

The Heart of Christ ~ the message of the Upper Room Discourse (John 13-17)

"...having loved His own who were in the world, He love them to the end"(John 13:1.)

The Consoling Savior

The Believer's Response to an Antagonistic World

John 16:1-4

1 These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling. 2 They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God. 3 These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me. 4 But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.

Quite some time ago lived a man – a seemingly ordinary man, who, when He came of age, set out on His own. This man seemingly came from ordinary stock, trained to work with His hands, and yet He left that pursuit and called to Himself twelve seemingly ordinary men. From a tax-collector to rough and rugged fishermen, there was nothing that set these men apart and little they necessarily had in common, except for one thing – they had been called by and responded to the voice of God. Now most of you know that I speak of the twelve disciples of Jesus. Of that group, we know that one, Judas, was marked out from the beginning as the betrayer; but the other eleven would be used by Jesus to do something that even Jesus Himself did not accomplish while on the earth.

Consider that for the three and one half years of Jesus' ministry, Jesus remained relatively obscure and knowledge of Him scarcely went beyond the territory of Palestine, and area about 120 miles north to south and 30-40 miles east to west. So what was it about the Person and message of Jesus that caused fishermen to leave their nets and tax-collectors to forsake their lucrative income? What was it about Jesus that inspired these men to stand firm against the antagonism of the world and faithfully proclaim a message of hope and eternal life through Jesus even when the world would mock, ridicule and even kill for such a proclamation? Some of what I share here is based upon tradition, some is fact, but listen to the great cost these men paid for following Jesus:

Matthew suffered martyrdom by the sword in Ethiopia. Mark died at Alexandria, after being dragged through the city. Luke was hanged on an olive tree in Greece. Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downward. James was beheaded at Jerusalem. James the less was thrown from a pinnacle of the Temple and beaten to death below. Philip was hanged against a pillar in Phrygia. Bartholomew was flayed alive. Andrew was bound to a cross, whence he preached to his persecutors till he died. Thomas was run through the body at Coromandel, in India. Jude was shot to death with arrows. Matthias was first stoned, and then beheaded. Barnabas was stoned to death by Jews at Salonica. Paul, "in deaths oft," was beheaded at Rome by Nero.

Not exactly what you might call the most tantalizing means of attracting followers. These men paid with their very lives so that they might fellowship with the saints, that they might see people baptized, that they might partake together of the Lord's supper. And sometimes we can barely get out of bed on Sunday so as to be ready to enthusiastically worship God and intently hear God. We struggle to reach out to one another throughout the week; to encourage one another; to challenge one another, to admonish one another to live intensely godly lives that point people to the power and wonder of God. And yet for all these things are more, many of the early

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disciples and apostles gave their lives. So what was it that made such men willing to die? What was it that inspired and enabled these men to so faithfully, so boldly and so willingly follow Jesus Christ, even if it meant such death? Do you desire such inspiration? Beloved, these men were so awed, so transformed by the person and message of Christ that they had but one response – to hear and to heed the words of Christ – they listened and they obeyed – they were instructed and then inspired to surrender all they had and all they were so that they might gain all of Christ. For these men, men to whom you owe a debt of gratitude for their boldness and sacrifice; for it was God through these men by whom you can confess faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior this morning, it is these men, that when they continued to draw near to Jesus by listening to His words, believed upon, trusted in, acted upon these words. Are you listening to Jesus? How do you know? Are you practicing what He tells you to practice?

Before us then in our text is the very root of the trust that these men hoped in. Before us is the catalyst that will ignite any heart willing to hear and to heed the words of Christ. Before us are the consoling words of Jesus – words that encouraged and reminded His followers; words that still are to encourage and remind we who confess Christ today, that regardless of the world's responses or actions against the followers of Christ, they must and can remain faithful in following Jesus. Are you listening to Jesus? Are you practicing what He tells you to practice?

We live in a world where the teachings, the ideas, the precepts of godliness, of living faithful and moral lives are being challenged and changed all around us. Beloved, it is only a matter of time before some of the social issues that concern us as believers, be it what defines a marriage or when does life begin, are defined in godless human terms rather than according to the Book. Marriage, morality, purity, faithfulness, work ethics, commitment – these are all being challenged by a way of thinking that is not Biblical. And the darker it gets; the more our culture moves away from godly principles, the more antagonistic, the more hostile, the more hurtful our culture will be against those of us who proclaim Jesus and who say that the one who says he abides in Jesus ought to walk (that is believe and behave) in the same manner as Jesus walked.

And so, like these disciples to whom Jesus is speaking to, we need words of encouragement, the consoling, hopeful words of the Savior. We, like these disciples who would over the next few years face trials they could have never dreamed of, need to hear and heed the words of Christ. And before us, in our text, Jesus has two key messages of consolation; two precious expressions of hope and comfort for those who would seek to live godly in a perverse and crooked generation. Notice how clearly these two messages of hope are identified in our text as Jesus says two times, once in verse 1 and again in verse 4, ***"these things I have spoken to you...so that..."*** There is a message that Jesus has given that brings to the disciple, the follower of Christ, a warning against apostasy – that is falling away from the faith (we will see this in verses 1-3); as well as a word of assurance to bolster faith (we will see this in verse 4).

So then, as we begin, let me set it up this way by asking you – are you hearing (listening to) and heeding (practicing) the words spoken by Christ so that you may not fall into sin and so that you may have your faith strengthened? Let us consider:

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I. A Warning Against Apostasy (16:1-3)

These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling.

As the time of Christ's betrayal, arrest and crucifixion approaches, and with it the beginning of an ever-increasing antagonism against Christ and His followers, Jesus begins with warning against apostasy. We read in verse one, **"These things I have spoken to you so that you may be kept from stumbling."** Let us begin by noting "these things" – what things is Jesus referring to? The immediate context, that is, what we find just before and right after these verses is what? Well, in John 15:27 we have Jesus commanding that the disciples would, like the Holy Spirit of God, be faithful witnesses of Jesus; those who would proclaim to the world the gospel, the message of salvation to the world. In John 15:26 and then again beginning in John 16:5-15, we have the teaching regarding the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the prime example and divine enabler of the bold and faithful witness of Jesus. Moving back to John 15:18-25, we see the hostility of the world against those who seek to live their lives for Jesus; noting that the world truly hates Jesus and His ways.

In addition to "these things", Jesus has also taught the disciples about faithfully serving one another through the foot washing of John 13; of fervently loving one another also in John 13; of trusting or believing in God and Jesus as there are future blessings for those who follow Him in John 14, along with additional promises of the Holy Spirit. These are the things Jesus had spoken. In fact, the way Jesus says this, **"these things I have spoken..."** is said in such a way as to call the followers of Christ to think back on what has been taught, because what has been taught was not only important at the time, but will continue to be important both in the present and in the future. In other words, we must never perceive of the words of Christ as being meaningful or only relevant to a time and culture long ago. What Jesus says here is every bit and meaningful and relevant to our time as it was to these first hearers. These words of Christ, words that encouraged and inspired the disciples can and must continue to inspire all who follow Christ in every generation.

So, Jesus wants His followers to think back on what He has taught in this upper room discourse. Why? What benefit is there to hear and to heed these words? How marvelous it is that Jesus answers that question for us. We are not left to speculate or offer our opinions on the subject. Jesus says the reason why we must hear and heed His words are, **"so that you may be kept from stumbling."** The word for "stumbling" here comes from the Greek word "skandalizo" – from which we get our English verb "scandalize" – meaning "to offend; to dishonor, or disgrace. The Greek verb more literally means "to trip up; or to ensnare in something hurtful or harmful." It came to be used in the NT and early church times to speak of enticing to or falling into sin. And so, what we see Jesus saying to His followers is this – "I have spoken these things, of your need to serve and to love one another; of your need to trust and believe in Me; of your need to know how the world will perceive you if you follow Me so fervently, so that you will not fall into sin – so that you may not have your faith falter and find yourself moving away.

Beloved, there something about the natural human response to persecution, pressure, animosity, and antagonism that Jesus knows the disciples must understand; that unless you are prepared for it; unless you are aware of its coming and presence, the natural man with either withdraw from his convictions and beliefs or he will conform to the opposing beliefs around him. Jesus is warning His followers that when you live for Him, there will be people that look at you as

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if you were foolish, that will scorn you or speak ill of you, or even desire to hurt you. And the question before us is this – how does the believer resist the temptation to withdraw – that is to clam up and say nothing; and how does the believer resist the temptation to conform, to simply change or modify his point of view so that it will not be so offensive to the world? What does Jesus say? "These things – my teachings, my warnings, I have spoken to you, so that [by knowing and practicing these things] you may not fall away from the faith, that you may not offend God by sinning against His revealed truth. It is interesting that in John 15:18-25 Jesus essentially says the world will be offended by the words and life of the committed believer and now here in John 16:1, if we don't hear and heed these words of Jesus – if we fail to diligently learn and apply the principles of serving one another, loving one another, fully trusting in God, being dependent upon the Holy Spirit, of expecting the world's hostility, then we may appease the world, but we end up offending God and create a scandal – calling ourselves believers when our words and actions do not match up with the practice of Christ.

Now then, just what are the temptations for us to possibly, even to the slightest degree, stumble, to fall away? Beloved, it is possible for believer's to fall into apostasy – to fall away, or move away from the faith – and generally speaking, such a falling away can be linked to a failure to be engaged in service as Jesus commands in John 13; or to fervently love one another as Jesus commanded in John 13:34-35; or to faithfully trust in God and Jesus as called for in John 14:1-3; or to know beforehand that there is no way to please the world and to please God at the same time. So then, what are the temptations that might cause us to fudge, to justify not living whole-heartedly for Jesus in order to appease the world? Let us note a few things we glean from Jesus in 16:2. Jesus says, ***"They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service [as a priest] to God."***

Here Jesus tells them that following Jesus is not going to be popular among the mainstream religious masses. It is amazing to me how much nonsense and how much bad theology is being propagated and spread through mainstream Christianity. I have heard it said before and generally agree that if something is popular in mainstream Christianity, it is probably not worth following after. But such thinking and practice can make you unpopular. Several years ago, when the denomination of which we are still a part of, sought to put women on the Board of Directors over the local churches and pastors, I stood against that, seeking to faithfully apply the principles contained in the Scriptures that a woman is not to teach or have authority over a man – not because she is incapable, but because of God's stated order and structure. Such a view did not earn me any degree of standing with the majority of the district churches and I was not re-elected to my position on the Board of Directors and our church has been on the outs with the district ever since. I do not say that joyfully, but simply to point out that the church is not a democracy, but rather it is a Christocracy – Christ and His Word head and guide the church into all faith and practice. But for sake of "unity" – for sake of my own "career" with the denomination, I could have withdrawn or conformed. Beloved, I would much rather be disregarded by our denomination than by our Lord Jesus Christ.

But let's make this practical, what are some potential points of stumbling for you? What are potential areas of withdrawal or conformity you are tempted to when considering holding fast to God's Word or of professing Jesus faithfully? Let me give you a few and see if any of these

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might be true of you to some degree or another. Are you tempted to squelch your testimony of Jesus for fear of alienation, isolation or rejection by family, friends or co-workers? Such a squelching would be your own stumbling. Are you concerned that by speaking faithfully or rightly about Jesus you might be marginalized by other, considered backward; "O there's Ed again on his Jesus kick...just smile and let him show how foolish he is." Perhaps you hold back your testimony because you fear being perceived as narrow-minded. Isn't interesting that having a passion for souls, expressing a concern for where one spends eternity can be seen as narrow-minded? Sometimes we hold back our testimony because we don't want to be seen as intrusive, or just plain ignorant. Perhaps you fear being labeled as judgmental, or as antagonistic yourself. Do any of these strike a chord?

Jesus says to his followers in effect that they need to know how the world will respond to them, in hostility, putting them out of groups and activities and places of service even thinking that by doing these things they are actually serving and pleasing God. But if we allow the response of the world to the message and person of Christ dictate our response, then we are destined to stumble, to slowly drift away from the purity of faith at best and at worst, fall away from the faith. What is the answer? We have already said it – hear and heed the things spoken by Christ. Are you listening to Jesus when He says serve one another; love one another; trust in Me; anticipate the work of the Spirit within you, expect hostility? And does your listening turn into obedience as you practice serving, loving, trusting, anticipating?

Beloved, the more hostile the world becomes to biblical Christianity is never a justification for withdraw from the world or even conformity to it. For only by living in the world; only by being involved daily with unbelievers around us, by being involved in the issues of our times and culture can we then show the contrast between the world's way and Christ's ways; only then can we be lights the point the way to Jesus. For notice in verse 3 the reason why the world responds as it does. We read, ***"These things they will do because they have not known the Father or Me."*** Beloved, do you have compassion on unbelievers. They are antagonistic to true followers of Christ, they are hostile toward godliness because they are ignorant of who God and who Jesus really are. Remember the words of Titus 3:3;

For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.

But then the kindness of God our Savior and His love for us appeared as He saved us, not because of what we have done or can do, but by His mercy and the merits of His Son Jesus Christ on the cross. Beloved, the early disciples were so inspired by this healthy fear of offending God, of hearing and heeding the words of Christ that rather than shrink away when the world when it fought against them, they, like we see in Acts 4 and 5 in the lives of John and Peter when they were threatened and persecuted, what was there response. Let us look at it and may I suggest to you as we turn to Acts 4, that you will see this principle of both hearing and heading, of listening to and obeying God for fear of otherwise offending God. First, let us read in Acts 4:18-20. Remember that Peter and John had been arrested, in part for preaching the gospel and in part for causing a commotion after healing the lame beggar. We read:

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18 And when they [the religious leaders] had summoned them, they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to [follow] you rather than to God, you be the judge; 20 for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

This earned them no honor in the sight of the “world” and in fact they were called in again before these leaders. After spending a night in jail, look with me at Acts 5:19-20 where we read:

19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the gates of the prison, and taking them out he said, 20 “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life.”

They were commanded by an angel of the Lord to speak “most of the message”? “the least offensive parts of the message”? No, the “whole message of this Life [Jesus]. When they did this, they were called again before the leaders in Acts 5:27-29 where we read:

27 When they had brought them, they stood them before the Council. The high priest questioned them, 28 saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name, and yet, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and intend to bring this man’s blood upon us.” 29 But Peter and the apostles answered, “We must obey God [that is hear and heed God] rather than men.”

The result of the disciples continuance in proclaiming Jesus brought them physical suffering and how did they respond? Let us read in Acts 5:40-42

40 They [the religious leaders] took his [Gamaliel’s] advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them and ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and then released them. 41 So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

Beloved, that is the kind of faith Jesus inspired in the life of His disciples. And how is it that these had such a faith? May I say it again? Because they heard and heeded the things spoken by Jesus. So I say to you, when your faith feels small, when your witness seems weak, ask yourself, am I listening and obeying the very things Jesus says will keep from stumbling? Am I serving in the church, the body of Christ? How are you doing that regularly? Are you loving, sacrificially giving of your time and energy and resources to the benefit and edification of the body of Christ? Are you trusting in God, believing in Jesus, anticipating His return? Are you walking by the promised Holy Spirit, witnessing of Christ even as He does? Beloved, as we practice these things, we will be kept from stumbling, from being ensnared by sin, from offending God. We Peter expound on this in 2 Peter 1:5-10.

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II. A Word of Assurance (16:4)

But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.

Now, I have not forgotten or put off this last point. In verses 1-3 we saw this warning against apostasy and now in verse 4 we see a word of assurance. We read, ***“But these things I have spoken to you, so that when their hour comes, you may remember that I told you of them. These things I did not say to you at the beginning, because I was with you.”***

It is a curious thing what the Lord sees fit to tell us before hand. It has been said that about 1/3 of the Bible is prophecy, a foretelling of things to come. And of that 1/3, about 1/3, or if I have my math right, about 1/9 of the Bible is prophecy yet to come. We read of the coming of Antichrist, of the great Apostasy of the terrible and terrific tribulation that proceeds the second coming of Jesus Christ and we wonder at some of the specifics, we speculate on the times of these things; and yet here, Jesus says something simple and profound, I have told you all these things so that when they come to pass, when you see them happen; when you begin to experience them; then you will understand that I am the God of providence; that I am the all-knowing God; that I am the God the guards and protects you. For as these things unfold even as God has foretold them, then our faith is strengthened and our assurance in God and His word secured. In other words, if all that Jesus previously predicted would happen, including His own crucifixion and resurrection, just as He said, then we have great hope and a sure faith that everything else that has yet to happen will happen just as He said.

Jesus did indeed promise the disciples great blessings, but He also spoke of the world's hatred and persecution. Jesus did not speak of such things to any extent at the very beginning of His ministry because the disciples would not have been able to bear it. Even now, in the scene before us, the disciples no doubt did not fully understand what Jesus was saying. For even at this point, they managed to misunderstand the plain teachings of Jesus concerning His own death and resurrection. And from this we learn that there needs to be a real connection between our hearing ears and Christ's spoken word. Sometimes the fullness of a passage of God's Word seems dark and dead to us until some experience or trial vitalizes them. The old Greeks used to send messages from one army to another by means of a roll of parchment twisted spirally round a baton, and then written upon. And it was perfectly unintelligible when it fell into a man's hands that had not a corresponding baton to twist it upon. Beloved, there are Many of Christ's messages to us that are like that. We can only understand their purpose and meaning as life gives you the frame round which to wrap them, and then they flash up into meaning, and we say at once, “He told us it all before, and I scarcely knew that He had told me until this moment when I need it.” But in that moment, our faith is assured and our hope endures even the worst of conditions. All because we have taken the time to hear and then heed the words of Christ.

Beloved, these first eleven disciples and the subsequent generations after them all were inspired to surrender all to Jesus, to give of their very lives for Jesus because they drew near to Jesus by listening to His words and then practicing those very things that Jesus said would keep them from stumbling and would remind them of the surety of their faith. How about you? Are you in awe of the message and work of Jesus Christ? Really? Enough so that you will fervently ask God to make you as bold and as willing to proclaim Him as these first disciples? And do you know what the first awesome truth is about the words of Christ? Let me close with what Jesus said in John 5:24:

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Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes [by his life, actions] Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

Have you come to be in awe of these things Jesus has spoken? This is where serving and loving others as Jesus commands begins, with believing God sent His Son to this earth as your substitute, to die for your sins, so that by believing in Him, you may be right with God, have eternal life in the presence of God and begin to live even now in the power of God a life please to Him. May we be so inspired to live for Him.

Soli Deo Gloria

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