



## Sermon

### ***The Now and Future Kingdom***

**John 14v23-29; Revelation 21v10, v22-22v5**

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There was tension in the room. The audience was both trusting friends and puzzled believers. The blows kept coming one on top of the other! He washes their feet and tells them to do the same; for some strange reason Judas walks out; then the announcement that He is leaving them and that they will not be able to follow Him. Peter in his usual way, promises more than he can yet deliver, and Jesus gently tells him what his real response will be.

We of course know what is going on: Ahead is the Cross. Gethsemane tells us of the horror with which Jesus faces this. Despite many attempts to warn the disciples of this they are still unable to let go of the ideas that have been part of their upbringing - part of who they are as faithful Jews. It is no wonder that they are puzzled. It is no surprise that the questions keep coming. Five different Apostles ask seven questions within these two chapters 13 and 14:

- "Where are you going?"
- "Why can't I come?"
- "How can we know the way if we don't know the destination?"
- "Tell us who the Father is?"
- "Why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

None of this makes sense Lord! And it won't until they see Him risen from the grave a few days later and meet with Him over the forty days from Easter to the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. What is the problem? Why can't they understand?

When an idea is fixed in our minds it is very hard to move it. For the first believers the idea was that the Messiah, the One promised by God to deliver Israel from their oppressive conquerors, would come and drive out the oppressors and deliver Israel into a golden age similar to the one they enjoyed under King David.

Imagine how you would feel if our Country was overrun by another Nation and we became inferior members in our own Land? How would it be for us if we heard a foreign language in the Beehive telling us how to live? That is what it was like for the Jews of Jesus day. They longed for the fulfilment of God's promise to rescue them.

### **And it looked like that in Jesus it was going to happen.**

Here was one who understood the ordinary person on the street. Here was one who could do marvellous miracles. Here was one who could challenge the religious leaders who collaborated with their oppressors. Here was one who showed every characteristic of the promised Messiah.

So, what sense did it make to say that He was leaving them. The foot washing thing was a bit weird but ok if it was kept within bounds. But you can't mean that we would do that to our oppressors? Can you?

Yet that is precisely what Jesus is on about. He is challenging the prevailing idea of what *kind* of person the Messiah would be and *how* he would carry out His task

Even rumours of the resurrection didn't convince them at first. They had to see Him for themselves. And even that did not shift this idea. (See Acts 1:1-8.) Forty days of teaching about the nature and character of the Kingdom of Heaven still not shift it. Jesus has to give them a new job description. They are to be witnesses to the new kind of life that the Messiah brings. There will come a time when the Father will set all things right. That promise has begun to be fulfilled in Jesus. When He returns it will be brought to completion. Gradually the old idea passes away and a new one emerges as the fulfilment of the old.

There are many ideas around in our world that are just as wrong and just as hard to shift. One is the idea that there is a neutral position on religious matters from which we can evaluate the truth or error of what the religion teaches. You may have heard the famous story of the blind men and the elephant.

Once upon a time a King and his courtiers came across some blind men confronted with an elephant. The blind men were arguing over who was telling the truth about the elephant. One had touched the trunk another the ears a third the legs. Each, in giving his account of what they had touched contradicted some of what the others said. The King is able to sort out their errors and show them the truth of what an elephant is really like.

This, it is said, is what the great religions are all like:

Each is like one of the blind men with only some of the truth and yet they proclaim it as if it were the whole truth. It has taken the so-called scientific view of the world to show us the truth about religion. Some of what we believe as Christians is right. Other religions are right in some of what they believe. So, all religions may well tell us something about God, but no one has the whole truth.

It is not a neutral stance. It is a position that says "we" are right and have a true view of all religion. This is immensely arrogant unless it is true. But a moment's thought about what the world's religions teach about the nature and character of God will show that it is not.

Moving that idea is going to be hard but if we take the example of Jesus, we won't go far wrong.

- He is confident of the truth He teaches.
- He demonstrates the truths He is telling by doing mighty works that cannot be denied or explained away.
- He carries an unshakeable hope in God's future for humankind.

### **We can do all of those.**

- Have confidence in the Faith taught in the Bible. There will be debate both within and outside the Church. There always has been. There always will be. God is trustworthy and will lead us.
- Pray faithfully for the world in which you have been placed and remember that even in the hard times Jesus is still Lord of all. Pray for miracles.
- God's unshakable plan is being worked out and the promise of a glorious future is true. Imagine a world where everything is under God's direct control and people choose to live in obedience to His goodness. Imagine a world when we can walk with our Master and talk with Him face to face. Imagine a world where only good happens. Imagine a world where all tears are wiped away and there is no more sorrow or suffering.

That is what John is trying to convey to us in the reading from Revelation 21 and 22. Here our thinking leads us to using our imagination. Words no longer suffice unless they paint pictures.

This is the hope we have. It is unshakable. No one can take it away from us. It is God's great gift.

And can you now see how these two lessons come together. Here are His disciples about to go through a heart-rending time of grief and sorrow almost beyond our imagining. He offers them comfort which is at first more puzzling than helpful. They have much to learn before all will be understood and even then, it will take the direct action of the Holy Spirit to teach and to remind them.

And we, like them, must go not into the horrors of the Cross but into our daily life. What will this week hold for us? What will sustain and comfort us if trials come our way?

Why the vision of the promise of life lived first here and then in eternity with Our Master.

It begins now and will continue undaunted by death or anything this world can throw at us. It won't be easy. We are never promised that. It will be worth it no matter what we go through. We have two wonderful promises. One from the Master Himself, "I go to prepare a place for you so that where I am you may be also." And one from His servant St Paul, "I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Live with that hope firm in your heart. It is true. God promises that it is so.

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