? How does Paul tell us to do this in Galatians 6:1?

Dr. H.A. Ironside has pointed out how wise it is, when washing another's feet, to exercise concern as to the temperature of the water! Some go with boiling hot water. They are angry and so upset by what has happened that they come and say, "Here, stick your feet in here!" Nobody wants to have his feet washed with boiling water. Some go to the other extreme and come with ice water. They are so righteously holier-than-thou, so remote from the whole dirty proposition, so above it all! No one wants to respond to that either.

And some, unfortunately, try to do it without any water at all! They come and dry-clean your feet; they scrape them free of dirt. Have you ever had anyone do that to you? They come and give you a piece of their mind and just tear into you. What they say may be true, but there is no water of love to wash the dirt gently away, there is only a rigid insistence upon scraping it away and the skin along with it. But our Lord insists that we wash one another's feet in love. That is the way that He loved His disciples, and He loved them to the end.

—Ray Stedman

Introduction

Judas. Not a name you'll find on many birth announcements. A name which conjures up images of betrayal, cowardice and greed. You might say it's the equivalent of the modern day Adolf. The point is to stay as far away as possible! Yet life is such that we run across Judas every day. He cuts a path through our hearts by way of a disloyal friend. He wanders through our veins as we ourselves do the very things we hate in others. There is a little bit of Judas in all of us!

In this section, Jesus finally confronts His Judas. He has lived with him as a close friend for three years. He has washed his feet along with all the other disciples in a loving act of service. It is now time to set in motion the course of events that would lead to His own arrest and crucifixion. It would all begin with setting Judas free from the company of the twelve to do his dirty deed.

In all this we learn how to deal with our Judas, whether we are on the giving or the receiving end of the disloyalty his name represents. How do you handle cowardice, greed and betrayal when you see it in yourself or others? Take a lesson from the one who made famous the name Judas.

Read and re-read John 13:18–30

Outline:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------|
| I. Prediction of Betrayal | 13:8–20 |
| II. Identification of the Betrayer | 13:2–30 |

Opening Up

Describe an experience when you were betrayed by a friend. How did you feel? How did you respond?

I. John 13:18–20 | Prediction of Betrayal

Trace Jesus' awareness of His betrayal throughout this entire chapter. See 13:2, 10–11.

v. 18

Jesus begins by contrasting the betrayer with His true disciples. What is the chief difference between him (betrayer) and them (disciples)?

vv. 18–19

In what ways does the text indicate that God was in complete control of the situation, working out His perfect plan?

v. 19

Jesus quotes from part of Ps. 41:9 to show that the betrayer was acting in fulfillment of scripture. Go back and read Ps. 41:9 carefully. What additional insight about Jesus and Judas can you gain from reading the whole verse?

The passage Jesus quotes is from Psalm 41:9. The eating of bread together points to fellowship and friendship. Easterners took very seriously the implications of sharing meals together. This meant peace and harmony and made hostile actions against those with whom one had eaten especially horrible. To lift up the heel against someone may be taken from the action of a horse as it prepares to kick. Or it may have something to do with shaking the dust off one's feet in leaving a hostile town (Luke 9:5; 10:11). Whatever the precise significance, it surely points to a hostile act and a hostile act, moreover, coming from someone who ought to be behaving with friendship.

—Leon Morris

vv. 19–20

For whom did Jesus make the prediction about the betrayer? What purpose would it serve in their lives?

II. John 13:21–30 | Identification of the Betrayer

Up until this point, Jesus has been somewhat vague about the betrayer. He now begins the process of identifying exactly who he is.

v. 21

Why was Jesus “troubled in spirit”? In your own words, describe what He must have felt like. What insight does this give you into Jesus’ character?

Jesus now “testifies” in a rather formal way, saying, “one of you will betray me.” What is Jesus’ purpose in making this pronouncement? Would you say He is trying to “root out” the betrayer or reach out to the betrayer?

vv. 22–25

These verses record the disciples’ response to Jesus’ pronouncement about the existence of the betrayer among them. Remember, we know who did it, but they didn’t. To forget this is to miss the drama and the tension of the moment. In general, how did the disciples respond? What do you think they were feeling?

Verse 23 speaks of the disciple “whom Jesus loved.” Which disciple was that? See John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20.

From what you know about Peter, why do you think he was so concerned with “who done it”?

Does it appear to you that the disciples had any idea who the betrayer was? Why do you think that was?

In order to appreciate fully what was going on in the story, it is important to know something of the way people ate meals in first century Palestine, and some of the customs associated with this. Ray Stedman’s words below help set the scene.

One sign of it was in the table arrangements which John records. Most people are familiar with Leonardo da Vinci’s painting The Last Supper, and they think that is the way it actually occurred—all of them sitting on one side of a long table. It is almost certain that this is not the way it was, because the custom of the Jews was not to sit at a table, but to eat while half-reclining on couches around the table, in the way the Romans did. The table was very likely U-shaped. At the center of the closed end sat Jesus as the host, half reclining on his left side on his couch, so that his right hand would be free to eat with. On the adjoining couch to the right was the Apostle John. He always refers to himself as that disciple whom Jesus loved. As he tells us here, he was sitting close to the breast of Jesus. His head would have been right at Jesus’ chest level because of the arrangement of the couches. And on the other side, the left side of Jesus, which incidentally, was the place of honor, was Judas. Jesus’ head would have been at Judas’ breast, as John’s head was at the breast of Jesus. This arrangement made it possible for these three to carry on an intimate conversation, unheard by the others. Only that table arrangement explains what happened here at the Last Supper.

—Ray Stedman

v. 26

Why would Jesus honor Judas in the ways indicated above? How do you think Judas felt about all this?

v. 27

After Judas received the bread, we are told that Satan “entered into him.” Using a concordance or your cross references, look up all the references to Judas in the four Gospels. What do you think Judas’s motive was in betraying Jesus? How does Judas’s example show the interaction between our own human responsibility and Satan causing us to do something (“The devil made me do it”)?

Notice the text says, “Jesus therefore said to him, ‘What you do, do quickly.’” (Note that the NIV omits this.) What is the significance of the “therefore”? Why does Jesus tell him to move quickly?

vv. 28–30

Why didn’t the disciples understand what had happened? How did they explain Judas’s departure?

“And it was night.” John adds this terse notation of time to his narrative of Holy Week events, but it is more than that. The nighttime he tells of will represent for all ages a deeper, more harrowing nighttime of the soul. But it will also be a night out of which hope is born.

—Earl Palmer

Summary and Application

Earlier you shared your experience of being betrayed by a friend. You have now seen how Jesus responded to His betrayer. What can you learn from His example?

None of us likes to think of ourselves actually betraying Jesus. But if it were possible in your life to betray Him, what would most likely be the cause?

How is it possible that a person can be an active and faithful participant in the church (as Judas was with the disciples) and yet still be fundamentally disloyal to Jesus? What are we to do about the possible existence of such people among us? See Matthew 13:24–30.

The remainder of Judas's tragic story is told in Matthew 27:1–10. After reading that and the quote below, how does his example serve as a warning to us? Have you ever climbed the "hill of regret"? How did you handle it?

While Jesus was climbing up the hill of Calvary, Judas was climbing another hill: the hill of regret. He walked it alone. Its trail was rock-strewn with shame and hurt. Its landscape was as barren as his soul. Thorns of remorse tore at his ankles and calves. The lips that had kissed a king were cracked with grief. And on his shoulders he bore a burden that bowed his back—his own failure.

Why Judas betrayed his master is really not important. Whether motivated by anger or greed, the end result was the same—regret.

A few years ago I visited the Supreme Court. As I sat in the visitor's chambers, I observed the splendor of the scene. The chief justice was flanked by his colleagues. Robed in honor, they were the apex of justice. They represented the efforts of countless minds through thousands of decades. Here was man's best effort to deal with his own failures.

quote continued...

How pointless it would be, I thought to myself, if I approached the bench and requested forgiveness for my mistakes. Forgiveness for talking back to my fifth grade teacher. Forgiveness for being disloyal to my friends. Forgiveness for pledging “I won’t” on Sunday and saying “I will” on Monday. Forgiveness for the countless hours I have spent wandering in society’s gutters.

It would be pointless because the judge could do nothing. Maybe a few days in jail to appease my guilt, but forgiveness? It wasn’t his to give. Maybe that’s why so many of us spend so many hours on the hill of regret. We haven’t found a way to forgive ourselves.

So up the hill we trudge. Weary, wounded hearts wrestling with unresolved mistakes. Sighs of anxiety. Tears of frustration. Words of rationalization. Moans of doubt. For some the pain is on the surface. For others the hurt is submerged, buried in a rarely touched substrata of bad memories. Parents, lovers, professionals. Some trying to forget, others trying to remember, all trying to cope. We walk silently in single file with leg irons of guilt. Paul was the man who posed the question that is on all of our lips, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

At the trail’s end there are two trees.

One weathered and leafless. It is dead but still sturdy. Its bark gone, leaving smooth wood bleached white by the years. Twigs and buds no longer sprout, only bare branches fork from the trunk. On the strongest of these branches is tied a hangman’s noose. It was here that Judas dealt with his failure.

If only Judas had looked at the adjacent tree. It is also dead; its wood is also smooth. But there is no noose tied to its crossbeam. No more death on this tree. Once was enough. One death for all.

Those of us who have also betrayed Jesus know better than to be too hard on Judas for choosing the tree he did. To think that Jesus would really unburden our shoulders and unshackle our legs after all we’ve done to him is not easy to believe. In fact, it takes just as much faith to believe that Jesus can look past my betrayals as it does to believe that he rose from the dead. Both are just as miraculous.

What a pair, these two trees. Only a few feet from the tree of despair stands the tree of hope. Life so paradoxically close to death. Goodness within arm’s reach of darkness. A hangman’s noose and a life preserver swinging in the same shadow.

But here they stand.

One can’t help but be a bit stunned by the inconceivability of it all. Why does Jesus stand on life’s most barren hill and await me with outstretched, nail-pierced hands? A “crazy, holy grace” it has been called. A type of grace that doesn’t hold up to logic. But then I guess grace doesn’t have to be logical. If it did, it wouldn’t be grace.

—Max Lucado

3 | Hard Questions

John 13:31–14:14

Introduction

Imagine yourself enjoying an intimate dinner with a trusted friend you love very much. Your friendship has been long and meaningful. Suddenly, your friend rises from dinner and makes an announcement. “I am leaving,” he says, “where I am going you cannot come. You will have to go on without me.” You are immediately thrown into a sea of confusion. Nothing but questions race through your mind. Hard questions. Questions born out of a troubled heart that thought this was the one friend you could trust. “Where are you going? Why can’t I go with you? Just tell me how to get there and I’ll find a way to follow. I demand an answer! Our friendship at least deserves that!”

If you can imagine yourself in that scene, you can imagine the feelings of the disciples as Jesus began His long discourse in the upper room. Jesus announces His imminent departure. What follows is more aptly called a “heated discussion” than a “discourse.” This discussion is swarming with hard, tense questions—questions that, because of the intimate nature of the relationship, demand an answer.

Many Christians are not comfortable with questions. Their faith is all figured out. It’s neat and clean. Questions are messy. But questions are also evidence that a relationship exists. And hard questions are more often born out of intimacy than apostasy. It’s interesting that in each question the disciples asked they addressed Jesus as “Lord.” Somehow they saw His Lordship and their questions as compatible. And as they did, their faith feasted on the rich food His answers provided. Answers like, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through me.”

Read and re-read John 13:31–14:14

Outline

- | | |
|------------------------|----------|
| I. Peter’s Questions | 13:31–38 |
| II. Thomas’s Questions | 14:1–6 |
| III. Philip’s Question | 14:7–14 |

Opening Up

If you could ask God one question, what would it be?

I. John 13:31–38 | Peter's Questions

vv. 31–32

This verse begins, “When therefore he had gone out ...” referring to Judas. What is the connection between Judas leaving and Jesus being glorified? What does this teach us about glorification?

vv. 33–35

Why is the “new commandment” to love one another so vital at this point when Jesus is leaving?

The command to love others is by no means new (see Lev. 19:18). Why then does Jesus call this a “new commandment”? (Look carefully at Jesus’ words in v. 34!)

Describe the kind of love that Jesus is talking about. See 1 John 3:16–18.

What effect will obedience to this “new commandment” have? Would you say that love is the distinguishing mark of Christians in the world today? Why or why not?

Schaeffer says that this is frightening, and he is right. For it is as if “Jesus turns to the world and says, ‘I’ve something to say to you. On the basis of my authority, I give you a right: You may judge whether or not an individual is a Christian on the basis of the love he shows to all Christians.’ In other words, if people come up to us and cast in our teeth the judgment that we are not Christians because we have not shown love toward other Christians, we must understand that they are only exercising a prerogative that Jesus gave them.

“And we must not get angry. If people say, ‘you don’t love other Christians,’ we must go home, get down on our knees, and ask God whether or not they are right. And if they are, then they have a right to have said what they said.”

—James Montgomery Boice

vv. 36–38

How would you describe Peter’s attitude in these verses? What was right about it? What was wrong about it? How can you distinguish between genuine and false commitment?

Imagine yourself in Peter’s place upon hearing Jesus’ prediction. How do you think he felt? (Remember that the identity of the betrayer was still unknown to the disciples. Also note that Peter would now remain silent until the events described in John 18:1–11.)

They cannot follow Jesus—that is the point, and the prophesy concerning Peter’s denial should be seen in that larger context. The theological importance of Jesus’ words should not be missed. Only Jesus Christ is to be the world’s Redeemer. The disciples are not! It is that basic. Jesus does not expect those men or any men or women to redeem the world. When we become confused at this vital point, we fall into the kind of theological error that causes harm to ourselves and to those around us. Both emotionally and theologically, the greatest fact about the gospel is that we are not the gospel. It is not our bravery or our greatness that is the redeeming victory over death, sin and the devil. It is Jesus Christ and He alone who is the Redeemer, and our discipleship tasks flow out of His act not ours. It is well for the first-century disciples and for us today that Peter fails and fails so hard! It is well that all of our heroes have clay feet so that we do not ask too much of them.

—Earl Palmer

II. John 14:1–6 | Thomas's Questions

Chapter 14 marks an unfortunate chapter division. Jesus is still responding to Peter's question and, in doing so, anticipating what all of the disciples were feeling. As He does this, Thomas pipes up with more questions of his own.

vv. 1–3

How does Jesus anticipate what Peter and the disciples were feeling? What is the cure for a troubled heart?

Look carefully at vv. 2–3. What new pieces of information does Jesus give them that would comfort them? (You should come up with at least three or four things.)

vv. 4–6

In v. 4 Jesus switches attention from His destination to the path we must follow to get there. This prompts Thomas's questions recorded in v. 5. How does Jesus answer his questions? Was this what Thomas had in mind?

In your own words explain what Jesus meant when He said:

"I am the way ..."

"I am the truth ..."

“I am the life ...”

How would you respond to the claim that Christianity is narrow and exclusive in that it presents only one way to get to heaven?

III. John 14:7–14 | Philip’s Question

vv. 7–8

What prompts Philip’s question? What do you think he means by “show us the Father”? Do you think this truly would have been “enough” as he says it would? How would you respond to someone who said, “If I could only see God, I would then believe”?

vv. 9–11

In your own words, explain how Jesus responds to Philip’s request. Do you think this is what Philip was looking for?

What two things about Jesus should cause us to believe that to see Him was to see the Father?

vv. 12–14

In the previous verses, Jesus established His unique relationship to the Father. He now goes on to explain how that unique relationship would affect the disciples. How would it affect them (and us)?

What prerequisites does Jesus establish for us doing “greater works than these” and having an effective prayer life?

We may profitably ask ourselves, “What work on earth is greater than the salvation of souls?” When a person is healed of a physical complaint, that person’s life on earth is enriched for a few more years. But when a soul is saved, something has happened that lasts through eternity. Jesus is saying that on the basis of His finished work of salvation, the church would go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit to bring many, many more people into salvation than Jesus did during the years of his ministry on earth. It is a tremendous privilege that is given to us to live for Christ and to proclaim his message in such a way that people are brought into salvation.

—Leon Morris

Summary and Application

Peter had a lot to learn before he was ready to be really used of God. His chief lessons would be learned through personal failure. In what ways have you failed in your commitment to God? How has this prepared you for service?

Imagine yourself at a funeral service having to comfort a large group of bereaved Christians. Using John 14:1–7 as your text, what would you say to them?

Jesus' words "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me" can be applied to us in any situation where we naturally would become anxious. In what areas can you presently apply this? How do you go about doing this?

How does your prayer life match up with vv. 13–14? What can you do to change this if need be?

Review the questions asked by the disciples. Summarize Jesus' answers to their questions in a few sentences. How were they better off for asking their questions?

On her deathbed, Gertrude Stein is said to have asked, "What is the answer?" Then, after a long silence, "What is the question?" Don't start looking in the Bible for the answers it gives. Start by listening for the questions it asks.

—Frederick Beuchner

4 | Another Helper

John 14:15–31

Introduction

How often have you heard people say, “If I could only see and hear and touch Jesus right now, my whole life would be different”? These people are voicing an understandable disappointment over our Lord’s absence. It was this growing recognition of His coming absence that really concerned the disciples in the upper room. He was, in their minds, simply irreplaceable.

What are we to say to those people who just want to see Jesus? We are to say what Jesus said to His disciples, “You are better off if I go. If I go, I will send another Helper. He will be Me to you now. And with Him you will even have an advantage.”

Who is this other Helper? Where does He come from? How can He help me? And what could He possibly do that is better than having Jesus right here beside me?

Read and re-read John 14:15–31

Outline

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------|
| I. Who the Helper Helped | 14:15–24 |
| II. How the Helper Helps | 14:25–31 |

Opening Up

What comes to your mind when you think of the Holy Spirit?

I. John 14:15–24 | Who the Helper Helped

v. 15

What theme is emphasized here and in the rest of the passage? See also vv. 21, 23–24, 31.

List five things that might be considered “commandments” of Christ. What is the proper motive for obedience to these commandments? What are some improper motives?

vv. 16–17

In these verses Jesus introduces the “Helper” whom He identifies as the Spirit. The Greek word for “helper” is paraclete which means “one called alongside to help and strengthen.” What other terms does Jesus use for the Spirit in this passage? How do each of these terms help you understand who He is and what He does? See vv. 16–17, 25.

Christian people are not in doubt as to the work that Christ did; they know that He redeemed men by His atoning death, even if they differ among themselves as to what exactly this involved. But the average Christian is in a complete fog as to what work the Holy Spirit does. Some talk of the Spirit of Christ in the way that one would talk of the Spirit of Christmas—as a vague cultural pressure making for bonhomie and religiosity. Some think of the Spirit as inspiring the moral convictions of unbelievers like Gandhi, or the theosophical mysticism of a Rudolf Steiner. But most, perhaps, do not think of the Holy Spirit at all, and have no positive ideas of any sort about what he does. They are for practical purposes in the same position as the disciples whom Paul met at Ephesus— ‘We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost’ (Acts 9:2).

—J.I. Packer

Why is He called “**another** Helper”? How long will the new Helper be with them compared to the other one? How is the Spirit’s help different and even more effective than the help Jesus could give if He were to stay?

In v. 17 Jesus speaks of “the world.” He uses this term frequently in this passage and the Upper Room Discourse. What does Jesus mean by “the world”? What is the world’s relationship to the Spirit? To the Son? To the disciples? See John 14:19, 22, 27, 30; 16:18–19.

vv. 18–20

Read these verses carefully. Knowing the disciples’ anxiety over Jesus’ departure, how would these words have comforted them?

Some interpret Jesus’ words, “I will come to you...you will behold Me” as referring to His resurrection, while others interpret them to refer to the Spirit’s coming. Which do you think is correct? Why?

v. 21

Notice that this verse summarizes what He has already said in vv. 15–20, with some additional information about His self-disclosure. To whom does Jesus disclose Himself? How does He do this? Is this a one time thing or an ongoing process?

v. 22

Who is Judas? See Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13. Why is he so disappointed about the world not being aware of the disclosure of Jesus?

vv. 23–24

In your own words, how does Jesus answer Judas's question? In what ways is Jesus' response once again a repetition of the themes He has already covered in vv. 15–21?

Notice in v. 23 that Jesus says "We will come to him, and make our abode with him." Who does He mean by "we"? How does this relate to v. 17, "He will be in you" and v. 20, "I in you"?

II. John 14:25–31 | How the Helper Helps

vv. 25–29

List all the things that the Holy Spirit provides for the disciples. How does each one of these things relate to you today?

Define “peace.” How is the peace Jesus gives different than that which the world gives?

One of the titles by which Jesus is known is Prince of Peace, and he used the word himself in what seem at first glance to be two radically contradictory utterances. On one occasion he said to the disciples, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34). And later on, the last time they ate together, he said to them, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you” (John 14:27). The contradiction is resolved when you realize that for Jesus peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle but the presence of love.

—Frederick Buechner

On what basis should the disciples not be troubled or fearful, but rather rejoice? If Jesus is God, how can He say, “the Father is greater than I”?

What has Jesus told them “before it comes to pass”? Why had He done this? What other two predictions had He made in the upper room?

vv. 30, 31

Who is the “ruler of this world”? What does Jesus mean when He says that this ruler “is coming”?

What commandment had the Father given to Jesus? How is Jesus an example of the very thing He was trying to teach the disciples throughout this passage?

Was Jesus' death on the cross a result of the work of Satan, or the command of God, or both?

Summary and Application

Taking this passage as a whole, what evidence of the Holy Spirit can we look for in our lives? To what degree do you experience these things? What explanation would this passage give for not fully experiencing these things? What aspect of the Helper's work do you particularly need at this time in your life?

Do you think of yourself as the actual "abode" of God? What activities or practices are you now involved in that you would stop if you gave this more consideration?

This passage has said a lot about love for God as our primary motive for obedience. The problem is that we don't always feel like we love God, nor should we expect to. But how can we go about keeping our love for God fresh and alive?

Torrey tells of a little girl who came to the great English preacher Mark Guy Pearse one day and, looking up into his face quite wistfully, said, "Mr. Pearse, I don't love Jesus. Won't you please tell me how to love Jesus?"

The preacher looked down into those eager eyes and said to her, "Little girl, as you go home today keep saying to yourself, 'Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me.' And when you come back next Sunday I think you will be able to say, 'I love Jesus.'"

The next Sunday the little girl came up to him again, this time with happy eyes and a radiant face, and exclaimed, "Oh, Mr. Pearse. I do love Jesus, I do love Jesus. Last Sunday as I went home I kept saying to myself, 'Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me. Jesus loves me.' And I began to think about His love and I began to think how He died on the cross in my place, and I found my cold heart growing warm, and the first I knew it was full of love to Jesus.

—James Montgomery Boice

Have you ever felt like Judas and wondered why God doesn't just show Himself to the world so that everyone would believe? When is it that you feel like this the most? What is faulty about this thinking?

To what extent are you experiencing God's peace in your life right now? What keeps you from this? What can you do about it?

5 | The Secret to Bearing Fruit

John 15:1–17

Introduction

Chapter 14 ends with Jesus saying to His disciples. “Arise, let us go from here.” Because of this, many scholars believe that the rest of the Upper Room Discourse was not delivered in the upper room but, instead, as they were walking to the Garden of Gethsemane. On the way, they undoubtedly would pass through the many vineyards that surrounded the city of Jerusalem. It was these familiar vineyards that Jesus would use as an object lesson in teaching the disciples a most fundamental lesson in how they would carry on and even flourish while He was gone.

This lesson has to do with growing and producing fruit as a Christian. It is common for Christians to intensely feel the desire to grow and struggle toward that end. It is also common for well-meaning Christians to set forth a variety of formulas that ensure such growth. But few of these formulas bear the simplicity and profundity of Christ’s analogy of the vine and the branches. Those vines contain a secret. It is with this secret that the struggle to grow ends and the fruit born of rest comes into view.

Read and re-read John 15:1–17

Outline

- I. Abiding in Christ 15:1–11
- II. Obeying in Love 15:12–17

Opening Up

What are some of the “formulas” for growth that you have encountered?

I. John 15:1–11 | Abiding in Christ

vv. 1–3

In the Old Testament, Israel was often pictured as a vine. Go back and read Isaiah 5:1–7. In light of this background, what does Jesus mean when He calls Himself the “true vine”? Who are the “branches” on this vine (see v. 5)?

What is the Father's role with regard to the vine and the branches? What is His ultimate purpose?

Now an important part of looking after a vine is pruning. Left to itself, a grape vine will tend to produce large quantities of foliage, and this tendency must be checked if maximum fruitfulness is to be attained. So the vinedresser will do a good deal of pruning in order to encourage fruitfulness. There is a parallel in spiritual things, and Jesus says that the Father "takes away" barren branches and that he "cleanses" those that bear fruit so that they will bear more fruit (v. 2). We should be clear that Jesus is here referring to conditions of fruitfulness, not to eternal salvation. We should not understand the passage to mean that God will remove from the number of the saved those who are not fruitful. Eternal security is not being discussed here (see, rather, 10:28–29). Jesus is talking about the saved and about what will happen in order that they may be the most effective servants they can be. For that, he says, it will be necessary for some judicious pruning to take place. We never become the best servants of God simply letting our natural impulses have full rein. It may be necessary to discipline activities that we would much prefer to indulge in. Jesus is saying that the Father will do what is necessary.

—Leon Morris

Compare v. 3 with John 13:10. How would these words have comforted the disciples? How does Judas provide a perfect example of what Jesus is talking about in vv. 2–3?

What are some ways that God might "prune" a person's life that he might bear more fruit?

vv. 4–6

What is required of us if we are to bear fruit? What is required of God? Why can you “do nothing” apart from Him?

Define what fruitbearing means for a Christian. Give at least three or four examples of what Jesus means by “fruit.”

Circle all the uses of the word “abide” in vv. 4–10. (If you use the NIV, the word is translated “remain”.) What are the various ways this word is used in these verses? What does it mean to abide in Christ and have Christ abide in you?

vv. 7–8

What additional benefits result from abiding in Christ? Are you experiencing these benefits?

vv. 9–10

In these two verses Jesus begins to talk about love. He speaks of the Father’s love for Him and His love for the disciples. Later, He will talk of the disciples’ love for one another (vv. 12, 17). He ties this into the theme of abiding by commanding us to “abide” in His love. What does this mean? How does He tell us we can do this?

Do you more often see your obedience to God's word as a matter of abiding in Christ's love or as a sterile obedience to a rigid and confining set of rules? Explain your answer.

Why does Jesus suddenly bring up the subject of joy? How does this relate to what He has been saying? Define what Jesus means by "my joy." See John 16:20–24; 17:13.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus sums up pretty much everything by saying, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11) He said it at the supper that He knew was the last one He'd have a mouth to eat.

Happiness turns up more or less where you'd expect it to—a good marriage, a rewarding job, a pleasant vacation. Joy, on the other hand, is as notoriously unpredictable as the one who bequeaths it.

—Frederick Buechner

II. John 15:12–17 | Obeying in Love

v. 12

Compare v. 12 with v. 10. How does v. 12 clarify v. 10? What is the relationship between "my commandments" (plural) and "my commandment" (singular)?

vv. 13–16

Jesus speaks of His “friends” in each of these verses. According to these verses, what does it mean to have a friendship with Jesus? What part does He play and what part do we play in this friendship?

How does Jesus define love? How does this differ from the world’s definition of love?

We talk about love but we don’t often practice it. We are like the 4th grade class who sent a get-well card to their teacher who was recovering from surgery. The card read: “Your 4th grade class wishes you a speedy recovery, by a vote of 15 to 14.”

—Anonymous

What are the differences between being a slave to someone and a friend of someone? Do you more often think of yourself as a slave or a friend of God?

Notice in v. 16 that Jesus comes back to the idea of bearing fruit (see vv. 2, 4, 5, 8). What additional light does He shed on fruitbearing in this verse? How does fruitbearing relate to effective prayer?

Compare v. 17 with both v. 12 and John 13:34. What is different and what is similar about these verses? Why does Jesus repeat Himself so much?

Summary and Application

Suppose you were approached one day by a young Christian struggling to grow in his new walk with Christ. Using the principles you have learned from this passage, how would you encourage and instruct him?

This passage provides us with something of a portrait of a mature, growing Christian. It describes this person as one who is effective in prayer, abounding in joy, and serving in love. Evaluate yourself in each of these areas. What, if anything, is holding you back from manifesting these qualities?

Jesus has described God the Father as the great “vinedresser” who “prunes” us that we might bear much fruit. Describe some of the ways God has gone about “pruning” you. How does this analogy help you view these experiences?

I am not a great horticulturist, but I am told by those who know such things that a vine needs to be cultivated at least three years before being allowed to produce fruit at all. That is, it must be trimmed and allowed to grow, then be trimmed and allowed to grow again, and so on for a considerable length of time. Only after this does it become useful for bearing fruit. Similarly, there are times in our lives when we too seem to go on for considerable periods, undergoing rather radical treatment at the hands of the Father, and seeing little fruit come from it. In such times, we doubt if there will ever be fruit. But that is only because we cannot see as God sees. We do not have His perspective. Do not get discouraged if that has happened to you. Instead, remember that Jesus promises fruit in due time if we truly abide in Him in a close way. We can give our witness, live the Christian life, and, in a sense, refuse to be concerned about the outcome; for, ultimately, God is the One responsible for the vineyard.

—James Montgomery Boice

Make a list of the significant and familiar people in your life from home, neighborhood, work, church, etc. What are some specific ways you can fulfill Jesus' command to "love one another" in each of these relationships?

6 | The World Will Hate You!

John 15:18–16:4

Introduction

One of the peculiar characteristics of our age is that very few people will admit to hating anything. Though we may feel deeply about certain things, it is simply not in vogue to hate. As a culture we pride ourselves on our ability to accept a diversity of opinions. We are open-minded and tolerant of many lifestyles. The underlying assumption is that personal freedom is a God-given right and no one has a corner on the truth anyway. This is why Jesus' words strike us as so strange. "The world will hate you!" he said. "The world will not tolerate you. It will not respect your right to believe in Me."

So what are we to make of this? What are we to make of the fact that no one hates us but our Uncle Frank, and he claims to be a Christian? Some Christians would simply say that the church has become worldly and, therefore, accepted by the world. Others say that we in America just happen to be more lucky than those in countries where faith in Christ is not tolerated. What do you think?

The passage at hand will help us explore these issues. Jesus has just finished talking to His disciples about His "new commandment" to love one another. But He doesn't want them to have any illusions about finding this same love in the world. They must not think they will win any popularity contests. Their candidate will not win the mayoral election. Make no mistake, though they love one another, the world will hate them.

Read and re-read John 15:18–16:4

Outline

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|
| I. Reasons For the World's Hatred | 15:18–21 |
| II. The World's Sin | 15:22–25 |
| III. Witness to the World | 15:26–27 |
| IV. Expectations from the World | 16:1–4 |

OPENING UP

How do you think Christians are viewed by non-Christians in your community?

I. John 15:18–21 | Reasons For the World’s Hatred

Throughout this passage, Jesus refers to “the world” numerous times. We have run into this term before in the upper room (14:17–31) and we will run into it again (16:8–20; 17:6–25). Define what Jesus means by “the world.”

v. 18

This verse begins with the words, “If the world hates you ...” In the Greek this phrase assumes the world will hate us. From vv. 18–21 give at least three reasons why the world hates believers.

1.

2.

3.

v. 19

Compare this verse with John 17:11, 17 where Jesus speaks of His disciples, saying, “they themselves are in the world ... I also have sent them into the world.” How is it that we are in the world but not of the world? What does that mean practically?

The Christian is the most contented man in the world, but he is the least contented with the world. He is like a traveler in an inn, perfectly satisfied with the inn and its accommodation, considering it as an inn, but putting quite out of all consideration the idea of making it his home.

—C.H. Spurgeon

v. 20

Where else and in what context has Jesus used this phrase, “A slave is not greater than his master”? (Use your cross reference or a concordance.) Why is this phrase such a favorite of His?

Because the above-named phrase is true, what can we expect from the world? How should this both encourage and discourage us?

v. 21

This verse is very similar to 16:4. Why does ignorance of God result in persecution for the followers of Jesus? How might your attitude toward those who persecute you be affected by remembering this? See also 1 Tim. 1:12, 13.

II. John 25:22–25 | The World’s Sin

vv. 22–24

What is the “sin” Jesus speaks of in these verses? Why does the world have no excuse for sin?

Based on these verses, respond to the following statements:

“I love God, but I don’t consider myself a Christian because I don’t believe in Jesus.”

“I don’t hate Jesus, but I don’t think He was the Son of God either.”

v. 25

Jesus quotes from a few different Old Testament passages (Ps. 35:19, 69:4; 109:3). Why does He call this “their Law”?

Notice that Jesus says that the world's hatred of Him was "without cause." Considering the words and works of Jesus, why should the world love Him rather than hate Him? Be specific. What does this teach you about how you should be towards the world?

So the Christian is not to retaliate, not to resent the hatred and persecution of the world, not to be vindictive, nor return evil for evil. Rather, we are exhorted to return good for evil. Nor are we to retire from the world, to withdraw from it and build a Christian ghetto in which to hide ourselves, and then to throw tracts across the chasm! Rather, we are to move into the world, live in its midst just as Jesus did, and bear witness to the truth even though it is often rejected. We are to do this for the sake of those who will receive, who will believe, will accept the Word. We are to bear witness in the midst of the world.

—Ray Stedman

III. John 15:26–27 | Witness to the World

Up until now, Jesus has focused on the results of His coming on the world and on His disciples. In this section and the one that follows, He begins to focus on His departure and how His disciples will get along in a hostile environment.

v. 26

Why does Jesus bring up the subject of the Holy Spirit now? What does He say the Spirit will do and how does this relate to the world?

What does it mean to "bear witness"? How does the Holy Spirit do this? See Mark 13:11.

v. 27

How does the disciples' witness relate to the Spirits' witness? Why will they bear witness? Does this relate to the Apostles or to us as well? Explain.

Could anything be more exciting than being a co-worker with God? I hardly think so. Yet this is what is promised to every faithful Christian in the pages of God's Word. If your boss should call you up tomorrow morning and say, "I have been watching your work and have been very satisfied with it; I would like you to become a partner with me in directing the affairs of the company," you would be thrilled. You would be even more thrilled and delighted if the call should come from the President of the United States asking you to be a member of his cabinet or a special counsel in the area of your expertise. How much more delighted should we be, then, that the sovereign and eternal God has appointed us co-workers with Him in carrying the gospel of salvation to this world!

—James Montgomery Boice

IV. John 16:1–4 | Expectations from the World

v. 1

How would "these things" keep them from stumbling? What does Jesus have in mind when He speaks of "stumbling"? How might unexpected persecution cause a person to stumble?

vv. 2–3

For a Jew to be made an "outcast from the synagogue" meant not only religious exclusion but also social isolation. Have you ever experienced such isolation? If so, how did you handle it?

How could a person kill someone as an act of service to God? For an example of this, read Paul's testimony before King Agrippa in Acts 26:9–11. Do you know of any examples of this today?

v. 4

When is "their hour"? When that hour comes, why will remembering that Jesus predicted it help us?

Summary and Application

The nature of twentieth century life in the U.S.A. is such that very few Christians experience real persecution. The prevailing attitude of the world seems to be that everyone has a right to believe what they want. In view of Christ's words about the world's hatred and persecution, how can you explain your current harmony with the world? What can you be thankful for? What should concern you?

What are some characteristics of the world today from which you should be different? To what degree has the spirit of worldliness infiltrated your life? What positive action should you take that might bring rejection from the world?

He that follows the world with all his heart and thinks that the best, is a reasonable man in following it. But he who thinks the world to come the best, and yet follows this present evil world—why, what a fool is he, and who shall plead for him? When he stands before God, his prayers will damn him, if nothing else will, for his prayers will be swift witnesses against him that he did know, did feel, and yet he would not act on his knowledge.

—C.H. Spurgeon

How aggressive are you in bearing witness to what Christ has done in your life? What, if anything, holds you back? Make a list of the people to whom you believe God is calling you to witness. Begin praying for an opportunity and the boldness to do so.

7 | The Cure for Sorrow

John 16:5–22

Introduction

Dr. R.A. Torrey was one of the great Bible teachers of the past generation and founder of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (Biola). Dr. and Mrs. Torrey went through a time of great sorrow when their twelve-year-old daughter was killed accidentally. The funeral was held on a miserable, gloomy, rainy day. They stood around the little grave and watched as the body of their little girl was put away. As they turned away, Mrs. Torrey said, “I’m so glad that Elizabeth is with the Lord, and not in that box.” But their hearts were still broken.

Dr. Torrey said that the next day, as he was walking down the street, the whole thing seemed unbearable—the loneliness of the years ahead without her, the heartbreak of an empty house, and all the implications of her death for them. He was so burdened by this, that he sought the Lord for help. He later reported, “And just then, this fountain, the Holy Spirit that I had in my heart, broke forth with such power as I think I had never experienced before, and it was the most joyful moment I had ever known in my life! Oh, how wonderful is the joy of the Holy Ghost! It is an unspeakable glorious thing to have your joy not in things about you, not even in your most dearly loved friends, but to have within you a fountain ever springing up, springing up, springing up three hundred sixty-five days in every year, springing up under all circumstances unto everlasting life!”

This is a strange story about a strange joy that springs up unexpectedly in the midst of great sorrow. No one escapes sorrow in this life. For some, it does them in, rendering them bitter and powerless their whole life through. For others, like Dr. Torrey, it becomes a doorway to great joy. It was the secret to this joy that Jesus shared with His disciples in John 16.

Read and re-read John 16:5–22

Outline

- | | |
|------------------------|----------|
| I. The Helper | 16:5–15 |
| II. The “Little While” | 16:16–22 |

Opening Up

What causes sorrow in your life? What are some things that help you overcome that sorrow?

I. John 16:5–15 | The Helper

vv. 5–6

What reactions and emotions does Jesus observe in His disciples?

Both Peter and Thomas asked Jesus where He was going (John 13:36; 14:5). Why then does it infer that they had never asked Him that question?

vv. 7–11

Jesus has already said a great deal about the Helper in the Upper Room Discourse. What does He say in these verses that would be new information for the disciples as to the Spirit's ministry?

Jesus tells us that the Helper will “convict the world.” Define “convict.”

Your sorrow itself shall be turned into joy. Not the sorrow to be taken away, and joy to be put in its place, but the very sorrow which now grieves you shall be turned into joy. God not only takes away the bitterness and gives sweetness in its place, but turns the bitterness itself into sweetness!

—C.H. Spurgeon

Jesus spells out three things of which the Spirit will convict the world. What are they? What reason or explanation does He give for each? (Be sure you understand what each means.)

1.

2.

3.

Can you think of an example in your own life or in someone else's life of the Spirit doing the above work of convicting? If so, write it down. For a scriptural example, see Acts 2:37.

vv. 12–15

In these verses Jesus moves from what the Spirit does in relation to the world to what He does in relation to the believer. From these verses, list at least three things He does for us. What will the Spirit not do?

How have you personally experienced the Spirit's ministry of guiding you into truth?

What do these verses teach you about the interrelationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit?

The Spirit of God is never going to give you isolated truth. He will not come out with some startling, brand-new, absolutely different revelation which nobody has ever heard of before! Every now and then we hear of some preacher who says, "God has revealed to me this brilliant new idea. Nobody has ever taught it before. If you want to know the secret you've got to come to me!" That is exactly what Jesus says will not happen. The Spirit of God will never speak that way. He will speak only what he hears. The Spirit, as God, is always hearing what God is forever saying to men. Therefore, what he says is always integrated truth, always in line with what God has already said. It will never differ from what he has said in the past, but will fit into the context of life as God has revealed it.

—Ray Stedman

II. John 16:16–22 | The “Little While”

In the first section, Jesus encouraged the disciples with the promise of the coming of the Spirit. In this section, Jesus promises another source of encouragement.

v. 16

Jesus speaks of two different time periods, each of which He calls “a little while.” To what does each time period refer? How did this come true?

vv. 17–18

How did the disciples react to Jesus’ prediction? With whom did they confer? Imagine yourself in their place; how would you have reacted? Explain why.

v. 19

How did Jesus know that the disciples wished to question Him? What question does He ask them? What does Jesus predict about their questioning in v. 23?

vv. 20–22

In what way would you say that Jesus really didn't respond to their question, but rather to their deeper need?

Why would the disciples “weep and lament”? Why would their “sorrow” be turned to “joy”? How did this literally come true? See John 20:11–20.

In v. 20 Jesus uses a woman's experience in childbirth to illustrate what the disciples were about to experience. In both cases, how is it that the thing that causes the sorrow is the very same thing that causes the joy?

One comforting thought is that he who alone can pierce sinners' hearts is named “The Comforter.” The Spirit who convicts us is also the Spirit who consoles. The same divine Spirit is both Wounder and Healer.

—C.H. Spurgeon

What qualities of joy does Jesus emphasize in these verses? How would you distinguish between this joy and what is commonly called “happiness”?

It is clear in this section that Jesus is talking about His coming death and resurrection. Why didn't He just come out and say it? Why did He speak in such veiled language?

Summary and Application

Imagine going through a time of sorrow as the disciples were. As you read this passage with a view to “the cure for sorrow,” what sources of encouragement do you find that might bring joy?

In this passage we have seen that it is the work of the Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness and judgment. Though the world may hate us, God is still at work in the world; He has not abandoned it. To what extent do you rely on the Spirit to do the work of convicting your non-Christian friends and family members? What is your role (if any) in this?

*When Jesus says about the Holy Spirit that “when he comes, he will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment” using the word **elenchein**, he has taken out of the hands of his disciples the rod of punishment against those who reject Jesus Christ as Lord. We do not have the obligation of proving to our neighbors the fact that they are sinners. That is the task of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who will expose creatively the hurts and empty places of the world.*

—Earl Palmer

Suppose someone came to you who has recently been attending your church. Though they like the Bible teaching, they don't feel like the Holy Spirit is given enough emphasis. They believe that the Spirit should play a more dominant role in the teaching and worship. How would you respond to such a comment? Before you respond, look carefully at the role Jesus says the Spirit plays in vv. 13–15.

8 | PROMISES ... PROMISES

John 16:23–33

Introduction

“Watch for answers to your prayers. When you mail a letter to a friend, requesting a favor, you watch for an answer. When you pray to God for a favor, you do not expect Him to hear you, some of you. If the Lord were to hear some of your prayer, you would be surprised. Sometimes when I have met with a special answer to prayer and have told it, some have said, “Is it not wonderful?” No, not at all! It would be wonderful if it were not so!”

Such were the words of a great man of prayer, Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who at the age of 27 was preaching to crowds of 6,000 in London’s Metropolitan Tabernacle. His words and the testimony of his life bear witness to the fact that he very simply took a promise of Jesus in the upper room to heart, “If you shall ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name”. This was a promise not just for great preachers, but for anyone willing to take Him at His word.

At the end of John 16, just prior to His High Priestly Prayer, Jesus leaves His disciples with two great promises—that both they and we needed in the “little while” between His departure and return. For us, all that is needed is to take Him at His word.

Read and re-read John 16:23–33

Outline

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------|
| I. The Promise of Prayer | 16:23–28 |
| II. The Promise of Peace | 16:29–33 |

Opening Up

What are some examples of answered prayer you have seen recently?

I. John 16:23–28 | The Promise of Prayer

vv. 23–24

Jesus begins with the words, “And in that day.” This is the first of many references to time in vv. 23–26. What “day” is He talking about? See John 16:16–22.

What changes will “that day” bring in the disciples’ prayer life?

My own soul’s conviction is that prayer is the grandest power in the entire universe, that it has a more omnipotent force than electricity, attraction, gravitation, or any other of those other secret forces which men have called by name, but which they do not understand.

—C.H. Spurgeon

In speaking about prayer, Jesus gives both a command and a promise. Explain each of these in your own words.

What does it mean to “ask in My name”?

What is the connection between prayer and joy? How does this add to what Jesus said about the “cure for sorrow” in 16:20–22?

Consider what you have already studied in the Upper Room Discourse. How had Jesus spoken to them in “figurative language”? How and when would He cease to do this?

vv. 26–28

Jesus now returns to the subject of prayer. What misconception about prayer does Jesus seek to clear up?

Why is it that we often see God the Father as cold and stern and Jesus as kind and compassionate? Do you do this? How might this hinder your prayer life?

According to v. 27, why does the Father love us? Does this mean we must earn God’s love? Why or why not? (See Romans 5:7–8 and 1 John 4:19.)

And Jesus goes on, “the Father loves you himself” (v. 27). The Greek puts emphasis on “himself”; it is none less than the Father, it is the Father himself who loves you. It is not some angel who is near to God and can speak for you, not some great human dignitary whom you think is nearer to God than you and will have some influence on your behalf. No. It is God himself who loves you, and that is the great central truth that you must never forget. Ultimately, everything depends on the fact that God is love (1 John 4:8, 16) and the whole of our salvation is the outworking of that love. So we may pray, knowing that we will be heard and answered as we pray in Christ’s name, because the love of God undergirds it all. It is love that sent Jesus to this world for sinners. It is love that brought him in due course to the cross and all that this means. And it is love that means that the Father’s ear is ever open to the prayer of the humblest of his children.

—Leon Morris

II. John 16:29–33 | The Promise of Peace

The remainder of the chapter does not deal so much with prayer as it does with the Apostles' own discipleship journey over the days ahead and the peace that only Jesus would give them.

vv. 29–30

How were the disciples feeling now? How had their feelings changed since Jesus spoke to them in 16:5?

Compare these verses with vv. 23, 25. What new levels of understanding had the disciples come to and why? In what sense were their conclusions premature and in what sense were they correct?

What levels of belief and understanding have you come to in your Christian life? At each level, why are we so prone to think that we have arrived at the ultimate in understanding?

vv. 31–32

The NASB translates Jesus' response as something of a rebuke ("Do you now believe?"). On the other hand, the NIV translates it as an affirmation ("You believe at last!"). How do you read Jesus' tone here? Is He rebuking them or is He affirming them? Explain.

In what sense had the disciples overestimated their own faith? What was their faith lacking?

It is part of the character and genius of the Church that its foundation members were discredited men; it owed its existence not to their faith, courage, or virtue, but to what Christ had done with them; and this they could never forget.

—C.H. Dodd

In what sense would Jesus' prediction in v. 32 be both a source of anxiety and a source of comfort?

What confidence did Jesus have going into His "lonely night"? How does this compare with Mark 15:34?

v. 33

These words form something of a conclusion to Jesus' teaching in the upper room. What are the two things Jesus says we are "in"? What can we expect to experience in each? How does your experience confirm this?

After predicting the fact that we will have great troubles in the world, Jesus says, "But take courage; I have overcome the world." In what sense did Jesus overcome the world? Why should this act as a source of encouragement for us?

Summary and Application

Jesus makes some bold promises about prayer in these verses. How is your prayer life these days? How does it compare with the promises Jesus makes in this passage? How have these verses personally encouraged you to pray?

Many Christians prefer what they call “practical Bible teaching” to teaching that is more “theological” in nature. What evidence is there in this passage that good theology and practical Christian living can’t be separated?

In this passage Jesus affirms the Father’s love for them despite their future failure to stick to Jesus. How does this encourage you? When have you failed to stick by Jesus? How have you seen His love expressed through that time?

Jesus promised us great troubles and great peace in the midst of those troubles. Are your expectations for what you will experience in this world too high (no troubles) or too little (no peace)? How have you been experiencing both lately?

*Day by day and with each passing moment,
Strength I find to meet my trials here,
Trusting in my Father’s wise bestowment,
I’ve no cause for worry or for fear.
He whose heart is kind beyond all measure
Gives unto each day what He deems best.
Lovingly, it’s part of pain and pleasure.
Mingling toil with peace and rest.*

—Lina Sandell

9 | Jesus Prayed For Me!

John 17:1–26

Introduction

An old football coach used to say to us the night before a game, “Fellas, the hay is in the barn!” His message was clear, that if we were not ready then, we never would be.

When we come to John 17, Jesus is through talking to His disciples. He’s through preparing them. The hay is in the barn. He stops talking to His disciples and begins talking to His Father about His disciples. But when you think about it, this is preparation of a different sort. Imagine listening in on this “High Priestly” prayer. Isn’t it true that we learn what is important to people by what they pray for? What then was important enough to Jesus that He would pray for it?

Our curiosity is heightened when we realize that not only did He pray for His disciples, but He prayed for us! He specifically mentioned you and me! In this prayer He spelled out His agenda for us to His Father. What great preparation for us just to learn what that agenda was, and it becomes even more exciting when you realize that His prayers had to be answered!

Read and re-read John 17:1–26

Outline

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|-------------------------------|----------|
| I. Prayer For Glorification | 17:1–8 |
| II. Prayer For Sanctification | 17:9–19 |
| III. Prayer For Unification | 17:20–26 |

Opening Up

If you were about to permanently leave some close loved ones such as your children, parents or close friends, what would you pray for them?

I. John 17:1–8 | Prayer For Glorification

Read over the verses in this section carefully. For whom does Jesus pray? What request does He repeat twice?

v. 1

What is the “hour” that has come? See John 2:4; 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1.

vv. 2–3

What does Jesus say God had given Him? Look also at verses 4–8. What else had God given Him? How does knowing this help you appreciate Him more?

What is Jesus giving to His disciples? How does He define this gift and who has it? According to this definition, do you have this gift?

Eternal life is the ability, the right, to know God in an ever-expanding, ever-increasing way, to understand and fellowship with, and be in close contact with his mighty Being who upholds all things by the Word of His power, and with Jesus Christ, who is the only way by which men can know God. That is eternal life—the knowledge of a Person. This really shouldn't be surprising to us. After all, this is the way many things in life are. For example, what is marriage? Is it just two people living together in a house, sharing the same salary, raising children, washing dishes and making beds, and expressing a little sex? Is that all marriage is? No, marriage is knowledge of a person. That is what makes a marriage rich and full. It isn't just living together; it is knowing each other, and coming more and more to know one another.

Many marriages grow stale because this process ceases, and people do not continue learning more and more of what is in the other person. So many couples come to me thinking they have arrived, that they have found out all there is to know about each other, and so their marriage appears to them dull and boring. But they haven't arrived. The knowledge of a person is an infinite undertaking. What makes human life rich is the discovery of what is in one another, who we are, and the sharing of it. And what makes eternal life worth the living is the discovery of God, the knowledge of him.

—Ray Stedman

vv. 4–8

How did Jesus glorify the Father? What was the work God had given Him to do? How did Jesus know if and when this work was accomplished?

How does Jesus describe the men God had given Him? How do you harmonize this description with their cowardice described in 16:32? How does this help you understand how He views you?

II. John 17:9–19 | Prayer For Sanctification

Read over the verses in this section carefully. For whom does Jesus pray now? List all the requests He makes.

vv. 9–12

What dangers does Jesus foresee for His disciples in these verses?

What does Jesus mean by, “keep them in Thy name”? For what purpose did He pray this? How might God go about doing this in our lives?

vv. 13–19

Circle all the references to “the world” in these verses. Describe Jesus’ relationship with the world as well as the disciples’ relationship with the world.

Once again, Jesus mentioned His joy as the unique possession of His disciples in the world. From what we have already seen in the Upper Room Discourse, what factors contribute to our joy in the world? See John 15:10, 11; 16:22, 24.

While the disciples are in the world, Jesus prays that God would “keep them from the Evil One.” Who is the “Evil One”? In practical terms, what does it mean to be “kept” from him?

Jesus also prays that, while they are in the world, God would “sanctify them in the truth.” Define “sanctify.” By what means are we sanctified?

III. John 17:20–26 | Prayer For Unification

Read carefully this section. For whom does Jesus pray? List all of the requests that He makes.

vv. 20–23

What effect will our unity have upon the world? Do you see this happening today? Explain why or why not?

What theological basis does Jesus give for our unity? According to these verses, who creates our unity?

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The man who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by himself. He enters the community of Christians with his demands, sets up his own law, and judges the brethren and God Himself accordingly. He stands adamant, a living reproach to all others in the circle of brethren. He acts as if he is the creator of the Christian community, as if his dream binds men together. When things do not go his way, he calls the effort a failure. When his ideal picture is destroyed, he sees the community going to smash. So he becomes, first an accuser of his brethren, then an accuser of God, and finally the despairing accuser of himself.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

vv. 24–26

What is the meaning of Jesus' request that we might be with Him where He is and behold His glory?
How does this relate to verses 2, 3?

By what work will Jesus continue to make the Father known to us? What is the purpose of this in our lives?

Summary and Application

Compare your answer for the “Opening Up” question to what Jesus requested for His disciples (and us). How are the priorities reflected in your prayer different/similar to those reflected in Jesus’ prayer?

Imagine yourself listening in as Jesus prayed His High Priestly Prayer for you. What kind of feelings would His prayer provoke in you? What kind of changes in your attitudes and lifestyle would it provoke?

In His prayer, Jesus had much to say about our unity as believers. How can a church or a group of believers determine when unity is best preserved by splitting up and when it is best preserved by sticking it out together?