

Behind the Black Curtain in the Upper Room

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In the Upper Room our Lord began immediately to deal with those who were His own in a way He had never dealt with them or anyone else before. He began to talk about things He had never before talked about. He was attempting to lift their thinking to a high plane – because these men were frightened.

They knew something tremendous was in the offing and that they were facing a crisis. Yonder in the Upper Room sin was knocking at the door, demanding its pound of flesh. Also behind the black curtain in that Upper Room was the long, thin hand of death stretching forth to reach their Savior. These men were rightly frightened. They didn't know what to think as they looked at the circumstances around them. As they looked, our Lord attempted to lift their thinking from a low plane to a high plane. He attempted to take them from the here-and-now to the hereafter. He attempted to lift them from the physical to the spiritual. He attempted to take them from the things which were at their fingertips to the thing that was beyond what their eye could see or their ear could hear. He was drawing their thinking yonder, and that is where He would have us think today.

As our Lord moves along, He is interrupted. He is interrupted by four men who stand out in the crowd of eleven disciples. These four men have the spotlight put on them and the cameras trained on them for a moment as they speak out. They are attempting to stop Him and pull Him back because they have questions that are bothering them in a desperate sort of way. Our Lord in a patient manner answers the questions of these men and, in doing so, leads them to the very heights.

We want to follow Him as He moves up and out in that Upper Room.

The first thing that He said triggered all their interruptions. He said in substance, "I have been saying to the Jews on the outside that I am going to leave and they won't see Me. Now I want to say it to you. You are My disciples."

Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me; and as I said unto the Jews, Where I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. (John 13:33)

As He was telling them He was going to leave, He said in effect, "Now the brand I want to be on you is love, which will let the world know that you belong to Me."

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:35)

Simon Peter

It was a wonderful discourse, but there was sitting there a disciple who missed it. He heard only one thing. He heard the Lord Jesus say that He was going away, that He was going to leave them. He held on to that. He is the first one to interrupt our Lord. He was, of course, Simon Peter. The first man in that crowd who *would* speak out would always be Simon Peter. He thought every occasion was an auspicious occasion to make a speech. Believe me, he was on his feet if there was ever an opportunity to say something. And he generally said the wrong thing. Although he reached spiritual maturation later on, here we see this robust fisherman that he was, nothing more than a child in his thinking and in his spiritual life.

This is not farfetched, because our Lord dealt with him that way. Notice that the Lord Jesus said, "I'm going away. And while I'm away I want you to exhibit to the world love for one

another.” Simon Peter didn’t hear that – all he heard was that Jesus was going away. So at the first opportunity he broke in and said, “Lord, where goest Thou? You say You are going away? I’d like to know where You are going.” My friend, that is the question of a child. You have seen a father put on his hat and his coat and start going out when his little son, who has been playing on the floor, jumps up and says, “Daddy, where are you going?” That is the question of a child. And every child asks that question. And childlike, Simon Peter will not sit by silently and let the Lord Jesus say, “I’m going away,” without saying, “Where are You going? I want to know.”

And the Lord Jesus dealt with him just as one deals with a child. Listen to Him:

... Jesus answered him, Where I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards. (John 13:36)

That’s the way we answer a child, is it not? When little Willie comes in at five o’clock in the afternoon and says, “I want a piece of cake,” Mama says, “Not now, but after supper.” That’s the way you deal with a child. Simon Peter says, “Where are You going? I want to know where You are going.” The Lord Jesus says, “You can’t follow Me now, but afterwards.”

Simon Peter then raises the question, “Why cannot I follow Thee now?” Again he is the child. When the father puts on his coat and hat, the child says, “Where are you going, Daddy? I want to go with you.” The father says, “You can’t go with me now, but I’ll take you afterwards.” Simon Peter says, “Why can’t I go with You *now*?” Peter was ready to go *now*. And the little child is ready to go too, my beloved. He’ll go get his hat and coat, and he’ll say, “I want to go *now*,” having no notion where the father is going. And Simon Peter, with no notion of where the Lord Jesus was going, said in substance, “Wherever You go I want to go with You. When I left that fishing boat the last time – and it took me a long time to give it up – I said I would go with You all the way. And I really meant it.” He *did* mean it. Listen to him here, “I will lay down my life for Thy sake” (John 13:37).

Many Christians, when they stand on the threshold of the new year, will resolve in their hearts to live for Him in the year that lies ahead. They will say, “I failed You last year, but this year You can count on me.” If you really want to know the truth, the Lord can’t count on you. Neither can He count on me. If He would take His hand off me for five minutes, I’d deny Him.

Simon Peter said, “I’ll follow You to death. I’ll lay down my life for Your sake.” And he was honest and sincere. He meant every word he said. I know he did because *I* said it, and *I* meant every word. You’ve said it and you have meant every word. But we had to eat those words later on, did we not?

Listen to our Lord as He deals with this man:

Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice. (John 13:38)

Simon Peter did not believe that, but several hours went by, and during those hours this man denied his Lord. Then he went out yonder and mingled his tears with the dew of the grass on the hillside. This man had made a discovery. He had found out how weak he really was. A great many Christians today do not know how weak they really are. They think they have within themselves a sufficiency to meet the crises of life. They do not know how much they need God in this hour in which they are living.

Now chapter divisions are wonderful to help all of us find our way around in the Scriptures, but sometimes they are in the wrong place. Do not make a break between chapters 13 and 14. Our Lord is continuing to talk to Simon Peter, which is the reason this section has meant so much to so many people – it was given to a man in the hour of his emergency, in the darkest time of his life. Our Lord, knowing that Peter would deny Him, was putting down a cushion for him.

Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. (John 14:1)

It was as though He said, “Simon Peter, tonight you will do the most dastardly deed any man will do – with the exception of Judas Iscariot, and your deed will be close to his – but I have prayed that your faith would not fail. You may have denied Me; I have not denied you. This night I do not want your heart to be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. Although this night you will fail and hate yourself for it, you can come to Me.”

Beloved, when we stand on the threshold of a new year, our Lord is saying to you and me – and it makes no difference who you are or what your failure is – “Let not *your* heart be troubled. I’ll stick by you.”

What a Savior! Not only did He reach down to save us those many years ago, but today He abides faithful.

Then He says,

In my Father’s house are many mansions....

The word “mansions” is an unfortunate translation here. The Greek word is *mone*, meaning “abiding places.” In the Father’s house are many abiding places. I do not know about you, but I do not want a mansion in heaven. I’ll settle for a little California bungalow anytime.

This universe is so tremendous that astronomers have no notion of the number of stars; they have no notion what is the actual size of it. Our most up-to-date telescopes are not even good bifocals for seeing God’s universe. It is my theory that in all of God’s universe He doesn’t have an apartment for rent anywhere. They are all occupied. God has, I think, created intelligences throughout His universe. Jesus says, “In My Father’s house are many abiding places where My creatures are, but I am going to prepare a special place for you.”

Now He says something that is brand new to them. It has become very familiar to us, but I hope it has not become commonplace because it is the great hope of the church. The future home of the believer is not here on this earth.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:3)

Jesus says here that He is going to do something He never said in the Old Testament that He would do; that is, to take us out of this world that we might be with Him in the place He has prepared for us.

Among the many things our Lord is doing today is preparing abiding places for His own. I think He is still the Carpenter of Nazareth. He is preparing a place for His own. And He is saying this directly to a man who in the next few hours will deny Him. He says, “Though you will deny Me tonight, let not your heart be troubled because it won’t in any way change My plans concerning you. I am going to prepare a place for you.” My friend, if God has saved you and He

doesn't get you to heaven, He'll have a house vacant throughout eternity because He has prepared a place for you. Jesus said, "I am coming again." This was a wonderful revelation to these men who had never heard anything like it before.

Thomas

Sitting there in the Upper Room was a man who possibly was the greatest skeptic who has ever lived – that fellow Thomas. I don't know, but I do not think I would have called him as a disciple. Would you? As a matter of fact, I don't know that I would have called any one of these twelve men for disciples – I wouldn't want any one of them! I am glad that our Lord called them, though, because if He could use them, He may use me and He may use you.

He called Thomas, the doubter. He always was a doubter. The first time you see him he is doubting. He said to the other disciples, "Let's go with Him to Jerusalem and die with Him. This thing is getting serious." He had his doubts. It was gloom as far as he was concerned. And after the resurrection when Jesus appeared to the other disciples, Thomas, I think, was infuriated when these men said, "We have seen Him." I think that he said, "I heard the women say they had seen Him, but they're just a bunch of women. I thought you fellows had better sense than that. I want you to know that I don't believe in the resurrection, and I won't believe it until I put my finger in His wounds." This man was a doubter, he was a skeptic, he had a question mark for a brain. I know some folk like this – they question everything. The Lord has the answer for these folk too, as He had for Thomas.

After our Lord said, "And where I go ye know, and the way ye know," Thomas, this magnificent doubter, sitting there that night on the sidelines, said in substance, "Wait a minute. You say You are going to leave us and that we are going to be with You. You say we know where You are going and we know the way." Listen to him,

Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not where thou goest; and how can we know the way? (John 14:5)

Today that question sounds like blasphemy. Questioning the Lord is something you ought not to do. But let me say to you that if you have a doubt, bring it out in the open to the Lord. Don't bury your doubts in a pious sort of way. Don't submerge your doubts and your questions and put on a pious front by saying, "I'm trusting the Lord," while you know good and well you're not trusting the Lord. If you doubt Him, don't publish your doubts, but take them to Him privately and tell Him that you have your doubts. No one yet has come to Him in this way without having his doubts resolved. The trouble with most doubters is that they are dishonest.

In college my philosophy professor doubted the Bible. He questioned everything. Finally his wife had him arrested for immorality. Of course he doubted the Bible! Any man who is living contrary to it will doubt it. He will want to get rid of it. But if you are honest and really have a doubt, bring it to Him like Thomas did.

Thomas says to Him, "You talk about going away. We don't know where You are going. How can we know the way?" I'm thankful that Thomas was there in the Upper Room because he elicited from the lips of our Lord this tremendous answer, the gospel in a nutshell:

Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. (John 14:6)

That answers once and for all the question of the way to God. Is the way to God through a church, a denomination? Is the way to God through a ceremony? Is the way to God today a system of ethics? While I believe in the church, and I am not opposed to denominationalism; while I believe in a ceremony (I think it is essential to be baptized if you are a Christian); while I think that Christianity presents the highest system of ethics the world has ever seen, let's be clear on one fact: the way to God is through a Person and that Person is Christ. You either have Him or you don't have Him. You either trust Him or you don't trust Him. There is no such thing as middle ground. When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life," He made a dead-end street of every other way, of every ism and every cult. Jesus Christ is the way to the Father.

When He said, "I am the way," He didn't mean that He was a way-shower. He said, "I *am* the way." He said, "I am the truth" – not I *tell* the truth (although He did tell the truth) – but I *am* the truth, I am the touchstone of truth, I am the bureau of standards of truth. Also He said, "I am the life," not the *source* of life.

That statement is dogmatic. Several years ago I was speaking at a Bible club at UCLA, using John 14:6. A young fellow came up to me afterwards and said, "Dr. McGee, I have one criticism of that verse. It is too dogmatic." I said to him, "I agree with you. It is dogmatic. In fact, it is the most dogmatic statement I can think of. But it is the characteristic of truth to be dogmatic." Then I gave him the illustration of a teacher I had when I was first starting out in school. She taught me that $2 + 2 = 4$. She was not broad-minded about it. She had no tolerance for anything else. To be honest with you, I was very broad-minded in those days. As far as I was concerned $2 + 2$ could equal 3 or 5. But she was very dogmatic. She insisted that under every circumstance $2 + 2 = 4$! You just can't get any more dogmatic than that. But I have thanked God for her since then because I now do business with a bank that is equally narrow-minded. Also, when I figure my income tax I have found that the government has the same narrow-minded idea about $2 + 2$. May I say to you, my beloved, truth is always dogmatic. And if it's not dogmatic, it's not truth.

Driving out of Portland, Oregon, one foggy day several years ago, we were going up to The Firs, a conference center in Washington, on a speaking assignment. Somehow I made a wrong turn and got off Highway 99. As I told my wife, "I don't understand how I got off with you and me both driving!" So I finally drove back into town because I was hopelessly lost. I drove into a filling station and asked the young attendant, "Can you tell me how to get to Highway 99?"

He thought for a moment. Then he said, "Let's see, I think you go that way – oh, no, I'm pretty sure it's down this street."

I asked him, "How long have you been here?"

"Two weeks."

"Thank you, but I'd better get better advice than that." I drove across the street and there was an older man in the filling station over there. I said to him, "Can you tell me how to get down to Highway 99?"

"I certainly can. You go down here two blocks. You come to a street light, you turn right, you go another block, and you are on Highway 99."

"Are you sure?"

He looked at me in amazement and said, "I'm *positive*."

He was a very dogmatic fellow, but I thanked God for him because he got me on Highway 99.

The Lord Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." And for almost two thousand years the Lord Jesus has been bringing men down the highway into His very presence. It's dogmatic, but it will bring you to the Father.

Philip

Then as our Lord moves out and on and up, another man interrupts Him – Philip, the quietest man among the apostles. You do not find him saying very much or doing very much, but every time you see him in action, he is bringing somebody to Jesus. Remember that Philip went and got a friend of his, a fellow who thought he was a humorist, who said, “... Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?” Philip didn’t argue. He didn’t talk much. He just said, “Come and see” (John 1:46). At another time the Greeks came to him, saying, “We want to see Jesus.” Philip ran over to Andrew and asked, “What shall I do – some Greeks want to see Jesus?” And together they brought them to Him. We see Philip bringing folk to Jesus, but he didn’t have much to say.

Here in the Upper Room Philip spoke out. He hadn’t had much to say before, but I think he forgot himself. The other disciples were startled, I think, to hear Philip interrupting Jesus. But when a quiet fellow has something to say, it is usually worth listening to. And Philip voiced the basic longing of his heart:

Philip saith unto him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. (John 14:8)

By the way, what is your ambition in life today? Is it to get rich? Is it to make a name for yourself? Is it even to do some wonderful thing for God? Listen to me, beloved. The highest desire that can possess any human heart is a longing to see God. Moses, who was so close to God, said, “If I could only see You” (Exodus 33:18-23). And here in the New Testament, Philip, in the Upper Room, says, “Show us the Father. That is all that I ask – just show us the Father.” Would you today love to see the One who died for you? Personally, I would love to see the One who created this universe, who died for me, who has borne with me all these years. I would love to see Him. And someday we are going to see Him.

Philip’s interruption did not sidetrack our Lord. Rather, it occasioned one of His strongest statements concerning His deity.

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been such a long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? (John 14:9)

The Lord Jesus says in substance, “When you look at Me, you look at God.” Not 99.44 percent God, but you are looking at God in human flesh when you look at Jesus. This faces us with a dilemma: either He is God, the Savior of the world, or He is the greatest imposter the world has ever seen. There is no middle ground with Him. My friend, Jesus is God. Today He is the Savior of the world. And someday we shall see Him.

There in the Upper Room our Lord, after assuring these men that He was God and that He was returning to His Father, declared that they would be able to do greater works than He had done.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father. (John 14:12)

“Greater works” are preaching the gospel from frail human lips and seeing the Spirit of God speak to human hearts so that men and women turn to God. For almost two thousand years it has been by the foolishness of preaching that multitudes of the human family have come to Christ. My friend, no *man* is equal to the task. Only a Savior who is at God’s right hand has enabled us to do the “greater works” – because He has returned to the Father and the Holy Spirit has come into the world.

Judas

As our Lord continued, He was interrupted by another disciple who had an urgent question:

Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? (John 14:22)

Sitting there was a man who was the first missionary, a man who had the first vision of a lost world, a man who really had a burden for other folk. The other men were so absorbed with other events that were taking place that they hadn’t thought of the world outside. But Judas (notice that it is not Judas Iscariot, but the other disciple by that name), sitting there, says in effect, “Wait a minute, Lord. Aren’t You forgetting something? You have brought us here to the Upper Room and You are telling us these wonderful things, but what about the world outside? Have You forgotten the world?”

Jesus answered, and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him. He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings; and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s, who sent me. These things have I spoken unto you, being present with you. But the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you. (John 14:23-26)

In other words, our Lord said, “No, Judas, I haven’t forgotten the world. I am going back to My Father, and We will come to make Our abode with you. The Holy Spirit will teach you and bring to your mind what I have said so that *you* may go to the world with the gospel.”

My friend, as we look out upon our disturbed world today, although our Lord has not forgotten the world, it does look as though *we* have. He did not give us the tremendous truths of John 14 for ourselves alone. He has given us these things that we might pass them on to others.

In conclusion He said, “... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” (John 14:27). Today our Lord is at the right hand of the Father. And still today we frail human beings have questions. I’ve got a question. You’ve got a question. All God’s chillun got questions. He is patient today. He is willing to deal with your problem, whatever it is. Maybe it’s personal, personal failure like Simon Peter’s. Maybe, like Thomas, you don’t know the way of salvation. Maybe, like Philip, you have an overweening ambition and you haven’t been able to reach your goal. Or, like Judas, you look out on the world and you wonder if God has forgotten it. Whatever your question is, bring it to Him. He has the answer today.