

Let Not Your Hearts Be Troubled

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- [0 : 00] Well, as I said today, we are continuing our study in John's Gospel. We've come to chapter 14 and I'd like us to read together the opening verse of that chapter. Jesus said, let not your hearts be troubled.
- Believe in God, believe also in me. And we're going to take our title from the first part of that verse. Let not your hearts be troubled. I absolutely love those words because they are so kind.
- They're showing us that Jesus wants to bring us comfort and peace in a world when there's so much distress. Jesus has come to help us.
- So I love these words because they're kind, but I also love these words because they are real. We are all here today from different circumstances.
- We've all got very different experiences, but I have no doubt that every single one of us here today knows what it's like to have a troubled. Heart. And that's one of the great ironies I think of our culture today and maybe especially of our island culture.
- [1 : 06] Everyone has got fears, anxieties and bruises in their hearts. And yet it's always so rare for us to talk about it and we feel like we have to keep these things hidden.
- Very often a brave face and an outward smile is hiding a troubled heart. But what causes that?
- What troubles our hearts and even more importantly, what heals it? How do we find peace in a world that so often leaves us troubled?
- Well, that's what I want us to think about together for a week while today. And I want us to start by saying that if we ask that question, what troubles our hearts? I think the simple answer is to say big stuff.
- In other words, it's the big issues of life that trouble our hearts. And again, this is an interesting thing that we see in our world today, in our lifestyle today, in kind of the 21st century West, where very often we will look for our smiles and our contentment in small things and in things that ultimately don't matter that much.
- [2 : 26] So I'm sure this week many of us will look for a smile by watching a funny video on social media or maybe if a football result goes our way. Or maybe if we buy something nice that we've wanted for a wee while.
- And there's nothing wrong with any of that. All of that's good stuff to enjoy. But often, you know, these things, one of the reasons we're attracted to these things is because they distract us.
- And they distract us from the things that really trouble our hearts. And that's so often our experience.
- Our hearts are weighed down by big things like fear, loneliness, pressure, guilt, inadequacy.
- Often our contentment will come from small stuff that doesn't matter that much really. Our troubled hearts come from the big things that matter more than anything else.

[3 : 26] So big stuff, big questions about life, big questions about death. These things will trouble our hearts. And as we think about this, I want to just dig into that a wee bit more.

And I'm going to suggest three areas where I think the big issues of life will trouble us. When our hearts are troubled, when we lack direction, when we lack certainty, and when we lack fulfillment.

Lack of direction. That can apply at a day-to-day level. Often we can just drift day-to-day, week-to-week. Often people will ask me, how was your week? Busy. What did you do?

I can't remember because you're just going through life and everything's just a fog. And we're just drifting along and the busyness of life, the pressures of work and family.

Sometimes we can feel like we lack direction. So it can affect us at a day-to-day level. But alongside that, bigger trouble comes from what is the biggest direction question of all.

[4 : 34] What is going to happen when we die? That is the biggest direction question of all. And that's the question facing the disciples in these verses.

Verses 1-5. Jesus is speaking to these disciples about his departure. And in the last two chapters, he's telling them more and more about what's going to happen. He says, we're going to Jerusalem and I am going to be betrayed by one of you, by Judas.

I'm going to be denied by Peter and I'm going to be handed over to the authorities and I'm going to be killed. In other words, Jesus is telling his disciples where he's going. And yet as he does so, he gives them the amazing promise that you have in these verses.

If I go, I'm preparing a place for you and I'm going to come again and take you to be with myself. So he's telling them about what's going to happen and he's getting them to think about that ultimate question about what's going to happen when they die.

But the disciples are confused and in particular, Thomas is troubled. And you can hear the distress in his voice where he says, Lord, we don't know where you're going. How can we know the way?

[5 : 41] And the same question troubles our hearts. Life is so frighteningly short. And the question of what lies beyond life is too hard to think about.

But it's too important to ignore. Where are we going? What's going to happen? Do we have a clear sense of direction for that ultimate question?

We also struggle with a lack of certainty. And in many ways, that's the flip side of the first question about direction. Because even if we do have an idea of the path we're on, even if we do think, well, yeah, I do think about this, Thomas. And I do have a sense of direction for what life and beyond will look like.

You can then be plagued by the question, well, that's the path, but how can I be sure? How do I know that I'm on the right path?

How do I know which path is right? And here is where we encounter one of the biggest troublemakers of our hearts. Doubts.

[6 : 54] We all struggle with doubts and they affect every single part of life. Day to day, we can think, can I cope with work? We think, you know, will this person like me?

Will I be accepted? Will I get through my exams? Will we be okay financially? So many doubts can press us in our day to day lives. And there's an even bigger problem with the big questions of faith.

What should we believe about life and death? What should we believe about our origins and about our destiny? What is the truth about our identity and our morality?

And for all these questions, there's no lack of answers. There's lots of different answers in the world around us. It's not hard to find answers, but it can feel very hard to find certainty.

As the big questions of life press into your hearts and trouble us, we can often find ourselves thinking, I'm just not sure. I just don't know.

[8 : 09] But the big questions of life don't just affect us, you know, in a big separate way from day to day life. The big issues also have a massive effect on how we go through lives, our lives, day to day, week to week.

And so often that can manifest itself in the fact that we can go through life struggling for a sense of fulfillment. That's something that troubles so many people's hearts.

A lack of fulfillment in our lives. And I think it's an especially big problem in our culture today because we have all grown up, you know, on a kind of where we've been fed with a menu of songs and films and TV programs and everything that have all generally had one big message.

And the general one big message is your dreams have got to come true. Your dreams should come true. And what they never say is the flip side of that, that is, if you don't, then you failed.

And there's that pressure for everything to just be the way we dreamt it to be. And yet for the majority of people, for nearly everybody, things don't work out the way they want.

[9 : 26] I mean, an amazing example of that is football. When I was young, everyone wanted to be a footballer. And, you know, we knew that so few people actually made it. But the reality is 10 times worse than that.

I spoke to a friend of mine, I've maybe told you this before, a friend of mine who's 16-year-old son was given a professional football contract with Aberdeen. So he was like, that's it, I've made it. Left school, professional football contract sorted.

Two years later, the contract ran out, it wasn't renewed. And what they discovered was that for every 16-year-old who got a professional contract, 85 to 90% of them don't get kept on.

And you think, my goodness, you know, at 16, he thought he'd made it. Two years later, it was all over. And it's not football, not just football, anything. That pressure for the team to come through, it doesn't, and we're plagued by a lack of fulfillment.

And, you know, even for the people whose dreams do come through, very often they'll discover that life's not as easy or as enjoyable as they expected. And this lack of fulfillment, you know, can manifest itself in lots of ways.

[10 : 39] Maybe you're here today and you struggle with a sense of self-worth. You struggle with a sense of purpose. Maybe you are working, but you're wishing your working life away.

You're wishing Monday to Friday away, wishing the next few weeks away until your next holiday. Maybe wishing the next 10 years away until you can retire. Maybe you feel like a failure.

And maybe there's nothing coming up in the week ahead that you're excited about. So I think that all of this is very, very real.

Many of us, I think, struggle with a lack of direction, with a lack of certainty, and with a lack of fulfillment. There's two crucial things I want to say.

If you can relate to anything of what I've just said, the first crucial thing is this, you're normal.

[11 : 40] You are normal. Because every one of us struggles with these things. If these big issues press onto your heart, you're not weird.

You're normal. The second crucial thing is that it doesn't have to be like this. And that's the key thing I want us to think about.

Jesus says, let not your hearts be troubled because it doesn't have to be this way. And as we long for direction and certainty and fulfillment, one of the most important and one of the most magnificent claims of the Gospel is that Jesus meets all of these longings.

In fact, the claim of the Gospel is that only Jesus will meet all of these longings. And it's so important for us to think about that.

It's really easy. At one level, the Gospel troubles us because it is forcing us to think about the big questions of life. But at the very same time, the Gospel settles us because it gives us the answers that we crave.

[12 : 50] And so you think, well, okay, where are those answers? Well, these answers come in 10 of the most amazing words that Jesus ever said. And you'll find them in verse 6.

And I am the way and the truth and the life. Our hearts long for direction. Jesus is telling us he is the way.

Now, when you think about direction, direction involves both a pathway and a destination. If you imagine you're climbing the Clesium or you're climbing Ben Nevis, you're following a pathway and you're aiming for a destination.

The two go together as we seek a sense of direction. And the amazing thing is that in these verses, verses 2 to 6, Jesus is telling us that he is both the pathway and the destination.

So in verses 2 to 3, he's talking to the disciples about the destination. And he's saying that at the heart of that lies a place with me.

[14 : 00] I'm preparing a place for you. And that place is one where we will be together. At the heart of the destination is him, the promise that we will be with him. But in verse 3 to 4, he talks about the way as well.

Thomas says, I don't know where the way, what the way is. And Jesus says, it's me. I am the way. And so Jesus is not only the destination.

He is the pathway. And that's extremely important for us to understand. At the heart of the Gospel is the fact that Jesus is the way to Jesus.

Jesus is the way to Jesus. Now that might sound like a really obvious, almost silly thing to say, but it's actually an incredibly important theological point. Jesus is the way to Jesus.

And the reason it's so important, the reason we have to recognize it, is because we can so easily get this wrong. Because we can easily try to find an alternative path to Jesus.

[15 : 02] So we think that, you know, well, maybe being good will lead me to Jesus. Maybe trying hard will lead me to Jesus. Maybe learning more will mean that I'll be with Jesus in the end.

Maybe even suffering a lot will take me to Jesus. And these are all ways of thinking that I need to find a path that will take me to Jesus in the end.

But they're not the way. The only pathway to eternity with Jesus is Jesus. But equally, we can try and make Jesus the pathway to something else.

We can try and make Jesus the pathway to a destination that isn't actually Him. So we might think, ah, if I follow Jesus, then I'll get a husband that I long for, or a wife.

If I follow Jesus, then I'll get the job that I really would love. If I follow Jesus, then I'll be popular in the way that I always dreamed of being.

[16 : 15] If I follow Jesus, then I'll get a really good reward, or whatever it might be. It's easy to think like that, but they're all the wrong destinations to aim for. Because the only thing that's going to satisfy us for eternity is the one who made us for Himself.

Jesus. It's an eternity with Him that will be paradise. So we've got to recognize that Jesus is the way to Jesus, and that tells you two amazing things.

It tells you that He's waiting for you. These words speak so powerfully, it says, I'm preparing a place for you. I'm waiting for you. He's waiting for you, but He's not just waiting for you.

He's come for you. He's come to meet you right where you are. And when the big question of what happens when we die troubles our hearts, this is the cure that we long for.

This is the difference that following Jesus makes. And when life feels short and fragile, it's so, so important for us to remember this.

[17 : 24] And I'm going to say something which is a wee bit personal, and I suppose it's something that we would be embarrassed to say, but I've actually found it a wee bit hard to turn 40. So I turned 40 last December, and I found it a wee bit hard.

Because I feel like life is just disappearing. And I think, you know, I mean, people think that's ridiculous. And I'm sure this many of you are like, try turning 80, but you know, you realize there's probably less ahead of me and behind me, or certainly more or less halfway now.

And I've found that hard, and it's made me feel like life is more fragile. And I've always been tall, I've always been fit, and now I'm just thinking, oh my goodness, it's only downhill from here in terms of my physical health.

And that has bothered me, and I feel stupid saying that, but it's true. But when I remember that Jesus is the way, and if he's the way to an eternity with him and with every other believer, I stop worrying about turning 40.

I actually start looking forward to turning 80, because it all just takes me closer to that amazing day. These great truths soothe our troubled heart.

[18 : 45] So as we look for direction, Jesus is the way. As we look for certainty, Jesus tells us that he is the truth. This is emphasized for us in verses 7 to 11.

Philip is desperate for certainty. You see that he says to him, says to Jesus there in these verses, just show us the Father. That's enough. That will give us the certainty that we need. And then Jesus responds by saying, do you not realize who I am?

And he's telling us, Jesus is telling Philip and us who he really is. And he's telling us that he is the great revealer of God, the Father. And that's so important to keep remembering. It's a key truth that has run right through this gospel that runs right through the Bible.

At the very start, John told us that no one has ever seen God, the only God who's at the Father's side. That's referring to Jesus. He has made him known. And the same emphasis has been revealed throughout the whole New Testament.

It's in the face of Jesus that we see the glory of God. It's Jesus who's the image of the invisible God. It's Jesus who's the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

[19 : 51] In other words, that means that if we want to know what God is like, we look at Jesus. If we want to hear what God is saying, we listen to Jesus. If we want to go where God is leading, we follow Jesus.

And as verse six tells us, it's only in Jesus that that's possible. And this is driving home an incredibly important point.

The fact that Jesus says, I am the truth is driving home a crucial issue about the gospel. It's telling us that if you want to find certainty, the gospel is not calling you to scrutinize a whole pile of religious claims.

In other words, the gospel is not saying, sit down with all these religious books, documents, comments, analysis, and scrutinize them. The gospel is not saying you need to scrutinize religious claims.

The gospel is saying, if you want to find certainty, you need to scrutinize a person. And that's so, so crucial. You can sit down and read a thousand books about claims and counterclaims regarding the gospel.

[21 : 03] You can watch dozens and dozens of YouTube shorts about it. And people do that. Some people remain skeptical. Some people are persuaded. All that's good. But that's not really what you have to do. You can do it if you want. But no doubt you'll find it helpful.

Christianity has stood up to intellectual scrutiny for centuries. But it's not really what you have to do.

You've got to recognize that the only way you can scrutinize the truth of the gospel is not by engaging with religious information. It is by engaging with a person.

It's by engaging with him. And so if you want to know if the gospel is true, you need to talk to Jesus.

You need to wrestle with Jesus. You need to meet with him. You can see that. Look at how many times he talks about, he uses the word me in these verses. Jesus, have you not known me?

[22 : 00] Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. I am in the Father. The Father is in me. The Father who dwells in me, in me. It's all about meeting with him.

And so if you want certainty, if you want the truth, you've got to just start talking to Jesus. Now that's not a complicated process. Even just saying to him, Lord Jesus, I want to figure this out.

That's where we've got to start. And what I think you'll discover is that here's the truth. And I think that I can prove that.

And the proof is in this, once you meet Jesus, everything else starts to make sense.

Our origins make sense. The fact that we know in our hearts that we are not just mechanical accidents.

[23 : 03] That when you look at the beautiful children who come here every week, they are not just a nice consequence of mechanical processes.

Our morality makes sense. There is nothing in an atheistic worldview that tells you that what happens in Gaza just now is wrong.

But in the name of God, we know it's wrong. On all sides. On all sides. The violence and the suffering that ordinary people are experiencing.

We know that's wrong. And even our joy makes sense. The fact that being together, that friendship, that community, that singing, that a beautiful sunset, that all of that is really, really cool.

That only makes sense when we see that it's the handiwork of our Creator. When you come to Jesus, everything starts to make sense.

[24 : 17] And if you are a Christian, and even if nobody else knows that yet, and I'm certain that that's true of some people in here, people who are believing, but scared to say it.

Even if, you know, whatever stage you're at in your Christian journey, the amazing thing about the fact that Jesus is the truth, it means that your doubts are painful, but harmless.

Your doubts are painful, but harmless. Doubts are painful because they trouble our hearts, and we all get troubled. Even I get troubled by doubts sometimes, and they're painful, but they're harmless.

Because your doubts have no effect whatsoever on those two words. They change nothing of the fact that Jesus is the truth, and that he is totally committed to you.

So if you are a Christian, your doubts are painful, but they're harmless. But if you're not yet a believer, and particularly if you are consciously pushing Jesus away, and if you're saying, I don't want this, I don't want Jesus, your rejection of Jesus is painless.

[25 : 43] But it's got the potential to be so, so harmful. It's painless because you can just go home and stick on the telly and think about something else.

It's got the potential to be incredibly harmful because of what it could mean for your eternal destiny. Doubts are painful, but harmless. Rejection painless, but oh my goodness, so potentially harmful.

Last of all, as we seek for fulfillment, Jesus tells us that he is the life. This I think is such an important thing for us to remember.

As Jesus speaks to us about these things, these big questions, yes, it makes us think about eternity. And I think that's so important. Jesus is the one through whom we are created, and life comes through him.

Jesus is the one who's conquered death in the cross, he's risen again and gives out eternal life to all who believe in him. That is all so, so important. And these big questions are what the Gospel is all about.

[26 : 52] But maybe you know all that. Maybe you have all that as a believer, but the week ahead still feels rubbish.

And so yes, you might think, yes, I'm so thankful for what I know for eternity, but I still feel so unfulfilled just now. Or maybe that's why you're actually rejecting Jesus, because you think, well, I'm not really thinking so much about what happens beyond what I die.

I don't know. But you're thinking, well, I just think it's going to spoil my life. And I don't want that unfulfillment now, because of what the Gospel might bring. Well, if you feel like that in any of those ways, I want you to notice something crucial that Jesus says in verses 11 to 14.

He talks about the fact, basically here, Jesus talks about his works, and he talks about how the fact that his works verifies his identity. That's a key part of the Gospel's claim, the miraculous works that Jesus did serve to verify his identity.

And then he goes on to expand on that a wee bit. He says something else about his works. He says to his disciples, you are going to do even greater things than me.

[28 : 05] And here, Jesus is setting out the pattern for how the church is going to work. And he expands on this in the next two chapters. He is saying, I am going back to my father. But the father and I are going to send the Holy Spirit to indwell you and empower you.

And through the church, through all who believe in Jesus, he is going to accomplish amazing things. And that's exactly what happened. You read through the Book of Acts. That's what it talks about.

You read through church history. You see it happening again and again. You look at our own lives. And that's exactly what Jesus has done. And the crucial point is this, that on his own, in his three-year ministry that's recorded for us in John's Gospel and in the others, in his three-year ministry, Jesus reached a few hundred people.

Through the church, he is reaching every nation of the world. That's the greater works that are being done.

The whole world is being reached with the Gospel and he's not stopping and he's using very, very ordinary people to do that. We're not miracle workers. We're not people with answers to all the questions.

[29 : 25] And we're definitely not perfect people who have got everything in their lives sorted with all very ordinary, very messy believers. But that's who Jesus uses.

And that makes life as a Christian so fulfilling. And that makes this week so exciting for all of us. Because just look at what we have. We've got a God who's worth worshipping.

We've got truth that we can actually rely on. We've got a church family that we can have so many good times with. We've got a community that we can reach. We've got good news that we can tell and we have got the grace and love of God in our lives that we can share with others.

That's what Jesus gives to us. And we want to share that with everybody else because it's only Jesus who can do that.

Following Jesus does not make life perfect. But I promise you it makes life fulfilling. It makes life so fulfilling.

[30 : 31] So Jesus comes to us with these words. Let not your hearts be troubled. We started by saying that these words are kind. They're so kind.

We said that these words are so real because they affect every part of life. But I want to close by just noticing the fact that these words are actually a commandment.

There's actually two commands in that verse. Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God. Believe in me. And these all go together.

What we believe is the key to our hearts not being troubled. In other words, the command let not your hearts be troubled is impossible without the theology that Jesus is revealing to us.

And it's telling us that by listening to him, by trusting in him, we're going to find the healing and protection and answers that our hearts desperately need.

[31 : 38] So next time fears and doubts and pressures and guilt start troubling your heart, please come back to these verses and please tell all of those negative feelings that are troubling your heart.

And tell them to clear off. Because Jesus is the way, the truth and the life.

Press those truths home into your heart and may all of our troubled hearts find their rest in him. Amen.