

THE CURE FOR HEART TROUBLE

by Ray C. Stedman

I am fascinated by the discourse of Jesus in the Upper Room. There are truths here that simply stagger the imagination. Surely this is one of the greatest revelations ever to fall from the lips of Jesus. The Gospel of Matthew records that, early in his ministry, our Lord said, "I have come that I might utter things that have been kept secret since the foundation of the world." Surely some of these truths are found here in the Upper Room Discourse.

Take Verse 1, for instance:

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

That verse could well be called a Manual for Stress Management, a remedy for anxious and troubled hearts. Here is where we find the answer to the question, "How do you spell relief?"

Notice that the verse comes right after Jesus' revelation to Peter that he is about to deny his Lord. This came as a shock to Peter. He did not believe he was capable of such a thing. Yet these words about troubled hearts are not addressed to him alone. The plural is used for "your" here: "Let not your hearts be troubled" includes all the disciples.

We can understand why they would be greatly troubled. They were aware of the mounting peril to Jesus, and that the priests and the rulers of the Jews were out to put him to death. Also, they were no doubt ashamed of their own behavior at the Last Supper, arguing about who was the greatest till the Lord rebuked them by washing their feet, much to their shame and embarrassment. Then they were uneasy when he declared that one of them was going to betray him. They were confused and puzzled by the sudden exodus of Judas from their midst. Most of all, they were afraid of losing Jesus. They were troubled by his words that he was about to take his departure, that they would look for him but would see him no more. Anxious foreboding filled their minds. The cold clutch of fear gripped their hearts.

Since we are also disciples of Jesus, and can rightly include ourselves in words like this, we must ask ourselves, "Is it wrong for Christians to be troubled like this? Are we expected never to succumb to moments of pressure, or to feel anxious and worried? Are we supposed to be cheerful and confident all the time?" Many Christians think this is what this verse means. But they forget that Jesus himself was not immune to this kind of reaction to pressure. Three times in the chapters before this John, using the same word on those occasions as he has here, records that Jesus was "deeply troubled in spirit." Thus it is clear that we may expect to feel troubled at times. Christians are exposed to pressure and danger. We have the record of the epistles to confirm this. The apostles went through times of great peril, during which they feared and trembled. Thus it is not wrong for Christians to feel pressured and fearful. What this is teaching, and what our Lord means by, "Let not your hearts be troubled," is that, while we cannot prevent stress, we can overcome it. This is where this passage has much rich meaning for us.

Jesus suggests two things in this verse:

First, he tells the disciples, "Believe in God, believe also in me." In this version both of those words "believe" are in the imperative mood, i.e., they are commands. There is some question among the commentators as to whether these should be indicative statements: "You do believe in God; you do believe in me," or whether they are commands, as rendered here. The Greek text will bear either rendering. The best way to take it, in line with the context, is, "You do believe in God; believe also in me."

What Jesus means is, "You have found relief for worry many times in the promises of God." They had the Old Testament, with its rich heritage of wonderful promises, and they had found strength and help from those

passages in times of pressure. But now he gives them new truth which goes beyond anything in the Old Testament. "I want you to believe this too," he tells them. "You have believed in God; now believe in me."

Here Jesus obviously moves himself onto a plane of equality with the Father, speaking not only as a man but also as God. He begins to reveal to them the things that had been kept secret since the foundation of the world.

One of those new things is found in the next two verses:

"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?" {John 14:2 RSV}

Some versions render this, "If it were not so, I would have told you, for I go to prepare a place for you." It is somewhat difficult to know which it should be, but, in the long run, it does not really make any difference. In both cases Jesus is saying, "If you had thought something to be true that was not true, I would have pointed that out to you." In other words, "I have come to correct the erroneous concepts, the false thinking that you may have held. I want you to understand that in my Father's house there are many rooms."

All of this is new truth, truth we do not find in the Old Testament. We must ask, "What is the Father's house?" Most of us take this to mean heaven, for heaven is usually viewed as the place where God dwells, but "heaven" is a very vague term. If we let Scripture interpret Scripture (as good expositors should) we would perhaps refer to a passage in the last chapter of Isaiah, where God says, "Heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool," {cf, Isa 66:1}. This implication is clear that God dwells in the entire universe; that this vast cosmos, of which we are but a tiny part, is the Father's house. "In it," Jesus declares, "are many rooms." The word in Greek for "rooms" really means 'a place to live.' This word appears but twice in the New Testament, here and in Verse 23 of this same chapter. In that verse Jesus says, "If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our *home* with him."

What Jesus therefore is saying is, "In my Father's house there are many homes, many places to live." Through the kindness of a Christian friend, my wife and I were invited to spend three days last week at a beautiful resort near the city of Mendocino in Northern California. It is called Heritage House. But Heritage House is far more than a house. It is a collection of apartments, nestled along the cliffs overlooking the beautiful surf, altogether a marvelous place. It is quite proper, therefore, to say, "At Heritage House there are many places to live." That is what our Lord seems to describe here.

As we contemplate the vastness of the universe we are astounded at the immensity of it. Our own galaxy is some 300,000 light years across, and there are millions and even billions of such galaxies, stretching out into space and rushing further apart all the time. As he gazes into the heavens, Jesus says, "In my Father's house, the place where God dwells, 'the heavens and the heaven of heavens,' there are many places to live."

I have long taken that to be a revelation that there are other inhabitable planets in our universe, where intelligent creatures dwell. Our Lord's suggestion here opens up whole new vistas of imagination to us. Since I was a boy in high school I have been intrigued by the great 200-inch telescope at Mount Palomar in Southern California, the largest telescope man has ever made. (They are beginning to build another one now that will be even larger.) I have always read everything I could about the discoveries of that telescope because I envisaged it as being poked right into the front window of the Father's house! It has shown us some amazing things. Now, of course, we have launched satellites that have gone clear out into space and even circled some of the other planets of our solar system. It is truly awesome to contemplate what is suggested in this verse.

But, whatever it means, our Lord wants his disciples to understand three very comforting things:

First, he tells them.

"... if I go ... I will come again," {John 14:3a KJV}

This word is clearly designed to help them in their fear, primarily their fear of death. What would become of Jesus if he died? Would they ever see him again? What would become of them if all this turmoil in Jerusalem

should eventuate in their own death? The thought of death has a very sobering effect upon us. I think it was Samuel Johnson who said, "The prospect of immediate hanging marvelously clears the mind!"

Here our Lord gives three comforting facts about death. First, he is going to prepare a place. We do not know where. I personally believe that this involves not so much the rearrangement of part of the universe for our reception, but that it involves primarily the preparing of us for a whole new dimension of existence. That is suggested in other passages. In the writings of Paul, for instance, the apostle says that what happens to us here, "This light affliction," as he puts it, "is working for us a far more and exceeding weight of glory," {cf, 2 Cor 4:17}. I do not know what that means either, but it blows my mind as to its possibility. What our Lord may be doing is working out a whole new dimension of existence for us, and, when it is ready (or we are ready), he will return.

The second fact he states is, "I will come again." Surely this refers to many other passages where he spoke of his return. Just a few days before this event he had sat on the Mount of Olives and talked about a time when the Son of Man would appear in glory, with all his angels with him: and the peoples of the earth would be gathered before him. etc. Now he relates it directly to these disciples:

"I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." {John 14:3b RSV}

Those are very comforting words. Paul enlarges on this in First Thessalonians:

"The Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command [He will not send an angel, he will come himself], 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 RSV}

That is a marvelous promise of an event that is yet to come into human history. You can buy a wheelbarrow full of books that will tell you the exact date of this event -- all of them different. But no one knows the exact date.

Yet through twenty centuries of Christianity this verse in John 14 has also been used to encourage believers to expect the Lord's coming when they die. Upon death, every believer is received into glory by Jesus. As Stephen was being stoned to death he said, "I see the Lord Jesus standing at the right hand of the throne of God," {cf, Acts 7:55-56}. (Some have suggested that Jesus had risen to welcome him home.)

I believe this indicates that these two events (the second coming of Jesus back into time to carry out his announced prophetic program, and the coming of the Lord personally for each believer upon death), are really one and the same. Other passages suggest this. It is very likely that when we step out of time, we step into eternity, and in eternity there is no waiting for anything. What you are spiritually ready for is what occurs. The event for which the Spirit of God is now getting us ready, throughout this earthly journey, is the coming of the Lord for his own. When we breathe our last, every true believer finds himself at this great world-shaking event when all believers are caught up together, and enter into glory at once. You may find some implications of that disturbing. If you want further information on it, I would like to suggest a chapter in my book, *Authentic Christianity*, called *Time in Eternity*.

The third comforting thing here is that we will be with Jesus forever. Just to be with Jesus -- that is all we need, that is what we want.

When I was a young Christian we used to sing a hymn that I never hear any more. The words went something like this:

No matter where on earth we dwell.
On mountain top or in the dell.
In cottage or in mansion fair.

Where Jesus is 'tis heaven there.

Oh, hallelujah! Yes 'tis heaven.
'Tis heaven to know my sins forgiven.
On land or sea, no matter where.
Where Jesus is 'tis heaven there.

Surely that is what makes heaven heaven. As one commentator has said, "You don't go to heaven to find Christ. You go to Christ to find heaven." This is what Jesus declares to reassure his disciples here.

In Verses 4-11, our Lord goes even further. Here he adds more marvelous but mysterious things, gathered around two interruptions by the disciples Thomas and Philip. Both of them are as bewildered and confused as most of us are when we first read this passage. Thomas is the first who interrupts, in response to the words of Jesus in Verse 4:

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 [do] know him and have seen him." {John 14:4-7 RSV}

"Doubting Thomas" he has been called. I don't think that is a good name for him. It should perhaps be, "Honest Thomas." I believe Thomas is the type of person who will not say he understands something until he really does.

I read once a story of Cordell Hull, the great Secretary of State under Franklin Roosevelt. He was riding in a train one day, with a companion, through the New England states. Observing a flock of sheep feeding on a hillside his companion idly remarked, "Those sheep have recently been sheared." Cordell Hull stared at them a moment and said, "Well, sheared on this side anyway!" Thomas was that kind of a man. He would go no further than what he understood.

And Jesus does not rebuke him. He simply replies with the greatest revelation about himself that we have had in the Gospel of John. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." What an awesome claim! Notice he does not say, "I show the way. I teach the truth. I give life." He is not merely a "way-shower." Other religious leaders fit into those categories. Buddha called himself "the way-shower"; Mohammed was a teacher of truth. There is much truth in the Koran. Even some modern day prophets are teachers of truth. All of them offer to lead one to life, but none of them can make a claim like this, "I am the way. When you come to me you are meeting God; you have found ultimate reality and truth. When you come to me you then and there possess life."

John puts it this way in his first letter. "This is the record, that God has given us eternal life and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life, and he who does not have the Son does not have life," {cf, 1 Jn 5:11}. That is what Jesus says here, "No one can come to the Father but by me."

Many bristle with indignation at those words. When I quoted this verse in a Bible study once, a woman said, "That's terribly narrow-minded." I said, "Yes, it is, but that is the way truth is. I find the phone company to be terribly narrow minded too. If you want to call someone up you must dial the exact numbers, in the exact order given; they will not allow any deviation. The IRS is terribly narrow-minded. They require you to state your income exactly. They don't accept a wild guess on your part." "But I think you must interpret a verse like that," she said. "How would you interpret it?" I asked her. She said she didn't really know how. I said, "Well, if it is true, if Jesus means what he says that there is only one way to God, that those that try to come another way will not end up with the God who exists, but with some god of their own invention, and, if there is only one way, how could he ever have said it any plainer than he does here, 'No one comes to the Father but by me'?"

Jesus goes on to reassure Thomas with this word in Verse 7: "If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you do know him and have seen him." Thomas' problem was not that he did not

know the Father; it was that *he had not realized* that he knew the Father. In coming to Jesus he had not grasped fully what had happened to him, how much his knowledge of God had been broadened and deepened. "You have known him, and you have seen him," Jesus reassures him.

Now Philip interrupts:

Philip said to him, "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}

Everyone was surprised when Philip spoke up. It was as if the table had suddenly spoken. He was the quiet, mousy disciple who never said anything. Yet all the sob and agony of man's hunger for God is heard in this cry, "Show us the Father and we'll be satisfied." Our Lord's answer is a quiet rebuke: "Philip, after three and a half years haven't you yet found out who I am? I came to reveal the Father. When you know me you have known the Father."

These are, confessedly, words of mystery. They reveal what theologians have called the "Doctrine of the Trinity"; that three distinct Persons can still exist as only one God. It is beyond our human comprehension. We have nothing to compare it with, thus we struggle to grasp it.

But the heart of it is what our Lord twice says here, "I am in the Father, and the Father in me." Out of that union come powerful words and wonderful works. Our Lord will go on very shortly to point out that this is the relationship which will now obtain between us and him: "As the Father is in me and I in the Father, so I am in you and you are in Me." That is the greatest secret in the Word -- the secret of God and man working together. Man working, making choices, putting forth energy, but God touching it, blessing it, pouring his divine afflatus upon it so that the results are far beyond anything you would expect from man's working. That is the wonder of what he is teaching us here.

As an old country preacher once put it, "He puts unction in our gumption." We need the gumption, the resolve, the will to act, but, when we do act, God puts unction upon it and the results go beyond what could ever be expected.

Jesus says, "Now believe that." Take either the channel of his words or of his works and you will come right out there. That is the secret. You will find yourself in touch with God and all your inner hungers will be satisfied. Faith is the answer to fear -- fear of the present danger, fear of the future beyond death, fear of all the doubts and the misunderstanding that plague all our days. Believe him. That is his word to us.

But there is still more.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it. {John 14:12-14 RSV}

This has been called the greatest promise Jesus ever made. Christians, the Apostle Peter says, have "exceeding great and precious promises" {2 Pet 1:4} from Jesus. Surely this is one of them. It is so great a promise we must read it very carefully. Jesus says three things:

First, "He who believes in me" i.e., he who keeps on believing in me, not just he who becomes a Christian but he who keeps on growing and trusting as a Christian "will also do the works that I do." Remember these words were first addressed to the apostles. Surely our Lord is referring to his miracles of healing the sick, raising the dead, opening the blind eyes, and curing the lame. In the book of Acts these words were literally fulfilled:

- Peter and John healed a man who was lame from birth;
- Peter raised Dorcas from the dead;
- Paul delivered people from demonic oppression and healed the sick.
- Even the very shadow of Peter walking through the streets healed people.

"He who believes in me will do these works that I do." This promise of Jesus has been literally fulfilled.

But he goes on to a second promise, "Greater works than these shall he do." What intriguing words! On occasion a young, starry-eyed Christian has said to me, "God has anointed me to do the greater works that Jesus promised." By that he meant greater physical miracles. I submit to you that this word of Jesus can not possibly mean that. The bald fact is, there are no greater miracles in the physical realm than the works Jesus did. What could be greater than raising a man who had been dead four days, healing someone who had been ill for 38 years, or restoring instant sight to blind eyes? There are no greater physical miracles. So when Jesus speaks of "greater works" he must mean "greater" in a spiritual dimension.

When we look at both the record of Scripture and of church history we see how true this is:

On the day of Pentecost, 40 days after our Lord uttered these words, Peter, filled with the power of the Spirit, preached with such effect that 3,000 people were converted in one day. That never happened during Jesus' ministry. Perhaps a few hundred on occasion believed when he preached, but mere handfuls were the usual response, never thousands as the book of Acts reports.

When Billy Graham preached on the parable of the prodigal son in Wembley Stadium during his first crusade in London in 1955, 3,000 people became Christians. According to the record there was no account of any conversions when Jesus told that story. That was a "greater work."

In his ministry in Palestine Jesus probably never spoke to crowds larger than 5,000-7,000 people, but even I had the privilege in January of this year, on Super Bowl Sunday, of preaching to 10,000 people in Grace Community Church in Panorama City.

Luis Palau told me just recently how thrilled he was to speak to a great crowd of 700,000 people in one vast meeting in Guatemala City.

A few years ago Billy Graham preached to over a million people gathered in a great public square in Seoul, Korea. That is far more than Jesus ever accomplished.

There are more than a hundred million believers behind the Iron Curtain today despite the repression and persecution which is the order of the day in those countries; the mighty Spirit of God is changing and converting people there. Thus it is true that, through the course of history, "Greater works than these" are taking place.

The third thing which Jesus stresses is most important: It is not we who do these "greater works," but him! Notice what he says, "Because I go to the Father," this will happen. By that he means that after he ascends to the throne of power, he will send the spirit and through the Spirit he will work universally. In Verse 13 Jesus links this to prayer. When you pray in his name, when you ask in line with God's will (that is what "in my name" means), what the Father wants, as Jesus himself always did, "I will do it," he promises. Twice he says this. Whatever you ask. "If you ask anything in my name, I will do it."

Thirty-five years ago this year I came as a pastor to Peninsula Bible Church. I didn't realize it at the time, but, looking back now, I must confess that I was motivated more by personal ambition than any other thing. I thought I was dedicated to the work of the Lord, and to some degree I was. But, on reflection, I can see how much of it came from an urge to be a well-known pastor, to make a name as a Christian leader, to see an effective ministry begin with a great congregation. Through these 35 years, through much pain and struggle, those dreams have been fulfilled. But I want to tell you this: They do not mean very much to me right now! As I look back, what means more to me are the hundreds of lives that have been changed as people heard the

Word of truth, right where you are sitting now. Homes have been revitalized, marriages have been restored, young people have been turned from hurtful and destructive practices, such as drug addiction, alcoholic abuse, false doctrines, and led into purity, and righteousness. I think of the great number of printed messages that have gone out to the far corners of the earth, and the hundreds of letters that keep coming back telling of dramatic, life-altering circumstances that have come out of reading these messages. I want to tell you that is not my work, nor is it the work of anybody associated with us here, loyal and helpful as they have been. That is the work of Jesus, his mighty work, conducted from the throne of power at the right hand of the Majesty on high, carried out through the Spirit by means of willing men and women who saw themselves in the same relationship to him as he is to the Father: "You in me and I in you." That is the greatest truth in the Bible.

How ignorant the world is of this! It is by far the greatest, most magnificent miracle that has ever taken place on this planet -- this mighty work of reaching, changing, healing and restoring. Yet the world sees nothing of the magnificence of what is happening here and in other places like this. But we know! This is what ought to lead us to give thanks to God, to joy in the ministry that he has given us, you and I alike. Let us carry on in His name.

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