

JESUS TELLS HIS DISCIPLES HE IS LEAVING

(John 13:33)

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

When we come to our text for this morning, Jesus is in the upper room of a friend's house where he has just finished his last meal before his crucifixion. During the meal, Jesus washed the disciples feet. Now this was first of all to give them an example of how they should treat one another with humility and deference. And so, Jesus got down on his hands and knees and he took a basin of water and washed the dirty feet of his disciples. But there was a bigger meaning behind the foot washing. You see, in a way, the foot washing was a type. It was a picture of how Jesus would wash away their sins. Now in that upper room, Jesus washed dust off their feet. But the next morning Jesus would hang on a cross and wash their sins away. The disciples probably didn't understand the significance of the foot washing at the time, but later, when they were enlightened by the Holy Spirit, they began to see the great significance of all these things.

And then, Jesus instituted a new ordinance. And he broke the bread into pieces and he gave the disciples the bread to eat. And he said, "This do in remembrance of me." And then he poured the wine and he gave them to drink. And this command he gave to the disciples to be a perpetual ordinance to be observed by the church until he comes again.

And then, Jesus dipped a piece of bread in the sauce and he gave it to Judas as a sign to John and Peter that Judas was the one who would betray him. And he told Judas to go do what he must do. And it says Satan entered into Judas and Judas and Satan walked out into the night. And so the twelve were reduced to eleven.

And now, having cleansed his church of that unregenerate element, Jesus turned to the eleven disciples that remained and he addressed them as "Little children." (John 13:33) And thus begins one of the most tender discourses that you will find in the Scriptures. In effect, this is a father who gathers his children around his death bed to comfort them and to give them last instructions.

Even though the soul of Jesus was greatly troubled at this time because of the suffering which was at hand, yet he told his disciples,

Let not your heart be troubled.

John 14:1

Isn't that just like Jesus? "Though my soul is torn asunder, let yours be comforted. Let me suffer so that your life can be pleasant. Let me be beaten so that you may go free. Let me die so that you might live. And this is the context that we find this morning.

Jesus said,

Yet a little while am I with you.

John 13:33

By this, Jesus began to let his disciples know that he would soon die. And Jesus is preparing their hearts so that they might not be utterly discouraged by the events which will take place in a few hours. And so he said, "I will only be with you for a little while and then I must go away." And he said,

Ye shall seek me.

John 13:33

What does that mean? Does it mean that the disciples will go house to house in Jerusalem trying to find him? Does it mean that they will spread out through Samaria and Galilee looking for Jesus after he is crucified? No, they will know where the body of Jesus is laid. It will be in a tomb. And then later they will watch as he ascends into heaven. So the sense here is not that the disciples will physically search for him. But the sense is that they will feel the despair of a great loss. They will feel lonely. They will feel anxious because he is no longer personally present with them. They will feel the want of him and they will desire to be where he is.

This longing to be with Jesus; to be personally with him; is the natural condition of all Christians as long as we are here and he is there. The One who loves us has left us on this earth for a time. And he has gone to another place. And Jesus said, "Ye shall seek me." This is the hope that lies within us. It is the hope of seeing Him one day. It is the hope of being where He is. It is the hope of sharing in his glory. It is the hope of living in his house. And so Jesus said, "Ye shall seek me." But then Jesus told them,

Whither I go, ye cannot come.

John 13:33

Now this statement would seem to be a very discouraging statement if Jesus meant, "Ye can never come." What if Jesus told them, "I am going away, and you will never see me again." What if he said, "I am going to a place where you can never come." Why, the disciples would have been discouraged to the point of utter despair.

Jesus had used the same language when he spoke to the unbelieving Jews in John 7:33.

Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me. Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me, and where I am, thither ye cannot come.

John 7:33, 34

And then again,

Then said Jesus again unto them, I go my way, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.

John 8:21

Now when Jesus spoke these words to the unbelieving Jews, he clearly meant that they could never come. He said, “Ye shall die in your sins.” They would never enjoy the personal presence of Jesus again. They would seek him but would not find him. And so, when Jesus spoke these words to those who were not his sheep, he meant it as utter rejection. “Whither I go, you cannot come.”

But when he spoke these words to his disciples, he meant, “Whither I go, you cannot come now.” Look what Jesus told Peter.

Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.

John 13:36

And look how Jesus explained these things to his disciples.

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 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 14:1-3

Jesus never uttered these words to the lost Jews. But now, at his death watch, he assured his disciples that he was only leaving them for a little while and that he going to prepare a place for them and that they would gloriously be with him again in that wonderful place.

This morning I want to take a few minutes and discuss with you why it was that Jesus must go away. It must have seemed to the disciples that this was not a good thing. I am sure that in their minds, it would have been good if Jesus would just have stayed with them. Why he could have stayed right there with them in Jerusalem. He could have taught them for many more years. He could have held their hands and led them along personally. And they could have enjoyed his personal fellowship for the rest of their lives. And this seemed good to the disciples. So why is it that he must now leave them? And I would suggest to you first of all that it was necessary for Jesus to go away so that,

He Might Enter Into His Glory

Jesus never intended to remain on the earth. Jesus never intended for his humiliation to last forever. But he always intended to return to his glory with the Father in heaven. You see, Jesus existed in eternity past with the Father and the Spirit. And he enjoyed great splendor and glory. He was the master of all things. And he was the creator of all things. And his glory shined forth as the sun in all its brightness. And then, in order to redeem a people for his name, this glorious God humbled himself and became a man. Philippians chapter two says that he “made himself of no reputation.” The Greek word suggests that he emptied himself. Theologians have debated among themselves for centuries about the meaning of this emptying. But let me suggest to you that it certainly does not mean that the Second Person of the Godhead divested himself of divinity. He did not empty Himself of his essential nature. He never shed his Godhood. This

much is clear in the Scriptures. Everywhere we look, Jesus claimed that he was God. He said, “I and the Father are one.” And so, he did not empty himself of his divinity.

But I would suggest to you that he emptied himself of his glory. He left his glorious station in the heavens and he became a man on a cursed earth. He emptied himself of his great and majestic presence in heaven and became a man in whom there was no form nor comeliness. (Isaiah 53:2) And he gave up his glory for the shame of a cross.

But now, Jesus tells his disciples that he must return to his glory. There is a time to every purpose under the heaven . (Ecclesiastes 3:1) And there was an appointed time for Jesus to leave his glory and to take up a cross. But there was also a time appointed for Jesus to return to glory. And this was it.

Later that night, Jesus would end this discourse by praying with the disciples. And in his prayer, Jesus prayed that he might be glorified.

These words spake Jesus, and lift up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee.

John 17:1

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

John 17:5

And so, Jesus must leave the disciples first of all, to return to his glory with the Father in the heavens. But secondly, Jesus must leave them in order,

To Assume His Reign as King

We learned in the book of Hebrews that after Jesus died he ascended into heaven and he sat down at the right hand of God.

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens.

Hebrews 8:1

This was a fulfillment of the prophecy in Daniel.

And I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:13, 14

You will notice that Jesus “came with the clouds.” But notice which way he was going. He was not coming down, but he was going up. He came to the Ancient of days. And there was a great coronation. And Jesus Christ was given dominion and glory and a kingdom. It is an everlasting kingdom and it will never be destroyed. And you will notice that Jesus didn’t come to the earth to be the King, rather, he went to heaven to be the King.

The fact of the matter is that it was necessary for Jesus to leave the disciples because his throne was in heaven. Some people ask, “When will Jesus reign.” And I think it is abundantly clear that Jesus Christ reigns now. He is sitting on the throne in heaven and he is Lord and Master of all. He does not sit on a hill in Jerusalem. Those old things in Jerusalem were types and shadows. But Jesus sits on a greater hill. He sits on his throne in that heavenly Zion. And he sits at the right hand of the Father and all authority has been given to him.

But it was also necessary for Jesus to leave the disciples in order,

To Intercede for His People

In one sense of course, his redemptive work of suffering and death is completed. But his heavenly work has just begun. He ever lives to make intercession for us. (Hebrews 7:25)

Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such a high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens. A minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched and not man.

Hebrews 8:1, 2

It was necessary for Jesus to leave the disciples so that he might go and continue his ministry. There was more to be done and so he must go. Now, after ascending to heaven, Jesus is not ministering in some earthly tent or earthly temple. He is ministering in that heavenly sanctuary - the one that counts – the one of which the Jewish temple was a type. The Jewish throne and the Jewish tabernacle were just earthly models of the true throne and the true sanctuary in the heavens.

For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices: wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat to offer. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law.

Hebrews 8:3, 4

Now there were earthly priests in Jerusalem. And they had certain gifts and sacrifices which they offered. And Jesus is the true priest in heaven of which they were the types. And if the earthly priests offered sacrifices, then the heavenly priest must have a sacrifice. And if we belong to him, Jesus stands in heaven as our priest. And he mediates for us day and night.

And so, it was necessary for Jesus to leave the disciples and go to heaven and perform his ministry of mediation. But it was also necessary for Jesus to leave the disciples in order,

To Fulfill Scripture

The Old Testament had foretold that Jesus would be led like a lamb to the slaughter. (Isaiah 53) and that he would ascend (Psalm 68:18). And we have already seen Daniel 7 which predicted that Jesus would ascend to the Ancient of Days and receive a kingdom.

And then, it was necessary that Jesus leave the disciples in order that,

The Disciples Would Be Empowered For a Worldwide Mission

As long as Jesus was personally on the earth, with the disciples clinging to him, the gospel was localized. But if Jesus were to go away, then the disciples could be sent to all parts of the earth with the gospel, and this was the providential plan for the spread of the gospel. Just before his ascension Jesus told the disciples,

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Matthew 28:19

And so the plan was that Jesus would ascend into heaven and then the disciples, being empowered by the Holy Spirit, would greatly extend the scope of the gospel to all nations. And so it was necessary that Christ should leave in order that the disciples would go out and the gospel would go out and as such the ministry of Christ would be multiplied.

Two thousand years later we can look back over history and see how this plan of God has been accomplished so wonderfully. When Jesus was on the earth, there was a moderate reception in a very small geographical area. Perhaps there were thousands who believed in Christ. But when Jesus left the earth and the Holy Spirit came and empowered the disciples, why the effects of the gospel began to multiply exponentially. And the gospel has travelled far and wide to every continent. All of this Jesus foresaw when he told the disciples I must go away.