

80 – I’m Coming Back

John 14: 12-20

For the past few years these eleven men had been students. They had been listening, watching, helping and at times doing, but everything centered on Jesus. He preached, He healed, He cast out demons, He prayed, and He led them from place to place. So it was almost impossible for them to think that the kind of ministry that He had been doing could continue in any real way. And how sorry they must have felt to see it all come to an end. So many people had been so wonderfully helped, so many smiles and happy tears as healed children were handed back to their parents, or tormented minds found peace. Yes, there had been lots of opposition, but there had also been lots of breakthrough. Many people had come to love Him. Roadsides, hillsides, backyards, synagogues and even the temple courtyards had been filled with people whenever He was present. How sad that He would be leaving. How intolerable a future without Him must have seemed, and their despair must have been obvious that evening. To comfort them Jesus said, “I will not leave you orphans; I am coming to you. Yet a little [while] and the world beholds Me no longer, but you behold Me; because I live, you will also live. In that day you will know that I [am] in the Father and you in Me and I in you” (literal).

Then a few moments later He said this, “Do not let your heart be troubled (shaken) or let it be fearful (terrified). You heard that I told you, ‘I depart and I come to you’” (literal) (Jn 14:28).

He was telling them not to be sorrowful, because He was coming back. He would be gone for a short while during which they would see Him on occasion by encountering Him in His resurrection body. Then, after ascending into heaven He would return, and an entire new era in God’s plan of salvation would begin. He said if they understood what He was telling them they would actually be glad to see Him ascend to the Father because after that the Father would initiate a far greater season of ministry. And this time, they would be the ones doing the wonderful works He had been doing. Just as He had been in the Father and the Father in Him (v11), now they would be in Him (Jesus), and He would be in them. The relationship they had observed between Him and the Father would soon happen in exactly the same way between Him and them. They would submit to, depend on and represent His heart and character just as He had submitted to, depended on and represented the heart and character of the Father. He would guide, empower and reveal Himself to the world through them just as the Father had guided, empowered and revealed Himself to the world through His Son. And, Jesus said, as this new dimension of ministry took place, He would remain in the Father, meaning He would continue to submit to, depend on and perfectly represent the Father.

Their years together had been wonderful, and they had reached many people. But the great harvest of souls had not yet begun. It could not begin until He finished what He came to do. Then after His death and resurrection He would leave for a short time, but very soon after that they would be filled with the Holy Spirit, and He would come back to lead them, and He would take them to the very ends of the earth (Ac 1:8). If they could just understand what He was saying, their sadness would turn to joy. So will ours!

The Spirit and the Son (Jn 14:12-20)

• DBS (Sun, Mon, Thurs-Sat)

The greater harvest

The impact of Jesus’ ministry was amazing. Thousands and thousands of people came to hear Him. But what He modeled during those few years was only a beginning. God had a far greater harvest in mind, one that would spread beyond Israel and reach the whole world, one that would cascade down through the generations, for thousands of years, until a time determined by the Father.

There are many prophecies and promises in the Bible that reveal God’s great love for lost people, but none is said more clearly than through the prophet Isaiah. Beginning in chapter 49 and continuing on through chapter 53 God’s plan to allow His Messiah to suffer and die is described, at times in horrible detail. In chapter 53 the Messiah dies like a lamb sacrificed for our sins. Then there is a promise that He will return to life, and like a victorious warrior, He will divide the “treasure” that His sacrifice has won. That treasure is, of course, people. It’s those who will be saved by placing their faith in Him. Then a series of chapters follow which describe a great harvest of souls that will result from His “guilt offering” (Isa 53:10). That section opens with these words,

“Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no [child]; break forth into joyful shouting and cry aloud, you who have not travailed; for the sons of the desolate one [will be] more numerous than the sons of the married woman,” says the Lord, “Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; lengthen your cords and strengthen your pegs. For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left. And your descendants will possess nations and will resettle desolate cities” (Isa 54:1-3).

In the next chapter, chapter 55, the gospel call is given. Listen,

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come buy and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and delight yourself in abundance. Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, [according to] the faithful mercies shown to David” (Isa 55:1-3).



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Then the next chapter, chapter 56, declares that the salvation won by the Messiah will fill God's house with people who used to be considered "unclean," and foreigners will join with believing Jews in this great salvation (Isa 56:1-8). And then over and over again, to the end of Isaiah's prophecies the blessings that will come from the Messiah's great salvation are celebrated. Jesus Himself chose this passage to reveal God's heart.

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me because the Lord has anointed Me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent Me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord..." (Isa 61:1-2).

The plan

Jesus saw these promises and understood the heart of God. He knew explosive growth was about to take place. He knew Isaiah 53 would release Isaiah 54 and all that would follow. But how would that happen? Up until He arrived, Judaism had more or less struggled to just survive, let alone be a force for evangelism around the world. Something drastic would need to take place, and that change was what He was explaining to them that evening. The plan was simple: Every disciple would be empowered by the Holy Spirit as He had been empowered, then He would lead them in exactly the same way as the Father had led Him. And by doing that He would reproduce His ministry through His disciples. He would continue to preach, heal, cast out demons, pray and lead them. In the future, wherever His disciples went, He would go, and as they multiplied and spread around the world, His ministry would multiply and spread around the world, until enormous numbers of people would encounter Him and be given the opportunity to believe. A people that had become barren, a fig tree with no fruit, would soon need a bigger tent to house all the new children of God.

The interruption

As we noted last week, God's plan has been tragically interrupted at times over the course of church history. In some seasons and places the gospel was nearly lost and replaced with works, the Spirit-led believer was replaced by a hierarchical structure, and the baptism with the Holy Spirit was reduced to a vague theology rather than a genuine empowerment. But mercifully, in every generation, God preserved at least a remnant of faithful believers to pass His truth onto the next generation. And today the plan is still working. In many parts of the world the ministry of Jesus is growing exponentially. Believers are carrying Jesus with them wherever they go, and the Father's "tent" is being filled with children.

The Father's goals

Someone might ask: "Well, how many people does God want in heaven? Doesn't He have enough already? How can He love so many?" But those questions reveal a lack of understanding. God's capacity to know and love is infinite. There is no limit to how many children He wants in His family. Yes, there will be a final number, but I think that number will be set by the events of the last age of human history. Between then and now the Father has, at least, three goals.

1) The firstborn: He wants all His children to become like Jesus. He is the firstborn of the Father's family.

"For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined [to become] conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren" (Ro 8:29).

2) The multitude: He wants an enormous multitude of people in heaven, as uncountable as the stars, made up of every tribe and tongue and people and nation. John heard them worship. Listen.

"And a voice came from the throne saying, 'Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.' Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready'" (Rev 19:5-7).

3) The disciple: He wants to reach people through you and me. He is giving us the privilege of bringing children into His kingdom, of reaching people who, in some cases, only you or I can reach.

Once we understand these goals our lives take on a new purpose: We recognize that we have the privilege of carrying Jesus with us wherever we go. Let's listen to Him once more:

"In that day, you will know that I [am] in the Father and you in Me and I in you" (Jn 14:20).

Questions

1) Have you ever been part of the process of helping someone to know Jesus? How did He use you to do that? What did you learn from that experience?

2) Think of a time when you asked the Lord to guide you and use you to minister as He wished. What happened? Was He there with you?