

## **PROMISES, PROMISES: HOW JESUS COMFORTS HIS PEOPLE (John 14:1-3, 13-27)**

We say that dogs are man's best friend. A duck hunter named Robert Cottingham of Utah might choose to differ. He, a friend, and his dog were in a boat out on the north end of the Great Salt Lake, close to the Bear River Bird Refuge. They were in a marshy area near the shore. As Cottingham stepped out of the boat to set up some decoys, he laid his 12-gauge shotgun on the bow of the boat. For some reason, his dog got excited. As his dog was jumping up and down, a paw landed on the shotgun. It discharged, striking Cottingham in his gluteus maximus. He was taken to a local hospital where 27 pellets of birdshot were removed from his backside.

Kevin Potter, a local sheriff's deputy reported that since Cottingham was wearing waders at the time, his injuries were less severe than they would have been otherwise. Deputy Potter did not speculate about the dog's motives at the time of the shooting, but the incident was ruled an accident, and no charges were filed. Regardless, the dog is still not talking.

Some days are bad days, but it is a really, bad day when you are shot by your dog with your own gun.

Do you ever have a bad day, a bad week, a bad month? Beginning with the outbreak of the coronavirus, our country and the world has experienced a few bad years.

One of the key ingredients to difficult days is stress. Stress comes in a variety of packages. Some experience marital stress, parenting stress, vocational stress, financial stress, medical stress, and other types of stressors.

Jesus' closest disciples were not immune from stress. In the first verse of John 14, Jesus looked at His followers and said to them, "Let not your hearts be troubled." He said that because their hearts were troubled.

Is your heart ever troubled? We are routinely troubled over many things. It might be failures of the past, or problems of the present, or fears of the future. Whenever unexpected change comes into our lives, it is often troubling.

What was troubling the disciples? At that Passover Supper which Jesus shared with the Twelve, He announced that one of them was going to betray Him, that Peter was going to deny Him, that all of them were going to desert Him. He also said that He was going somewhere, and they wouldn't be able to follow. They were certainly stressed over what Jesus had said and over what would soon happen. And when what Jesus foretold happened, they would be even more stressed.

Jesus sought to prepare them. He sought to comfort them. How did Jesus comfort them? He gave them certain promises. You may never have realized it before, but promises have the power to comfort.

Listen to the words of author, speaker, and theologian Lewis Smedes:

Yes, somewhere people still make and keep promises. They choose not to quit when the going gets rough because they promised once to see it through. They stick to lost causes. They hold on to a love grown cold. They stay with people who

have become pains in the neck. They still dare to make promises and care enough to keep the promises they make. I want to say to you that if you have a ship you will not desert, if you have people you will not forsake, if you have causes you will not abandon, then you are like God.

What a marvelous thing a promise is! When a person makes a promise, she reaches out into an unpredictable future and makes one thing predictable: she will be there even when being there costs her more than she wants to pay. When a person makes a promise, he stretches himself out into circumstances that no one can control and controls at least one thing: he will be there no matter what the circumstances turn out to be. With one simple word of promise, a person creates an island of certainty in a sea of uncertainty.

Like the disciples, you and I often face uncertain times, stressful time, difficult times, but we can obtain the same comfort that Jesus' original disciples received. We can be comforted by His promises. We find four promises in John 14. We won't look at everything in this beautiful chapter, and we won't comment on every verse, but we will give attention to the promises that Jesus makes, the promises that are meant to bring us great comfort in tumultuous times.

### **Comforting Promise #1: Jesus Will Bring Us to a Place.**

Look at vv. 1-3. Jesus refers to heaven as *His Father's house*. Please know that heaven is not a state of mind. Heaven is not a spiritual symbol that stands for something else. In the words of Todd Burpo, who wrote a best-selling book that became a major motion picture, "Heaven Is for Real."

In this passage, Jesus employs a marriage metaphor. In the Jewish culture of that day, after a couple were engaged and before the wedding took place, the husband-to-be would add a room to his father's house. In a typical family compound, there were multiple generations. Each time a son, a grandson, or even a great grandson was to be married, another room would be built and added.

When the room was ready to be occupied, the groom would go get His bride. The two would be married with a great feast to celebrate the occasion. Then, the groom would return to his father's house with his bride, where he and her would enjoy their life together.

In like fashion, Jesus promised that He was building a place for His bride, the Church, in His Father's house. When it is ready, He will come back to get you, and me, and all who are His. This is a promise.

Elsewhere in the NT, we are told what the eternal state will be like for those who belong to Jesus. Listen to what we find in Revelation 21:1-4 in the NLT.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

<sup>3</sup>I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

Does the promise of that place bring to you any comfort over the trials and travails of this life? It should. It is meant to.

A dozen years ago, Michael Card recorded a song entitled, “I Will Bring You Home.” Let me read to you the lyrics of the second verse, followed by the chorus.

When time reaches fullness  
When I move my hand, I will bring you home  
Home to your own place in a beautiful land  
I will bring you home

I will bring you home  
I will bring you home  
From this fearful fallen place  
I will bring you home

Let’s give attention to a second promise Jesus makes.

## **Comforting Promise #2: Jesus Will Answer Our Prayers.**

Let’s drop down in John 14 to vv. 13-14. Twice in two verses, Jesus promises to answer our prayers if we pray in His name. Jesus uses the word *whatever* in v. 13 and the word *anything* in v. 14. He saw no need to constrict His promise or narrow its boundary.

Stores and restaurants routinely confine their sales and specials to certain days or certain times, and those reduced prices may only pertain to certain items. This coupon or offer cannot be added to any other.

Jesus gives us only one precondition—pray in My name. What does it mean to pray in Jesus’ name? When I was young, I was taught to end my prayer with the words, “In your name, I pray,” or something similar. Praying in Jesus’ name, however, involves more than adding an appropriate end to your prayer.

William Henriksen explains, “A prayer in Christ’s name is a prayer that is in harmony with whatever Christ has revealed concerning Himself.”

If you pray for something Christ wants, you can be certain that He will answer that prayer.

That means that Jesus is not promising to answer selfish prayers. You can’t pray for a new fishing boat, a luxurious house, and a six-figure salary and realistically expect Jesus to answer that prayer.

That means, if you want Jesus to answer your prayers, you must draw close to Him to learn what is important to Him. As we get to know His heart, what He values, what He desires, we are to pray for those things. When we know we are praying for what Jesus wants, we can be assured that He will answer our prayer.

Promises of Scripture should always be examined in their context. Notice the verse that precedes this promise. Look at v. 12. God wants to use you in a great way. He can and will do so as we pray to Him. When we fail to pray, we cut ourselves off from the helping power of our great God.

Isn't it comforting to know that when you endeavor to serve the Lord, even if the task seems enormous and daunting, if you pray to Him, He will guide, and bless, and cause your service to bring glory to God.

According to the promise found in vv. 12-13, we can say three things: 1) Jesus is the One in whose name we are to pray; 2) Jesus is the One who hears our prayer; 3) Jesus is the One who answers our prayer. In both verses, Jesus says, "I will do it."

There is a German proverb that says, "When in prayer you clasp your hands, God opens His."

### **Comforting Promise #3: Jesus' Father Will Send Us a Person.**

Look at vv. 15-17. In the previous verses, Jesus impressed upon us the need to pray. Here, Jesus said that He, too, would pray to His Father. He had a particular request. He said that He would ask the Father to give His followers a *Helper*. That word is variously translated as *Comforter*, *Companion*, *Counselor*, *Friend*, *Advocate*, *Intercessor*, and *Helper*. The Greek word used is made up of two words. The first is a preposition that means "by or along." The second is a noun referring to One who has been called. When you put those two together, the word literally means "One called along-side." The Holy Spirit is the One who has been called to walk alongside us as our Counselor, our Comforter, our Helper.

I like the word, *Helper*. Jesus calls the Holy Spirit in v. 16, *another Helper*. Jesus is our Helper in heaven. He prays for us. The Holy Spirit is our Helper here on earth. He stays with us. This means we are not in this on our own. According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is more than just alongside us. Jesus says in v. 17, "He dwells with you and will be in you." That means, He doesn't just walk with us; He lives inside us, and because He does, everywhere you go, He goes with you.

If anyone ever looks at you and says, "You need help." Look back, smile, and say, "Oh, I have a Helper, thank you very much. He goes with me wherever I go."

Let me caution you not to go anywhere you wouldn't be comfortable taking Jesus to, because the truth is, anywhere to which you go, that is where you are taking the Spirit of Jesus. Don't do anything you would not want Jesus to see because the Spirit of Jesus is right there no matter what you do.

Let me say a word as to who this Holy Spirit is. Please understand this, the Spirit of God is not a force. The Star Wars saga has popularized the notion of this life-force being with us: "May the force be with you." The Holy Spirit is not a force. He is forceful, and He is powerful, but rather than being a force, the Holy Spirit is a Person.

That means the Holy Spirit is not an *it*. You wouldn't call your spouse or your child an *it*. Your spouse or your child is either a *he* or a *she*. In our current culture, we seem to be obsessed with pronouns; so, when speaking of the Holy Spirit, make sure you use the

proper pronouns. The proper pronouns for the Holy Spirit are He/Him. Look at v. 17.

In Scripture, sometimes the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of God. Other times He is called the Spirit of Christ. In his commentary on this passage, Hendriksen wrote, “The Holy Spirit is the person in whom the Father and the Son meet one another.”

We have seen that Jesus promised to pray to His Father that the Father would send the Holy Spirit upon the Church. God answered that prayer on the Day of Pentecost. That was 50 days after Jesus arose from the grave. The Holy Spirit is with us and in us, and He is not leaving. He is our ever-present Helper.

Look at one more truth about the Holy Spirit. Notice what Jesus says in v. 26. Just as we are to pray in Jesus’ name, God sent the Spirit in Jesus’ name. The Holy Spirit will be our Teacher. He will guide us into all truth.

If you don’t know something, you can ask your pastor or you can ask the Holy Spirit. Your pastor might not know, and not wanting to be embarrassed, He might just make something up. The Holy Spirit knows. If you ask Him in Jesus’ name to show you, the One sent in Jesus’ name will do just that. He will teach you.

Garrison Keillor is a well-known author and radio personality. In 2007, he wrote an article that appeared in *Newsweek* magazine. The article was entitled, “*My Five Most Important Books.*” Some of *Newsweek’s* readers were likely surprised to learn that he ranked the Book of Acts at the top of his list. Keillor offered this concise but powerful summation of the Book of Acts: “The flames lit on their little heads and bravely and dangerously went they onward.”

You and I are living in an increasingly dangerous culture. The Holy Spirit, however, our indwelling Helper, will help us to go bravely onward.

Here in this 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of John, we find one additional promise that is meant to comfort us.

#### **Comforting Promise #4: Jesus Will Give Us His Peace.**

Look at v. 27. Jesus says again in this verse what He said in the first verse of the chapter. He said, “Let not your hearts be troubled.” This time He adds, “Neither let them be afraid.” Jesus’ antidote to a troubled and fearful heart is His peace. This is not just any peace. It is His peace.

An old-time preacher used to say, “God can give you a peace the world can’t give you and a peace the world can’t take from you.”

I like what Hendriksen wrote: “The world may give outward pleasure, physical rest and enjoyment, honor, wealth, but never that inner assurance which is the reflection of the smile of God in the heart of His child.”

The peace of Jesus and the worries of this life cannot reside in the same heart at the same time. Have you allowed the worries of this world to take up residence in your heart? If we will receive the peace of Jesus into our hearts, Jesus will evict the worries and anxiety that were there.

Paul has something to say about this special peace. I want you to see it in your own Bible; so, turn to Philippians 4:4-9.

This past Friday, the Christian Church and the world lost one of its brightest lights. Friday morning, Tim Keller passed from this life to the next. He lost his battle with pancreatic cancer that began back in 2020. Keller was a pastor, a theologian, and an author. I have read several of the 31 books he published. In 1989 he left his professorship at a seminary to plant a Presbyterian church in the heart of Manhattan. It grew from 50 to an attendance of over 5,000.

One of my preaching heroes, Joel Gregory, eulogized Keller online. Of his passing, he wrote, “Earth is poorer. Heaven is richer. As another New York City pastor, Dr. Gardner C. Taylor, used to say when a saint crossed over, ‘Good for him.’” Keller himself said, “Death can only make me better.”

If you are a follower of Jesus, death can only make you better.

In honor of Dr. Keller, I am going to close this message with a story he told:

Many years ago, in my first pastorate, I met with a teenage girl in our congregation. She was about sixteen at the time, and she was discouraged and becoming depressed. I tried to encourage her, but there was a revelatory moment when she said, “Yes, I know Jesus loves me, he saved me, he’s going to take me to heaven—but what good is it when no boy at school will even look at me?”

She said she “knew” all these truths about being a Christian, but they were of no comfort to her. The attention (or the lack of it) of a cute boy at school was far more consoling, energizing, and foundational for her joy and self-worth than the love of Christ. Of course, this was a perfectly normal response for a teenage girl. Nevertheless, it was revealing of how our hearts work. [Jonathan] Edwards would say that she had the opinion that Jesus loved her, but she didn’t really know it. Christ’s love was an abstract concept while the love of these others was real to her heart.

My question for you is, “Do you really know that Jesus loves you? Has His love become foundational for your joy and your peace, and your sense of well-being?”

More than 30-years ago, Gary Chapman wrote a best-selling book called, *The Five Love Languages*. It reveals how different people process and receive the message they are loved. One of the five is receiving gifts. Some people best feel they are being loved when they receive a gift freely given.

Whether or not that is your primary love language, Jesus has shown His love to us by giving us and making good on four promises:

1. He Will Bring Us to a Place.
2. He Will Answer Our Prayers.
3. His Father Will Send a Person.
4. He Will Give Us His Peace.

For these reasons, let not your hearts be troubled.