
Comfort for the Troubled in Heart

DAVE BAST

About two-thirds of the way through the Gospel of John, there is a series of chapters containing Jesus' upper room discourse. The teaching he offered his disciples on their last evening together. Jesus takes that opportunity to impress some important truths on his disciples' minds and hearts, sort of like parents giving final instructions to their kids before heading out for the evening. In today's *Groundwork* program we will look at one of those chapters; one that includes perhaps the most wonderful promises Jesus ever made to anyone. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and we are welcoming Ruth Boven, the minister of pastoral care at the Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Ruth, thanks for joining us for this series on comfortable words; words full of comfort from the scriptures.

RUTH BOVEN

I am glad to be here with you, Dave, and with you, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Each of our programs has a different scenario; today we are just thinking about times when, in our lives, in the church, in our families, times when the bottom line of how you would describe how you are feeling is: I am troubled. There is some trouble going on. The passage that we are going to go to that you just referred to, Dave, in the upper room discourses in those great chapters in John, mostly it is going to be John 14, but if we are going to dig into John 14 and some wonderful words there, we really have to start with John 13, and what is going on. What is the setting? We cannot just start at John 14:1; we have to back up.

RUTH BOVEN

Right, yes. We need to back up into 13 because Jesus is going to be saying goodbye. His disciples for the first time are hearing this and they are troubled. They have been with him; they have been traveling; they have been learning from him. I am sure the relationships have grown deep, and now Jesus is saying I am leaving you; and it must have felt very shocking, as well as fearful, fearful. Yes, I am sure their hearts became quickly troubled.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes. ³³My children, I will be with you only a little longer – that is from John 13 – you will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now, where I am going, you cannot come. ³⁴A new command I give you: Love one another as I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know you are my disciples if you love one another. ³⁶Simon Peter asked him, “Lord, where are you going?” And Jesus replied, “Where I am going, you cannot follow, but you will follow later. ³⁷Peter asked, “Lord, why cannot I follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸And Jesus answered, “Will you really lay down your life for me? Very truly I tell you, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times.”

DAVE BAST

So, immediately I think we know where we are. We are in the upper room, and Jesus has just finished the Lord's Supper with his disciples. It is interesting; John is such a different Gospel from the first three we call the Synoptics, because it means to view from the same vantage point; to view together, and they seem to tell basically the same story, but John comes with all of this other material, and so, he alone has Jesus saying to them: You know, I am leaving. I want you to love one another. There is the parent saying to the kids, now, do not fight. Be nice to each other while we are gone.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Just in reading this now, it struck me how funny it is. So, Jesus says: Okay, I am leaving; and now I want to tell you some things. So, he goes on for a bit about loving for each other, and then when he gets done with that, it is like Peter was not even listening. He says: Lord, where are you going? It is like he did not even hear the other stuff because all he heard was: I am leaving. And after that, there was this roaring in Peter's ears. He did not even hear the stuff about love one another initially, and so: What did you say before that? Where are you going? They are very troubled.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

RUTH BOVEN

Yes, yes.

DAVE BAST

And that all sets up these familiar and beloved words from John 14, beginning in verse 1.

RUTH BOVEN

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ²My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ 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. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going." ⁵Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" ⁶Jesus answered, "I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there it is. The disorientation of the disciples keeps coming through. Thomas is confused. If we read another verse further, Phillip will ask a question; everybody is getting in on this. They are just bewildered. What is very important to remember is that in that first verse: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Jesus is saying: Do not let your hearts be troubled – and that is important to say because there is trouble all around. Judas has already left just a little earlier in John 13; Judas slunk out of the room to go do his dirty deed. Now Peter has been knocked for a loop by having his disowning of Jesus three times was just predicted. Boy, I will tell you, if you want trouble, this is it! This is a troubling context, and in fact, I have often suggested to preaching students that maybe we need to change the acoustics of this passage a little bit. We often read Jesus' words: Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe in me. We read it confidently...

DAVE BAST

Triumphalistically...

SCOTT HOEZEE

I would not be surprised if Jesus had a tear in his eye and a quiver in his chin as he said this because his friends were falling apart all around him. His death was imminent. Judas is already gone. Peter's denial has been foretold. You talk about trouble! This is it!

RUTH BOVEN

Right; and Jesus sounds, I think, so pastoral and parent-like here. Well, he calls them children back in 13; so I think you are right, Scott, about the ambience of the room, right? It is more grief along with them, in a sense.

DAVE BAST

Yes, I totally agree. I think that pastoral note that you mentioned is the right one, Scott, because it is interesting, even the word that is used here for troubled – do not let your hearts be troubled – it is a very strong word in the original. It is *tarassesth?*, and a different form of that word actually appears in John 11, to describe Jesus' reaction at the tomb of Lazarus, his friend, when he finally comes face to face with death it says he was greatly troubled – same word – so Jesus knows what they are going through because he has felt the same thing; this amazing thing that the God of the universe, who is so high and so great and so invincible and so powerful, comes down and climbs inside our skin and feels what we feel. He can sympathize with us.

RUTH BOVEN

He knows our grief.

DAVE BAST

Yes; do not let your hearts be troubled. It makes me think, actually, in an earlier program we talked about the mountains falling into the sea, Psalm 46 – the shaking and the trembling – well, that happens inside his disciples, and it is going on right now.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, as Ruth said, too, He is being very pastoral here. He is not scolding them or haranguing them or waving a bony finger in their faces or giving them some lecture in the abstract. He is talking to them from the heart of trouble and saying: But, your hearts, your hearts, your hearts – trust me; latch on to me; you have believed in God, now believe in me – somehow, I will get you through this in ways that you can have some calm on the inside even when the world around you is falling apart. Given again that it is Jesus speaking these words, probably again in a broken voice; he himself, perhaps. He knows what he is talking about.

DAVE BAST

Don't you find this, Ruth, that when you are dealing with people who are in trouble, whose hearts are troubled or they are in grief; there is a tendency on the part of others to want to cheer them up?

RUTH BOVEN

Oh, yes.

DAVE BAST

Because we do not want to feel vicarious pain. We want people to be happy all the time. If people are not happy around us, then we might feel troubled. Some of that troubled heart might seep into us. So, we are always saying: Do not feel bad. Do not feel bad. And that is not what Jesus is saying here.

RUTH BOVEN

No, and that is not what we are called to do either. You know, to come beside someone in their grief; to identify, in a sense, with their grief; to acknowledge the grief, is really the best way, and it is the way Jesus here sets us an example.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And He has reasons for saying it. He is going to make a triplet of great promises, which is why our hearts can stay untroubled even when there is trouble; and we will look at those promises in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. Along with Scott Hoezee and Ruth Boven, I am Dave Bast, and today we are digging into the familiar words of John 14: Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. Trust me, Jesus says. Look, I know you believe in God, but I want you to believe in me, too; which is actually rather a staggering claim for a Jewish rabbi to make, isn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, he is putting himself in the place of God, putting himself right alongside God; but then he goes on to say something else, and we will unpack this in this part of the program.

²My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³And 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.

So, Jesus here is not just saying in the abstract: Let not your hearts be troubled because, you know, what we were saying earlier: Cheer up. It is not so bad. Buck up, come on. No, no, no, no; he is grounding this in three really great promises.

DAVE BAST

The first one is the promise of a place. He has just told them: I am going away. I have to leave you. You cannot follow me – at least not yet – someday you will. Now he tells us where he is going; he is going to prepare a place in the Father's House. We know what it is going to cost him to prepare that place, and that is why they really cannot follow him yet, because he has to go there via the cross, but when he gets there, he is going to get something ready for them, so that someday they will be there with him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Ruth, I am imagining in your ministry now, and we have probably experienced this, Dave, you and I as well; but I would imagine that when you meet with grieving people, one of the main things they want to know is where is my loved one? Here Jesus is saying: In a place I have prepared.

RUTH BOVEN

Yes, and of course, there are always more questions around that. We want to know more details about that, and we do not have a lot of those details; and yet, the greatest promise – the greatest comfort – is that they are with God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that has to be enough sometimes.

DAVE BAST

Yes, that where I am there you may be. A lot of the images of the Bible – and we have all dealt with this, too – have to do with the end of time and the return of Christ, and we are going to talk about that in just a moment, too: Streets of gold and pearly gates and harps and choirs and all that stuff – some of it is not even in the Bible, but what is there is picture language. It is trying to describe the indescribable.

RUTH BOVEN

That is right.

DAVE BAST

I love an image or a set of images that comes from one of the Narnia stories; the last one, *The Last Battle*, where the children come, and it is at the very end and they are sad because even though Aslan has won the battle, they think they are going to be sent back and they want to stay in Narnia; and he says: Oh, you do not get it yet. You are actually dead now and you are in Narnia and you do not ever have to leave. And it ends this way: The term is over, the holidays have begun, the dream has ended, this is the morning. That is all

summed up in that image of home that Jesus talks about. It is the Father's home and that is where you will be with me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, you have a place, that is promise number one; but then there is more; there is a second promise. If you go a little bit further – now this is beyond where we read earlier, but a little bit deeper – verse 18 and following Jesus says:

¹⁸But I am not going to leave you. So, he has told them he is going to leave; as we said in the earlier part of this program, he said I am going to leave, and that just threw them all for a loop. He said: But I am not leaving you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day, you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me, and I am in you.

²⁷“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.”

DAVE BAST

There it is again; do not let your hearts be troubled.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But now he is saying: I am not really going to leave. There is going to be another one who is going to come. What we sometimes call the *paraclete*, the Holy Spirit. You are really not going to be disconnected from me. Physically, yes; but with the eyes of faith, you will still see me. And that is the second great promise here.

Ruth Boven:

I think about an illustration that Craig Barnes uses in a sermon, and I do not remember which text he was preaching on, but he talks about a child who wakes up in the middle of the night and who is afraid, and so a parent rises from the bed and comes to the door, and they do not just stand there in the doorway and start listing off truths and realities and trying to reason; no, they come to them and they draw close and they hold and they comfort in that way; and that is what Jesus is saying here: As I leave you, I am not just leaving you with some truths, some teachings; I am leaving you with myself. I will still be with you.

DAVE BAST

Yes, it is more than a promise; it is a presence. It sounds like he is speaking in riddles here, and so, no wonder they are a little bit confused. They do not quite get it; but I think that everyone who knows and loves him gets it. The promise is: Yes, we have a future. We have a home in heaven. Sometimes, especially young ministers who have just finished seminary and they have heard all about: Well, let's not be Greek and dualistic and make too much out of heaven. It is really the new creation. Yes, yes, yes; I get all of that; but do not get rid of heaven, either, because that is the promise, too.

When people are bewildered and troubled, we say to them: No, your loved one is in heaven. He is with the Lord. He loved the Lord, and now he is with the Lord; but more than that, Jesus is with us. So, it is not just that he promises a home for us in the skies by and by...

RUTH BOVEN

Right.

DAVE BAST

It is that he promises to come and be at home in us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the story that you just told, Ruth, so like frightened children in the night, basically Jesus is saying: When you call my name, I will be there. By my Spirit – true, not physically in the flesh – but you call out in fear during the night and I will be with you.

So, when we die or our loved ones die, when we are in troubled circumstance, we know that there is a place; we know that the Spirit comes; and then there is one more promise in this passage: I will come back and take

you to be with me. So, that closes the circle. Why not let our hearts be troubled when by all rights we could be troubled in a troubling world? Well, because God has a plan; he has a place; he has a *paraclete* – he has his Spirit in our hearts – and at the end of it all, we will be reunited.

DAVE BAST

There is a whole lot of stuff here in this chapter – John Chapter 14.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thick theology.

DAVE BAST

There is the whole Trinity, because Jesus does not say only I will come and live with you, but my Father and I will both come and live with you through somehow the Person of the Holy Spirit. Actually, he says: If you knew about all of this – if you really realize what I am telling you – you would want me to leave physically because this is even better, in a way. He can be with all of his people all the time. He is not just limited to one spot on earth in Palestine; but then that final, climactic promise, which is hinted at here when he says: I will come back. It is not just a spiritual calling us home someday, but it is actually a visible, public, final return when the Triune God – Father, Son, and Spirit – will make all things new, including us; and that is pretty good.

RUTH BOVEN

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is as good as it gets. But there is an interesting other little part of this passage that we are going to want to look at before we close. It is not catch or anything, but it is something that reminds us that to really benefit from and enjoy the comfort of all of these promises that keep our hearts from being troubled – to really experience that fully, as a community, we have something to do. We will look at that in a moment.

Segment 3

RUTH BOVEN

I am Ruth Boven, here with Dave Bast and Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we are in John 14 – John 13 and 14 – hearing these great promises that we do not need to be troubled because Jesus has a plan; he is still with us; he comes to us when we call to him; he will come back someday; but in the meantime – a little truth in advertising here – in the meantime, those promises are offered – not just to anybody – but to people who do something.

DAVE BAST

Yes, remember; step one: He is talking to his disciples; he is in the upper room, and Judas has bailed; Judas is not actually one of his disciples; so there is no reason to think these promises apply to Judas; and in addition to the promises and the wonderful words of comfort, and I will be with you and I will come for you, there are a bunch of commands, and you cannot really – what God has joined together let no one put asunder – you cannot grab the promises and say: I am not so interested in the commandments.

RUTH BOVEN

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, he begins back in Chapter 13, as we saw, by saying: You need to love each other as I have loved you; but here in Chapter 14, He goes on to say: You need to love me as well. So, we get verse 23: Whoever loves me, I will love him and I will manifest myself to him. You want me to be with you; that promise is for those who

love me.

SCOTT HOEZEE

John 13 in particular – the foot-washing scene in John, but also this passage – all these upper room – we often read these in the church year on what we call Maundy Thursday; the day before Good Friday; the day before Jesus – and of course, we hear that term Maundy Thursday, but probably hardly anybody in the church knows what Maundy means. It comes from the Latin, from the word from which we get *mandate* – the commands – so the heart of Maundy Thursday is a mandate – a command – command is in there, also: If you love me you will keep my commandments. So, you need to love one another and you need to love me. All of these great promises come true to people whose lives are saturated with love.

I think as pastors we have probably seen that. People who know the love of God and who live it out, they are the ones who somehow lean into these promises the best.

DAVE BAST

I like that idea that love is the crowning mark of a follower of Jesus, and it begins with love for him. I do not think Jesus is some kind of egomaniac or some kind of jealous spouse who says: You have got to love me! If you do not love me... love me... love me! He is not needy; but what he recognizes is that when the transforming power of his Spirit really touches a person's life and changes their heart and opens their eyes, they cannot help but be drawn to him.

RUTH BOVEN

Right, yes.

DAVE BAST

There is this sense that he becomes the center of our life, and that is the real testimony that the Spirit is at work in us.

RUTH BOVEN

I think about being filled with his love – we often talk about and pray for God to fill us with his love – a filling that then ends up overflowing to others. It is not so much about love me in this selfish way and do what I tell you, it is open yourself up to the filling of my love and it will overflow.

Yes, there are people that I am sure all of us can think of who so evidently show that. You know that their relationship with God is real and is meaningful because you see them loving others. You see that especially in people who love others who are not very lovable.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, and it is dangerous to generalize – and I certainly would never put any names with what I am about to say – but as a pastor, I observe, too, that people who were deeply, deeply loving – it is the first word that comes to mind when you mention this person's name to anybody – loving, loving, just full of love, love for the unlovely, love for the unlovable or love for the tough to love – the people who are filled with Jesus' love – when they go through a time of great crisis or loss, and when they are in a situation where their hearts could genuinely and legitimately be troubled, they often have serenity. They are still sad – it is not like they are unaffected, but they often have a serenity that you just sense they are drawing out of that deep well of love; whereas, there are others who are a little prickly. I am not saying they are not Christians; they are sisters and brothers in the Lord, but they are a little prickly. They do not have a reputation and sometimes they are the ones who react in anger when something bad happens, and they are the first ones to fall apart. I am not saying that is inevitable, but you do have that sense that when people manage to have untroubled hearts in troubling times, they are drawing off that deep well of love – love for God – love for Jesus – love for each other.

DAVE BAST

Yes; that same thought, really, struck me, Ruth, when you were sharing just a moment or two ago; the contrast between trouble in your heart and love in your heart; the latter drives out the former, or at least tempers the former; and real comfort often comes to us not when we focus on ourselves and our needs and

our problems and our fears, but when we turn outward and engage and do something for Jesus. Mother Teresa's great line: Do something beautiful for Jesus; namely, in the face of a neighbor or a neighbor's need. When you do that – just obey my commands, Jesus says. That is what it really means to love me. It is not so much a matter of saying all the right words and singing gushy songs, but do what I tell you to, which is to love others and the trouble will be eased; your hearts will be saved by that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, amen. Thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast and Ruth Boven, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into the scriptures. So, visit groundworkonline.com and tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

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