

The Cure for the Troubled Heart

Have you seen the latest Star Wars film yet, *The Force Awakens*? It's a classic action film. Some have called the whole Star Wars series a "space western." (Some of you are too young to know what a "western" is.) But all action films follow a scripted formula. And it's not all action! Usually somewhere along the way, you have a chance to catch your breath; there's a scene where everything slows down. There's an oasis in the action, a calm in the storm.

There's a very tender scene like that in this Star Wars film. We're re-introduced to Princess Leia and Han Solo, some 30 years down the road. We discover that in better days they were together as man and wife and had a son. Han is about to leave to go on another hopeless mission to rescue some poor soul when Leia urges him to try to find their son who has gone over to the dark side. She says to Han...

Leia: You can still save him.

Han: How can I save him when Luke couldn't? (Luke Skywalker, his uncle)

Leia: Luke was a Jedi, you are his father.

In the last few weeks, the gospel of John has read like an action movie. There's been a lot of high-powered action with miracle healings, verbal light saber fights with the evil Pharisees and last week, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead! Now, there's a pause. We're jumping over chapters 12 and 13 which are the Triumphal Entry and the Last Supper, which we'll study just before Resurrection Weekend, and we're going to see a major pause in all the action. Everything slows way down. The musical score goes from triple forte to pianissimo and the camera zooms in until we see only faces in the candle light. If you have a red-letter Bible where everything that Jesus said is in red print, you'll find that in John 14-17 it's 98% red ink!

And in this quiet moment, just before the final battle between the Prince of Peace and the real Darth Vader, what do we hear? We hear Jesus speaking to us from His heart. Today, we're going to study only seven verses. In those verses I want you to focus on three words: Trust, Father and Way. First...

I. In the Presence of Trouble, Trust Jesus.

In verse 1 of chapter 14 we hear Jesus in the middle of a conversation with His disciples. This is in the Upper Room, right after they've celebrated the Last Supper and after Jesus "outed" Judas as being a traitor. He's preparing the remaining eleven for the extreme trouble they will soon be in and He's telling them they'll have to face it alone. He says to them:

...I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come. (John 13:33)

Simon, in true Simon form, promises Jesus that he will not only follow Him wherever He's going but, if required, he will lay down his life for Him. Jesus looks Peter in the eyes and says...

... "Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times!" (John 13:38)

The truth is, they will all disown Jesus once He is arrested. Have you ever denied 'knowing' Jesus? When's the last time your heart failed you? You knew what the right thing to do was but your heart failed, your backbone disintegrated and you went over to the dark side. And Jesus knew His disciples would desert Him. He knew it. Think what He might have said to them with that knowledge?

But listen now to what He does say (this is from the Living Bible translation):

"Let not your heart be troubled. You are trusting God, now trust in me. There are many homes up there where my Father lives, and I am going to prepare them for your coming. When everything is ready, then I will come and get you, so that you can always be with me where I am. If this weren't so, I would tell you plainly." (Jn. 14:1-3 TLB)

My anthropology professor at Wheaton College used to say that all human relationships are built on the "prior question of trust." Without trust or when trust is destroyed, your relationship is in trouble. Do you see what Jesus is saying to His disciples? He's saying, "Look, I know things are going to get really tense here. It's going to be emotional chaos and you're all going to get knocked off your feet. You're going to be disloyal to me. But listen – I will never be disloyal to you! This place is not your home. Your home is where I am going. One day, we'll all be home together. Trust Me in this. I will come and get you myself."

How faithful have you been to Jesus? One act of disloyalty does not mean your faith has failed. Did you hear me? I have proof. In Luke's record of this same conversation between Jesus and His disciples, he remembers Jesus saying to Peter:

"Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." (Luke 22:31-32)

As serious as Peter's sin was, denying he even knew Jesus three times, it did not mean his faith had completely failed. No, when he returned, Jesus re-deployed him in ministry.

In what way have you been disloyal to Jesus? Whatever it is, it does not mean that your faith has failed, unless you've never trusted Jesus to save you in the first place. Either way, the path to being reinstated into His good graces is the same – 'turn back,' 'repent,' ask Him to forgive you today and one day this place that troubles your heart will be in your rearview mirror fading from view, because you'll be on your way home. So first, when you find yourself in trouble, trust Him. Secondly...

II. In Your Trouble, Remember Your Father's Love.

Jesus points His disciples to His Father. In chapters 13 through 17 he speaks the name "Father" 53 times. John has really taken this to heart because it's his favorite name for God in all five of his New Testament books. What's your favorite name for God? How do you usually address Him in prayer? When Jesus taught us to pray, He taught us to begin by saying, "Our Father," didn't He? What do you remember about your father?

My Dad was not perfect, but he was more than good enough. And I know this: he loved Jesus big time. But he did not have an easy relationship with his father. His father (and mother) were both immigrants from Sweden. His dad died before I was born, so I didn't really know him and my dad didn't say much about him, but what he did say wasn't pretty. He apparently had some quirky behaviors. For example, he demanded silence at the dinner table. Can you imagine that? Absolute silence! There were five kids in the family and if you said even a word, he'd hit

you in the mouth with the back of his hand and he'd say, "Lat marten tysta munnen!" Which means in Swedish, "Let the food quiet your mouth!"

My dad never did things like that, though he sometimes displayed a short-ish temper. But he regularly demonstrated his love for me, my brother and my mom in so many ways – providing for us, going to our sports games, always being willing to talk with us (even at the dinner table!)

And he fully trusted Jesus. Once in a while I'd see him reading his Bible but more often, like several times a week, as my brother and I were going to bed, we'd hear him down in the living room singing – singing hymns and songs about life with Jesus. Some he sang in Swedish but all of them were very personal songs, songs that described an intimate friendship and deep devotion and affection...

*I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the Son of God discloses.
And He walks with me and He talks with me, and He tells me that I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there, None other has ever known. ¹*

I can hear his voice right now. My dad was blessed by God but that didn't mean his life was always easy. He lost his job at one point and he had some chronic physical issues. But when things were tough, he remembered his heavenly Father and he sang to Him and it lifted his heart.

But what if you didn't have a great relationship with your Dad or what if you didn't even know your Dad? How are you supposed to feel toward God?

Watch what Jesus does in these verses. He says: (John 14:2)

"In my Father's house are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you."

Who's making the preparations? His Father? No, He is. Jesus is speaking to those of you who didn't know a human father's love and so you don't fully 'trust' Father God yet. He's saying, "All right. I get that. Then, trust me! You know me. Trust in me and one day, I'll introduce you to the Father." In fact, in just a few verses, Jesus adds:

"If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:7)

Your earthly father was not God. For some of you He was a pretty good substitute but, for others of you, he was a very poor substitute. But if your bad father's name was Jim, do you transfer all your negative feelings to everyone named Jim? I hope not. Jesus is giving you a means by which you can get over your phobia of the word "father." Just focus on Jesus as your Heavenly Father. That's not who He is, but Jesus says, "If you know me, you know Him!" That will enable you to remember the Father's love when trouble comes. Lastly...

III. In Your Trouble, Follow the Way.

In verses 4 through 6, Jesus says:

"You know the way to the place where I am going."

Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:4-6)

Let me introduce you to the apostle Thomas. He's sometimes called "Doubting Thomas" because after the crucifixion and the reports that Jesus had been seen alive, he said, "I won't

believe it until I can put my fingers in the nail holes in His hands!" That's a serious doubter, isn't it? Do you know any doubters like that? Sometimes we think that a doubter can't possibly be a person of faith and it's true that, when Jesus finally did appear to Thomas after the resurrection and let him put his fingers in His healed nail holes, He did say to him:

"... Stop doubting and believe." (John 20:27)

But actually, I'm thankful that Thomas asked the question he did because, if he hadn't asked it, we wouldn't have Jesus' answer. And His answer answers many other questions than just Thomas'. Thomas said, "*Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*" Thomas at this moment was already a man of real faith. He demonstrated that back in John 11 when the disciples warned Jesus NOT to go back to Mary and Martha's house because they knew the Jewish leaders were back there looking to arrest Him. At that point, Thomas said to the other disciples:

..."Let us also go, that we may die with him (meaning Jesus)." (John 11:16)

So, Thomas wasn't some whiny, weak doubter always asking unanswerable questions. No, he was, in many ways, asking the question everyone else had but no one was willing to ask! If you have a question, isn't it better to ask it? Sometimes we don't want to ask it simply because we think others will think we're stupid. But notice how Jesus responds. He doesn't belittle Thomas or do anything to make him feel sorry for asking the question. He simply gives this golden response:

... "I am the way and the truth and the life..." (John 14:6)

Let's stop there and notice some things. First, each of the nouns – way, truth and life – is preceded with a definite article, "the." So, Jesus ISN'T saying, "I am one of many ways and a version of the truth and one of many representations of life." No, he's making a very dogmatic statement, "*I am THE way THE truth and THE life.*" How do you feel about dogmatic statements?

A student from UCLA came up to Dr. J. Vernon McGee one day and said, "I don't like the Bible because it is filled with dogmatism." Dr. McGee agreed with him. The student pointed to this verse, John 14:6 and said, "That's dogmatic." Dr. McGee responded to the student by saying, "I had a teacher when I was in school who was the most dogmatic, narrow-minded person I'd ever met. She insisted that 2 plus 2, equaled 4. It didn't make any difference what you had two of – apples or rocks or cows – she always insisted that 2 plus 2 equaled 4. She was so dogmatic! And as an adult, I've found that bankers are the same way. Only in my case it's usually 2 minus 2 equals zero! And they're so dogmatic about it!" Then he said, "I've found that it's a characteristic of truth that it's always dogmatic." The student got his point. ²

If Jesus is speaking truth here, then there is only one way to deal with Him. We must deal with Him by His definition of Himself, not by our own. Jesus is saying that He is the only way to God. No other way exists. It's not that there aren't other religions that CLAIM to be a way to God, because there are. But Jesus is the only way that will actually take you to God. The other ways are completely bogus because they don't work.

Also, this means that Jesus is the ultimate truth. So, any claim of truth that contradicts Jesus' claims regarding truth, is false and must be set aside. For example, Jesus referred to the story of Noah as being historically true (Luke 17:26-27). So, anyone who says he believes Jesus, but doesn't believe that the story of Noah is true, doesn't have a truthful view of the world.

Finally, this means that Jesus didn't say He was "THE life" because he spent some time being "alive" physically. No, being THE life means what John wrote back in the first chapter:

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. (John 1:3-4)

So, you do not have permission to create life or to take life outside of the boundaries Jesus has set. Why do I bring all this up? Because so much of what 'troubles' us, are questions that Jesus - who is THE way, THE truth and THE life - has already answered in His Word! For example...

Question: Should I skip church this week?

Answer: **Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.** (Heb. 10:25)

Question: My spouse isn't a believer so, I'm free to leave him/her, right?

Answer: **If any brother has a wife who is not a believer and she is willing to live with him, he must not divorce her. And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him... How do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband? Or, how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?** (I Cor. 7:12-13, 16)

Question: Why should I have a curfew? After all, I'm 13 now!

Answer: **Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" -which is the first commandment with a promise - "that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth."** (Eph. 6:1-3)

Question: So then, I can discipline my kids any way I want to, right?

Answer: **Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.** (Eph. 6:4)

Jesus said, *"In this world you will have trouble..."* (John 16:33). But here, He says, *"Do not let your hearts be troubled."* (John 14:1) So, which is it? Jesus is telling us that we can be in troubled circumstances without having a troubled heart. How? By Trusting Jesus, Remembering the Father's love and by Following in His Way. Trust, Father, Way. In these seven verses He's made it clear that if we do this, we will know that we have:

- A heavenly home
- A heavenly highway to follow and
- Heavenly help to get there - He didn't just give us a map, He gave us Himself to get us home safe and sound. And THAT is the cure for a troubled heart. Amen.

¹ In the Garden, C. Austin Miles, 1912

² J. Vernon McGee, *Through the Bible: Vol. IV, Matthew through Romans* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1963), p. 460