

Title: Troubled or Trusting
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Subject: Believing
Scripture: John 14:1

Jesus was known by many different names – Son of God, Son of Man, Savior, Christ and as The Teacher. His teachings were always relevant. Maybe we should say he made his listeners relevant to what he taught. He employed question and answer (often he was the one asking the questions), lecture, conversations, and could tell a story with the best of them - parables. We saw Him in action for extended teaching sessions in the Sermon on the Mount, which included the Beatitudes and Lord's prayer. Most recently we saw the Olivet Discourse in which his topic was his second coming.

Originally, in our study of the life of Christ, I intended to zip through his last days. However, I've reconsidered. Jesus' last teaching was given the night before he was crucified. It's found in John 14 – 17 and is known as the Upper Room Discourse. It provides the capstone for everything he taught, how he lived and how he died. Martin Luther viewed it as “the best and most consoling sermons that the Lord Christ delivered on earth...a treasure and jewel, not to be purchased with the world's goods.” We're going to give more extensive treatment to these four chapters, taking one chapter a week.

I invite you to read and reread these 4 chapters during the next three weeks. As you do...mark keywords like the ones in today's text trust/believe. I have about a dozen I've highlighted. There are also concepts you'll see repeatedly. Other things to note or record are promises, commands, statements of truth and fact as well as the connection between God the Father and God the Son. You could back up to 13:31 to include the last 8 verses of chapter 13. I found it a great aid in helping to digest what Jesus says.

Read John 14:1

I. Don't let your hearts be troubled

Troubled means to be disturbed, agitated, stirred up.

Jesus sensed his disciples were headed in that direction. They had lots of reasons. They'd just celebrated the Passover, a time for rejoicing accompanied by great pomp and ceremony. Not the case this time as there was a more somber tone because of what Jesus talked about. He was going to leave them, not just to visit relatives up in Nazareth and be back in a few weeks. He was going to leave - as he was going to die.

Previously, when Jesus talked about dying, it wasn't received very well. The disciples didn't understand. They rejected the idea as completely ludicrous. Peter rebuked him for saying he was going to die.

There were other factors. Jesus said one of the disciples would betray him. Not exactly a mood lightener. He told Peter he would deny him. Peter tried to deny that he would deny. Jesus matter-of-factly told him it was going to happen. That had to turn the disciples' heads – Peter, a rock just like his name, their apparent

spokesman, who'd been a follower longer than most of them and probably closer to Jesus except for John - being warned about being a deserter. And Jesus added that all the disciples would leave him.

Jesus had told them he was going and that where he was going they couldn't come (John 13:33). Peter couldn't let that one go: "Lord, where are you going?" There's a lot behind that question: "You don't need to go. We've had wonderful times together. They don't need to stop. We won't be able to hear you teach. We won't see your miracles. If you insist on going, why can't we follow you now? I've said it previously and I'll say it again. I want to be with you to follow you. We want to follow you. What's going to happen to us when you're gone, wherever you're going? Why won't you tell us where you're going and why we can't come with you?"

The disciples were perplexed, confused, in the early stages of grief, anxious, dismayed.

What causes us to be troubled, disturbed, agitated, stirred up? It falls in the areas of time – stuff from the past, present and future. It comes from the major categories of life - family, personal issues, health, world situation. There's a lot of stuff that can get us troubled and worked up.

What's Jesus solution? "Don't let your heart be troubled." Jesus repeats the admonition a little later in the chapter: "Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (27). Later on he'll state a fact of life: "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). Not good news but it's paired with good news - the promise that he has overcome the world.

Jesus doesn't teach that we're to deny the reality of troubles, that there's no such thing as troubles, that they're figments of our imagination. Jesus teaches that having trouble doesn't mean we have to be troubled. We don't need to allow our troubles to control us. Ain't got no troubles where the Lord isn't with me. Psalm 23.

Missionaries desire to get the Bible into the heart language of people. It hasn't been without difficulty. There've been situations where there's no written language or alphabet. I believe it was in Africa where missionaries wanted to express what Jesus was saying about not letting your heart get troubled. This made no sense as the people group had a literal understanding of heart. It was that thing in the chest that pumped blood.

It took years. Then one day when the missionary explained the concept of the heart being the core of a person and the seat of emotions, his words were greeted by head nods, not just in the polite way a person acknowledges they're listening. There was understanding. It was explained to the missionaries that the people didn't connect emotions with the heart but with organs in the abdomen. They had an expression which translated into English is: "Don't get your liver in a quiver."

In just a little bit Jesus speaks about heaven. He gives the good news. It's not just a place where he'll be restored to his full glory and enjoy its benefits. He's going to come back to get those who are his and take them to be with him so they can enjoy heaven forever. It's a fantastic promise. Everything will be great, wonderful. There'll be no Goldilocks syndrome, the need to search for something that's "just right" because everything will be "just right."

That takes care of the end game, but what about now? We don't have to wait till heaven. Jesus is more concerned about our lives on earth than about heaven. Heaven will take care of itself. God promises to be with

us now through the turmoil of life. As our speaker Mark Harris said a few weeks ago about his experience when he was in a wheel chair and facing an uncertain medical future, he felt the Lord was telling him “Everything is working out the way it’s supposed to.”

Charles Spurgeon, the great preacher of the late 1800s: “Would you lose your sorrow? Would you drown your cares? Then go plunge yourself in the Godhead’s deepest sea; be lost in His immensity; and you shall come forth as from a couch of rest, refreshed and invigorated. I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon God” (sermon, 1/7/1855).

We come to the basis of not letting our hearts be troubled.

II. Believe in God

There are three things to note about the wording of the next two phrases. Older NIV translations use the word *trust* for the second and third phrase. The newer editions of the NIV use the word *believe*, consistent with most of the other translations. The second thing: most translators feel the middle phrase of v. 1 should keep the format of the other two – as an imperative or command. The older NIV translations reflect this while the newer versions switched to make the middle phrase a statement of fact, an acknowledgement that the disciples believed. It’s possible to merge the two ideas – you have believed and need to keep on believing.

The disciples believed in God, but Jesus was after something more, something deeper. He wanted them to believe in God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind and with all their strength. He wanted them to really and fully believe.

The words believe and trust can be used interchangeably. Some Christians have adopted trust as more descriptive because people sometimes think of belief as merely an intellectual undertaking about something being true without it requiring action on their part. We might use the word entrust.

Time for another missionary illustration. I believe this took place in the Amazon rainforest. Missionaries were trying to convey the concept of believe. They weren't getting any closer though their national worker was trying to help them. He finally grasped what the missionaries meant and responded his people had a fitting expression. It was used for lying in a hammock. It signified that they were completely off the ground and dependent on the hammock. They weren't sitting on the edge with their feet on solid earth but resting in the hammock. Resting - putting the entire weight of one's life, present and future on God. Entrust.

It’s important to know who God is. A. W. Tozer’s classic book *The Knowledge of the Holy* (pp. 7-10, 17, 76): *What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us...The gravest question before the church is always God himself...We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God...Without doubt, the mightiest thought the mind can entertain is the thought of God, and the weightiest word in any language is its word for God...A right conception of God is basic not only to systematic theology but to practical Christian living as well...It is my opinion that the Christian conception of God in these middle years of the 20th century is so decadent as to be utterly beneath the dignity of the most high God and actually to constitute for professed believers something amounting to a moral calamity. All the problems of*

heaven and earth, though they were to confront us together and at once, would be nothing compared with the overwhelming problem of God: that he is; what he is like; and what we as moral beings must do about him...So necessary to the church is a lofty concept of God that when that concept in any measure declines, the church with her worship and her moral standards declines along with it... The heaviest obligation lying upon the Christian church today is to purify and elevate her concept of God until it is once more worthy of him - and of her... "What is God like?" If by that question we mean "What is God like in himself?" there is no answer. If we mean "What has God disclosed about himself that the reverent reason can comprehend?" there is, I believe, an answer both full and satisfying. For while the name of God is secret and his essential nature incomprehensible, he in condescending love has by revelation declared certain things to be true of himself. These we call his attributes... We must not think of God as highest in an ascending order of beings, starting with the single cell and going on up from the fish to the bird to the animal to man to angel to cherub to God. This would be to grant God eminence, even pre-eminence, but that is not enough; we must grant Him transcendence in the fullest meaning of that word. Forever God stands apart, in light unapproachable. He is as high above an archangel as above a caterpillar, for the gulf that separates the archangel from the caterpillar is but finite, while the gulf between God and the archangel is infinite.

In the olden days men of faith were said to "walk in the fear of God" and to "serve the Lord with fear." However intimate their communion with God, however bold their prayers, at the base of their religious life was the conception of God as awesome and dreadful. This idea of God transcendent runs through the whole Bible and gives color and tone to the character of the saints. This fear of God was more than a supernatural apprehension of danger; it was a nonrational dread, an acute feeling of personal insufficiency in the presence of God the Almighty... When men no longer fear God, they transgress his laws without hesitation. The fear of consequences is no deterrent when the fear of God is gone... Conversely, the self-assurance of modern Christians, the basic levity present in so many of our religious gatherings, the shocking disrespect shown for the person of God are evidence enough of deep blindness of heart. Many call themselves by the name of Christ, talk much about God, and pray to him sometimes, but evidently do not know who he is. "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life," but this healing fear is today hardly found among Christian men.

What are we to believe about God? God who doesn't depend on anyone else for his existence, is completely self-sufficient, never had a beginning and won't have an ending, has no limits to his being and ability, never differs from himself, possesses all knowledge and wisdom and power, is above and beyond all, faithful, good, merciful, full of grace, loving, perfect, holy and rules over the entire creation.

For a moment we need to talk about another group. There are people who say they believe in God and will call themselves Christians. However, when you dig beneath the surface, the God they believe in isn't the God of the Bible. It more closely aligns with themselves being their god. They feel like God up there is a nice guy to have around in case they get into trouble just so long as he leaves them alone so they can do whatever they want, without him trying to have a major role in their lives. They don't accept God's positions on numerous issues. For one, they don't believe a loving God would allow anybody to go to hell. The truth is God has created a place where people can be with him forever. Those who reject his massive overtures of love and don't place their trust and confidence in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord are responsible for where they wind up.

III. Believe also in me (in me also believe)

Remember I said there were three things about the wording of the middle and last phrase? The translations have “Believe also in me” even though the sentence structure of the original language says the better wording is “in me also believe.” The intent would be to more closely connect Jesus to God. Jesus emphasizes the same reaction and response given to God the Father is to be given to him God the Son who in his incarnate presence on earth was the highest and most complete revelation of God.

WWII London was relentlessly bombed by Nazi Germany. Bomb craters were everywhere. A father and son were out for an evening walk when the air raid sirens sounded. The dad jumped in the crater and asked the son to jump. The son refused. He said he was scared because he couldn't see his dad. The dad responded, “I can see you.”

Sometimes it's hard to believe. That's where trust, believe, confidence enter the picture. Believe God the Father and God the Son are trustworthy. Trust what they have done and are doing is for our good. Believe that heaven is worth far more than troubles.

Skiing down a mountain slope on narrow pieces of laminated birch or poplar over frozen ice crystals is difficult enough in itself. When the inability to see is added in... Blind skiers are paired with sighted skiers. The first lessons are on flat areas where they learn how to make turns. When that's mastered, it's time for the slopes. The sighted skier skis behind and shouts instructions “left”, “right.” As the blind skier obeys the commands, they're able to negotiate the hill.

What if a blind skier decided to stop listening to the commands of the sighted skier? Where would he wind up? He could crash into another skier, a fence, a tree.

As the blind skier needs to depend completely and solely on the directions of the sighted skier, so followers of Christ need to listen to the directions God gives us through his word.

Alexander MacLaren reflects on v. 1: “Who can reproduce the cadence of soothing tenderness, soft as a mother's hand, in that ‘Let not your heart be troubled’? And who can fail to feel the tone of majesty in that ‘Believe in God, believe also in Me’?...For the essence of the whole is not the intellectual process of assent to a proposition, but the intensely personal act of yielding up will and heart to a living person. Faith does not grasp a doctrine, but a heart. The trust which Christ requires is the bond that unites souls with Him; and the very life of it is entire committal of myself to Him in all my relations and for all my needs, and absolute utter confidence in Him as all-sufficient for everything that I can require. Let us get away from the cold intellectualism of ‘belief’ into the warm atmosphere of ‘trust,’ and we shall understand better than by many volumes what Christ here means and the sphere and the power and the blessedness of that faith which Christ requires.”

We made it through one verse – words of comfort and encouragement. Cover the rest of chapter 14 in Sunday School.