

## Sermon- Bursting the Bubble of Spiritual Self-Assurance

Scripture: John 16:23-33

Sunday, October 20, 2019

In our journey through the Gospel of John I almost always move sequentially making sure to cover every verse. But sometimes because of the way the topics have been arranged within the text, especially when there are multiple themes interwoven I am unable to cover big and important insights from the text in one sermon. So for example in our section from verse 16 to 33, we focused on how Jesus highlights the grief and pain his disciples were about to experience once he was handed over to the Romans in the next few days, and how he reframes the pain as pain with a purpose. But there was another very big theme that was embedded in this section that we were not able to get to. And that is when an individual interacts with God and His word, there is a roller coaster of spiritual certainty. That is what we are going to look at today.

Looking at the section from verse 23 to 28, here is what Jesus says, *<sup>23</sup> At that time you won't need to ask me for anything. I tell you the truth, you will ask the Father directly, and he will grant your request because you use my name. <sup>24</sup> You haven't done this before. Ask, using my name, and you will receive, and you will have abundant joy.*

*<sup>25</sup> "I have spoken of these matters in figures of speech, but soon I will stop speaking figuratively and will tell you plainly all about the Father. <sup>26</sup> Then you will ask in my name. I'm not saying I will ask the Father on your behalf, <sup>27</sup> for the Father himself loves you dearly because you love me and believe that I came from God.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>28</sup> Yes, I came from the Father into the world, and now I will leave the world and return to the Father."*

So what is Jesus explaining here? He is introducing the concept of praying to the Father in His name. This is something completely new to the Jewish people. He is saying in verse 23, "at that time", when he reappears miraculously after his horrendous death,

then Jesus' disciples will have a new spiritual gift. If they need something, they don't need to ask Jesus like they were used to doing for the last three years. At that time they can ask for things directly to their heavenly Father and they have to ask for it in Jesus name and they will get what they ask for. And this new capacity will be so wonderful that Jesus himself tells his disciples, you will have abundant joy, as a result. Then Jesus tells them that since they believe Jesus, the Father loves them and will answer their prayers directly. He also tells them that he himself is going to return to the Father.

Now after Jesus has spoken all these things to his disciples, they respond, *"At last you are speaking plainly and not figuratively. <sup>30</sup> Now we understand that you know everything, and there's no need to question you. From this we believe that you came from God"*. This response is going to be our focus today. To appreciate how different this response is we have to look at the pattern of how the disciples have responded to Jesus. See throughout Jesus' time with the disciples they were always a little confused and unsure about what Jesus was talking about. When Jesus spoke in parables they usually never got it and usually asked Jesus what he meant. When he did his various miracles, like the feeding of the many thousands, they interpreted it as the work of a prophet like Moses, but Jesus explained to them that he was more than a prophet. Even as recent as earlier in our chapter 16, when Jesus told them that they would not see them in a bit and then they would see him, they were confused like crazy. Now to be fair to the disciples, anyone would be confused when you followed Jesus around because He was describing things that human beings have never heard of before or done before or seen before. So if the disciples had their head spinning around Jesus trying to grasp who he was and what he was telling them, that was the understandable and normal part.

But in our passage today we see something we have not seen from his disciples before. So here after Jesus tells them that in the time when we is seen again after he is not seen, some amazing things will happen. The disciples will be given a new form of prayer

in Jesus name that will enable them to directly talk to their heavenly Father. And he tells them that he himself was going back to the Heavenly Father. Now it is easy for lifelong church goers to look at this and think nothing of it. But the exchange I just described to you was so unique that no human being would have heard those words from any other human being before. But now all of a sudden, the disciples are like, “oh Jesus now we get you! Oh you are speaking so plainly. Now, it is all as clear as day. We get who you are and we don’t need to question you about your true identity any more. We believe you came from God”.

This is a very interesting point in the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. Because after 3 years, they are saying that they finally get it. They are claiming that they know what Jesus was trying to explain to them all along. They are saying, yes Jesus, the lightbulb has just got turned on after three years of following Jesus. This is kind of just in time too right because it is literally one day before the final exam. After all, the next day Jesus was about to go on the cross. This is what any teacher lives for right? The light bulb turning on moment in the students life? And that too, it happening at the last possible moment.

But what Jesus does with this moment is truly remarkable. Because instead of doing high fives and end zone dances, Jesus says, look guys, *“Do you finally believe?”<sup>32</sup> But the time is coming—indeed it’s here now—when you will be scattered, each one going his own way, leaving me alone.”* ...

Imagine the disciple’s reactions! They would have thought that their teacher would be super impressed with their declarations. But instead of their teacher being impressed or happy, he is saying, they are about to abandon him. It would have been a hard pill to swallow for his disciples right? But Jesus was not trying to burst their bubble just for kicks. Jesus was ironically demonstrating his divinity at that moment, by peering deep into their hearts and seeing that even when the disciples think they know something

they actually don't. Because Jesus knows that when they are put to the test they will not be able to keep these two facts together in their minds, the fact that Jesus is someone who has come straight from God, and the fact that he is being brutally dragged to the cross. And when they see Jesus completely surrendered to the violence of the Romans, they are going to run for their lives.

Now, why do I point this out? To encourage us to burst people's bubbles, because that is what Jesus would do? 😊 Not really. I want to point out some very important phases in the evolution of the disciples' faith.

The first is the phase of the seeker. There are many examples of this in the Gospels from the old and devout Zachariah who was eagerly waiting for the Messiah in the temple to the younger disciples who became the 12. Let's be clear, there is no one, Rom 3:11 says who is seeking after God of their own accord. But John 6:44 says, God draws people to himself. It works like this. God puts this force in people that would cause them to seek him. Now once this thirst or seeking impulse is put in people, Ps 14:2 says that God is looking down from heaven to see who is understanding and seeking after God. In other words, God is looking for those who will respond to that seeking impulse. The one who responds can be called a "seeker". Becoming a seeker is phase 1 of the spiritual journey.

When a person seeks genuinely, God responds with a lot of additional input. Now every individual processes all this input in all kinds of ways. And in the end, people come out in different places on a spectrum. Let me describe this spectrum to you. On one end of the spectrum are people who seek and seek and seek and never ever come to believing anything specific. These people are the permanently open minded even about the basics of who Jesus is. In some religions of the world, being permanently openminded is considered a virtue. But you may have heard this phrase, some people are so open minded that their brains have fallen out. That is the permanent seeker for you. And one end of the spectrum.

On the other end of this spectrum are the people who think they have figured God out completely. This is what I call Spiritual Self Assurance. And this is what we are seeing in the disciples response to Jesus in our passage today. Spiritual Self-assurance is when someone thinks they fully get everything about God, Jesus Christ and the Bible. They may even have committed themselves to Jesus. But there is a little problem with this level of self-assurance. They have so much certainty about who God is and how He should be operating that sooner or later God is going to do something that is out of the box they have created for God. You see friends, no matter how well you think you know God, He is going to do something that pushes your faith, your imagination and your understanding. And when that happens it could cause the Self assured seeker, the one who thought they had God figured out, to snap. This is what we see happening to the disciples at Jesus' crucifixion. The guys who were so sure they got who Jesus was in John 16:30 will by chapter 19 be nowhere to be seen just as Jesus predicted. So this is what I have called Spiritual Self-Assurance and it represents the other end of the spectrum to Permanent Seeker. Spiritual Self-Assurance is making up your mind about God a little too much.

Now if you look at the spectrum with the permanent seekers on the one side and the Spiritually cocky Self-Assured on the other side you might ask, where does the true disciple come in on this spectrum. Well, it's a good thing you asked ☺ The true disciple is on a narrow path between these two extremes. The true disciple is someone who has passed through the seeker stage and come to the commitment stage. You see you cannot come to the commitment stage without making up your mind about who Jesus is. This is what Jesus calls, "believing in Him". But here is a very special thing about a true disciple. A true disciple knows that when you are following Jesus you are following God. And when you are following God, there are many things about God that lie in the realm of mystery. And being a disciple of the true God is to be willing to be lead to the edge of these mysteries and being flexible, open and humble enough to know that there

are many things of God that we cannot fully comprehend because God is made up of infinities and our finite mind can never fully wrap itself around something that is infinite. The true disciple of Jesus then is one who has made up their mind about Him just enough that they are then taken on a journey where they have the privilege of being exposed to the mysteries of God. In Matt 13:9-11 it says, *“Who hath ears to hear, let him hear. **10** And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? **11** He answered and said unto them, Because <sup>i</sup>it is given unto you <sup>k</sup>to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.*

Apostle Paul talked about many mysteries of the faith that were revealed to him. To give you a few examples, Christ’s incarnation is a mystery of faith, spiritual birth is a mystery of faith, Christ’s relationship to the church is itself a mystery of faith.

Why is it important for Jesus’ disciples to contemplate the mysteries of faith? Because it helps us always remember who God is. God is an infinite being and when God reveals Himself to us he is opening up mysteries too awesome for us.

Secondly, it keeps us humble in knowing that we are but a speck in God’s presence and we should remember to treat God with the awe and respect that He deserves and not take God for granted.

Thirdly, it helps us to not be overwhelmed when life surprises. Because if God Himself is mysterious, whose ways, Is 55:9 reminds us, are above our ways, then if we don’t fully understand all the why questions it is ok. We only have to be sure that God is good for the promises and he has made to us. And that is all that matters.

I hope that in our walk with Christ, no matter where we might be on the Seeker Spectrum, that we will be able to avoid the extremes of being permanently open or putting God in a box and come into that center where we can be filled with certainty of who God is but also open to the awesome mysterious of His ways. And if we wander

into either a false Spiritual self-assurance or a dangerous open-mindedness then that God would burst our bubbles just to bring us back to him. Let us pray.