

The Upper Room Discourse 'Troubled Heart'

by Conrad Mbewe

Jesus teaches us to trust in God and in Him, even in the midst of troubles and uncertainties, because He has a redemptive purpose at heart.

Duration: 44:34

Scripture: John 13:36 - 14:6, John 14:12, John 14:15, John 14:27

Topics: "Faith And Trust", "Spiritual Perseverance"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the human tendency to assume that life will always move forward and progress. However, there are times when we experience setbacks and things don't go as planned. The disciples faced this when Jesus revealed that one of them would betray him and their hopes for a glorious future seemed to be shattered. Despite these challenges, Jesus encourages them to trust in God and reminds them that He is still in control. The speaker also warns against overconfidence and emphasizes the importance of staying committed to the Lord and not becoming lukewarm or indifferent.

Transcript

And turn with me to John chapter 14, John chapter 14. For the purpose of context, we will begin reading from chapter 13. John chapter 13, we'll commence reading from verse 36.

As you can see behind the flowers here that we are coming together around the Lord's table. And as has been our custom, we are going through the upper room discourse of our Savior beginning in chapter 13 a couple of months or years ago and slowly making our way towards chapter 17, in which we have the Lord's high priestly prayer. We have now reached the beginning of verse 14, but let me read the context beginning with verse 36 of the previous chapter.

Simon Peter asked him, Lord, where are you going? Jesus replied, where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later. Peter asked, Lord, why can't I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you. Then Jesus answered, will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.

Chapter 14, do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me.

In my father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I'm going there to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going. Now, the last time we looked at the words of the Lord Jesus in this section of scripture, you will remember that we were engaged in the discussion that took place between Peter and our Lord.

Essentially, the discussion amounted to the fact that although Jesus was speaking in terms of a new commandment I am giving you, and therefore you ought to love one another the way in which I've loved you, saying, look, I'm going to follow you. Maybe the others might not follow, but I am not the others. I am going to follow you.

And we learned from this the danger of self-confidence, the danger of self-confidence, which lurks very close to our hearts as individual Christians. We noted quickly that Peter must not be immediately condemned for the words that he spoke, because in many ways he was representing the affections of all true believers. Every true child of God has an attachment, not only to the Savior, but also to the things of God, a very real attachment, so that when that seems to be undergoing any form of threat, the true child of God is quickly going to rise to the occasion because he does not want that which he has come to treasure very close to his heart to come to an end.

And consequently, he may end up speaking the way in which Peter spoke. However, from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is very clear that Peter went one step beyond that attachment that believers have towards the Lord and the things of God. That line, which is an invisible line between our affections for the Lord and our self-confidence in ourselves, is one that is very visible to the Lord himself.

And consequently, he saw it in Peter. He saw that Peter had overstepped, and consequently, needed to hear the offside whistle. And so we spent a bit of time considering that, that we need as individuals to be wary of overstating our commitment to the Lord and to the things of God.

It's very easy in the midst of saying, others may backslide, but not me. Others may fall into sin, but not me. We may go beyond expressing our love for the Lord and end up expressing mere self-confidence.

And finally, therefore, we went on to see how we can discern that self-confidence in our lives. And the most obvious way is the way in which we become lukewarm or indifferent to the means of grace. When that antidote, well, we will engage our minds in it for some time to come.

But today, I just want us to begin biting into that antidote. And consequently, we will limit ourselves to the first verse, in which the Lord Jesus says, do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God.

Trust also in me. Now, the antidote that our Savior gives here is one that we all need to hear. We all need to hear it because at some stage or rather in your Christian life, you are going to suffer from a troubled heart.

And a troubled heart is not necessarily something that we all participate in collectively as God's people at once. No. Sometimes it is something that you suffer alone in the midst of God's people.

So everybody else seems to be all right. They seem to be going on OK. But for you, your soul is in trouble.

Now, what do we understand by a troubled heart? Essentially, it is when events in your life seem to strongly suggest that you are losing, that you are losing. Things are beginning to go backwards rather than forwards. You see, all of us as human beings have an entity in us called hope.

We are not always conscious of it. But the moment hope is threatened, we all become extremely anxious because it is very much part and parcel of our lives. God has made us in such a way that we are, I almost said animals, but that's not quite correct.

We are beings of progress. We always somehow assume that we will continue heading forward, whether it is in terms of family life or whether it is in terms of school and career or whether it is in terms of just the building up of a financial empire and property and so on. There's just something about us as human beings that causes us to assume that life will be going forward and not backwards.

But every so often, something happens in our lives that makes it abundantly clear to us, however much we might want to fight, that the backward step is starting. For the disciples here, it was the three pieces of bad news that the Lord Jesus had shared with them. The first one was that one of them was going to betray Him as their Messiah.

We know the results of that. It was Judas. And finally, he went out, and things were to happen later.

But all you need to know is that at this stage, these disciples were worried about that. We had been a good team. We were going forward very well.

What is this news that one among us is about to destroy the team and will still attack the Messiah Himself? Then, of course, was also the chief bad news, and it was the fact that the Messiah Himself was going away and that in going away, they were not going to come along with Him. Again, put yourself in their shoes. For three solid years, they had given up whatever it was that was the means of livelihood for them.

They had become attached to Him. They had followed Him wherever He went. And now, they were being told, we are parting ways.

I am leaving you. Now, that is retrogression. But the third is what they had just heard concerning Peter.

I tell you the truth. Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times. Who? Peter, the one who was so quick to speak in every situation.

He will disown you three times. Now, if Peter disowns you three times, what about us lesser mortals? So you have a situation here where everything suddenly is crumbling, no longer speaking in terms of progress. Now, everything was beginning to go backwards.

Obviously, this bred in them very distressing thoughts. As they sat around that meal table, thinking to themselves, in their hearts, sorrow had begun to grow. In their hearts, anxiety had begun to grow.

In their hearts, fear had begun to grow as well. Now, this troubled heart was not just something that remained with the disciples in the upper room. It is the experience of Christians, especially when you meet frowning providence.

Somehow, we assume, like every human being, that we are going to be heading forward. We assume that. But much more than that, we are the children of God, aren't we? We've got the great and glorious promises of God for our lives, don't we? We are seeking to please the Lord, aren't we? So of course, things ought to go well.

And then things begin to go in reverse gear. You've had a job, and all has been going well. Suddenly, you are laid off.

And try as you might to apply to 1,000 places, jobs aren't coming. And in the domestic sphere, the stress level begins to rise to unmanageable levels. And you are asking yourself the question, what will happen tomorrow? You come to church.

Everybody else, they are smiling. And you are saying to yourself, the only reason why they are smiling, they've got jobs. I don't.

Or it might be the ending of a relationship or marriage. Again, you assume, we got into courtship, we will get married. Alas, one day, your partner, your friend, says, fiapua.

Me, a Christian, I prayed about this, Lord. How can my relationship finish? I even consulted the elders. And they said to me, well, it looks like you are meant for each other.

How can things like this end? Or at a higher level marriage, that may end again, leaving you distraught. Or it may be the death of the breadwinner in the home. You were living at a particular standard in life because of your father or because of your uncle.

And you thanked God for this home in which you were. And then one day, bang, comes the news. He has died or she has died.

And that economic level comes crumbling down. And you have to move out of your present residential area into one which you never dreamt you were ever going to live in. And then we're still told that you cannot continue with school anymore.

You have to wait, you have this and that, and so on. That future that you took for granted seems to be caving in on you. Or it may be trouble in the church, persecution by the state that takes place.

And consequently, the church has to scatter. And you start asking yourself, this which made up so much of my life, where is it now? Could it be that the church that has been the center of our activities, all that is no more? Or it could be not so much persecution, but backslidings in the church. Individuals that at one time you looked up to, suddenly you hear the bad news that they have backslidden, they've thrown in the towel.

And it's not just one, it's another one there, and another one there. And it leaves you sorrowful, it leaves you anxious, it leaves you full of fear. Is this going somewhere? Is this real? And so on and so forth.

I could multiply examples. And what I'm trying to show here is that this is a very real phenomenon in the lives of God's people. It may not happen every day, but it is something that's going to happen here and there.

And one day, it could be you. You come to church, and everybody else seems to be fine. But for you, your life has entered into reverse gear.

And consequently, you are sorrowful. You are full of anxieties and fear about tomorrow. Well, what we discover concerning these words here of our Lord is, in fact, that Jesus is interested in our emotional state.

He is. He had just broken the bad news. I'll be with you only a little longer.

Where I am going, you cannot come. He's just broken the bad news. One of you is going to betray me.

He's just broken the bad news. One of you is going to deny me three times over. Their hearts are troubled.

And Jesus, reading their hearts, immediately says, do not let your hearts be troubled. In other words, the state you are in is a very bad state. You and I need to address it.

A Christian must never content himself with being in a state of distressing thoughts that are robbing him of joy. He must never be content with that. The Lord is saying, let's deal with it.

How? Well, in the immediate context, Jesus says two things. The first is, trust in God. Trust in God.

What does he mean by that? You see, the main reason why your hope should begin to crumble in your hands is because you have no assurance of the fact that the one who is in charge of history is interested in you. The simple way to show this is, if we can just quickly turn to 1 Corinthians and chapter 4, or maybe one which is a little more precise, let's quickly go to Ephesians 2 instead. Ephesians 2, I think that one develops it very quickly.

Ephesians 2 and verse 11. The Bible says that, therefore, remember that formerly you were Gentiles by birth and called uncircumcised by those who call themselves the circumcision, that done in the body by the hands of men. Remember that at that time, you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, and foreigners to the covenants of the promise.

Now listen to this. Without hope and without God in the world. The two of them go together.

The reason why the Gentiles were without hope was because they were without God in the world. They were separate from Christ. They were excluded from citizenship in Israel.

They were foreigners to the covenants of the promise. They had nothing strong, stable to hang on to. And consequently, their lives were exposed and vulnerable.

But those who have God can afford to sleep in the backseat, knowing that all will be well. That's what the Lord Jesus Christ has in mind when he says, trust in God. God holds the reins of history.

Nothing happens in this world, nothing happens in your life without him allowing it. Now, if you don't trust him, three thoughts are going through your mind. One is the possibility that he has forgotten about me.

In the midst of running his world, this complex, diverse, huge universe, he's forgotten that I'm thinking. And how much I might be pulling by his trousers to say, God, look here, I'm in reverse gear, I'm rolling backwards. He's too busy with the bigger picture to actually hear me.

Or another possible thought is this. He doesn't love me anymore. Maybe he did once upon a time.

Maybe he cared back then. All those glorious days when I was going uphill and we were continuing onwards. Progress was on our hands.

But clearly, he no longer loves me. Because if he did, he could not allow. Or it could be an even worse thought, that he's not all-powerful after all.

If he's mindful of me and he cares for me, he's concerned about me, and yet I am rolling backwards, heading as it were for a crash, and he's not stopping the retrogression, could it be that he actually can't stop it? No doubt about it, for the disciples, such thoughts would have begun to fill their minds. Here they

were, they knew that Jesus was the Messiah. They knew he was the Son of God.

They knew that according to the promises of the Old Testament, he was to restore Israel in its glory. He was as it were to remove it from the clutches of the Roman colonialists. They were to enjoy a most glorious day in the future.

And they were with him. They were supporting him. They were his disciples, his followers.

And then suddenly, it's as though the plan has aborted in mid-air. The question is why? What's gone wrong? And Jesus is saying to them, Trust God. He knows what he is doing.

Even this reversal of fortunes is something that he has allowed. Trust him. Trust him.

Disciples, trust in God. He is still in full control. And he is a faithful God.

He knows what he is doing. Now we must accept that this is extremely difficult when everything around you seems to be going wrong. You feel like if it was a car that God was driving, you feel like saying, stop the vehicle, stop the vehicle.

You come into the back seat, let me take over the driving. It's very clear, God, you don't know where we are supposed to be going. Let me take over.

Yet Jesus is insisting, Trust his wisdom. Trust him. He knows why he has put your life, your fortunes into reverse gear.

He knows it. Trust him. It doesn't stop there.

It must be interesting that he goes on to say, Trust also in me. In fact, the actual rendering in the Greek is something like this. Trust in God and in me.

Trust also. And as I've always said to you, the Greek emphasizes by what it says first. In other words, in the first place, Jesus' emphasis is trust.

Trust God. In the second place, his emphasis is himself. Now, by that he's not suggesting that he is not God.

His emphasis there is the particular role that he is playing in terms of the unfolding of redemptive history. He's saying, look, trust me too. Now, for the disciples, it made a lot of physical sense.

Because he's sitting in front of them and he's saying, Look, trust God. He knows what he is doing in this retrogression of fortunes. But he's also saying, trust me as well.

Don't worry. I know what I'm doing. I haven't changed from the Jesus you have known for the last three years.

I am the same. Are you willing to trust me? As I go out through that door with my suitcase? Are you willing to trust that I am not abandoning you? That I have your interest at heart? Trust me. Trust me.

It's the same for us. We may not be in the same physical room with Jesus. But it's important nonetheless for us to realize that the rule of history, the reigns of history, are presently in the hands of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He's the one who is in charge of history. God the Father has handed over to him the kingdom. Jesus is right now sitting on the throne of the entire universe in complete control of all things.

Nothing happens in your life without his bidding. And he is the one who determines all that transpires in history. And what he is saying by pointing to himself is simply this.

That when providence begins to frown, don't think I have forgotten your existence. Don't think I no longer love you. Don't think that I am not as powerful as my word claims I am.

Rather, realize that I have a redemptive purpose at heart. I know what I am doing primarily in terms of the whole project of redemption. For the disciples, obviously, they were soon to realize that he was leaving them in order to die on the cross.

He was going to die, not because of mere weakness on his part, but because that was the only way of salvation. More than that, three days later upon being raised from the dead, he was going to ascend to heaven. Again, he was going to leave them, not because he was running away from his enemies, leaving them in the hands of their enemies, but as he goes on to say, I am going to prepare a place for you.

Trust me. I'm doing all this for you. For your spiritual betterment.

For your welfare. For your eternal well-being. Trust me.

He is taking us to a glorious consummation. And it's not just us in terms of me. It is us in terms of the Christian church.

In terms of the Christian church. Last week I was speaking in the evening service about the early missionaries and how they would come into Africa and within a few days half of them would die of malaria. And as their bodies are arriving back in their former countries, or the countries of origin, and barriers taking place, even more Christians would again be committing themselves to go back into Africa in order to share the word.

Think for a moment of a child. A child of a missionary who soon after arriving in Africa would die of malaria. Or a spear would be put through his ribs and the body taken back.

Think of that child standing by the graveside of the father thinking, where is my future now? What is a loss of life? God, why should you do a thing like this? Where are you God? If that child now could peep from heaven and see this, that child would say, God, I'm glad I did not take over the driver's seat. Because it's the blood of the martyrs that is the seed of the church. It's because of the apparent loss that this has now happened.

Jesus is saying, trust me. Trust me. I know what I'm doing.

There is a big plan. A thousand times bigger than your little life that is being moved forward. It is rolling forward.

In the midst of that big plan, there may be need for you to go some steps backwards. Don't worry. I know what I am doing in the midst of this big, big plan.

All is well. All is well. I want to ask, are you presently with a troubled heart? Are you right now in that situation of deep sorrow, perplexing thoughts, anxiety about where your life is going, if it's going anywhere

at all, fear that the end may be very near? Do you feel as if you are sitting in a sinking ship, that there is no future, there is no hope for you? Suddenly, all that you were building seems to be crumbling in on you.

Well, the message today is that Jesus knows what you're going through. And he's concerned, very concerned about your distressing thoughts. Very concerned about it.

Those thoughts that are filling you with anxiety and fear, he's very concerned about it. And he is saying to you, stop looking below. Stop looking at other people.

Look up to heaven. Trust in God. Trust also in me.

We know what we are doing. We know. Cast your care upon the Lord, for he cares for you.

Trust him. He has a saving purpose, a real purpose, even in the midst of every frowning providence. You are afraid of a sinking ship? Well, Jesus is basically saying to you, that ship won't sink.

It won't. In many ways, we are like that baby eagle that is being taught to fly. For a while, enjoying the warmth of the nest, the great food being brought to us freely, and we are enjoying it there.

Everything we need, it's all there for us in that nice nest. What we don't realize is that our wings are not getting stronger. Until father eagle or mother eagle finally says, well, let's make redemptive progress now.

And he comes and gets you out of that nice warm nest. On his back. Takes you into the middle of nowhere.

And then tilts over. And you begin to tumble down. And as you are tumbling down in the air, you are screaming blue murder at mother eagle.

Why did you bring me in this world only to abandon me in the air? Now I'm about to crash my head. And you're saying all kinds of things. Until before you know it, he comes under you, picks you up and takes you back into the air.

And he starts complaining to you. But how could you do this? And he's saying to you, I want your wings to be strong. I want you to learn to trust.

To learn to trust. As long as you continue positively, you don't really know what it means to trust. And while you're arguing with him, he again tilts over.

And down you go again. Oh, what a heart-rending experience. Feel like giving up.

But in due season, you'll learn. That's what the Lord is saying here. He's got a purpose.

We can't see it now. But let us learn to trust him. To trust him.

He loves us. One of the ways in which he has proved his love for us is in the death of his son. One of the ways that he reminds us of that love is by this meal that we are about to partake of.

It symbolizes the death he died. But much more than that, it points forward, as we shall be learning next time, to the mansion with many rooms that he has gone to prepare for us. And he says, whenever you eat it, do so in remembrance of me, and do so until I come.

So troubled heart, trust in God. Trust in his son. God knows what he is doing.

Let's pray. Eternal and gracious God, these things are easier said than done. Especially when we are in the midst of troubled years.

When a child of God walks in darkness, not knowing whether there will be anywhere to place the foot for the next step. Lord, though fellow Christians may not be able to sound the depths of the feelings of agony and despair, we thank you that you feel the pain of your people. And yet we thank you for your counsel this evening, that you will not abandon your bigger plan because of mere thoughts of anxiety in our hearts.

Rather you want us to strengthen our eagle wings that we might soar into the heights of genuine faith, of living faith in you. Oh Father, help us to come out of our state of despair, out of our state of sorrow, anxiety and fear, and help us to see the clear day above those clouds. Help us to trust you, to trust you, to trust you, that you know what you are doing and that all will be well.

Father, especially as we tend to break bread and drink of the cup, we pray that you will be pleased to once again see the depth of your love for us. That though our lives are now in reverse gear and we do not seem to be heading forward, you still love us with an eternal love. Oh grant that the partaking of this bread and the drinking of this cup will be blessed to that end.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. For more information visit www.fema.org

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