

Abandoned by Jesus?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 January 2025

Preacher: Chris Lowe

[0 : 00] I wonder if you could sense why their hearts would be troubled, the disciples at this point. Why bubbling up inside them, a mix of confusion and anxiety and fear as they talk to Jesus.

I think the reason is because Jesus is going. He's leaving them behind. He is just abandoning them, or so it seems.

Through three years of public ministry to this point, they'd been with him and he'd led them. As they stood alongside him, he'd turned water into wine, he'd spoken with authority, he'd fed 5,000, he'd stood up against religious authority, he'd given sight to the blind.

Jesus had spoken a word and raised Lazarus from the dead. He is God the Son, he's the Messiah, he's come to save his people and restore the world and the disciples were with him every step of the way.

Can you imagine how that would have been, to be there alongside him? Just a few days beforehand, before this moment, Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on a young donkey, and the crowds had shouted, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

[1 : 14] Nothing to be afraid of anymore, for your King is coming and now he's here, he's with us. Yet from that moment on in John 12, the mood shifts.

If you have your Bible open in John 12, verse 20, just back a bit. Darkness looms. Jesus speaks of a seed falling to the ground and dying, he says, you must follow me.

In 12, verse 27, now my soul is troubled, because he sees death coming. The crowd say, verse 34, surely the Messiah will remain forever.

Jesus warns, walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. And when darkness overtakes you, it is scary.

At the start of chapter 13, the Passover meal, in the upper room, Jesus bends to wash his disciples' feet. They're thrown off balance, they don't understand. What are you doing? In verse 31, back in his place, Jesus is again troubled in spirit.

[2 : 23] He testifies, one of you is going to betray me. And they stare around at a loss. Who is it? Jesus takes bread, he gives it to Judas.

Do it quickly. And in verse 30, Judas went out and it was night. Now the Son of Man is glorified, Jesus declares.

Really? Then, verse 33, my children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me. And just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now. Where I am going, you cannot come.

Where are you going, Jesus? Cries Simon Peter. Why can't I follow you? I'll lay down my life for you. No, you won't. You will disown me three times. Can you sense why their hearts might be troubled?

With events moving so quickly and betrayal in their midst, why so confused and desperately anxious and afraid in this moment? Because at the bottom of it, Jesus is going.

[3 : 29] He's leaving them behind. Like a parent walking out on his children. He's just abandoning them. Or so it seems.

Leaving them alone in the darkness. A small bunch of disciples by themselves without him in a world that will hate them. As we approach these verses, you and I, for sure, we are not in the same position as the disciples on the night before Jesus is crucified.

Of course we're not. We haven't walked alongside him for three years. Moreover, it's 2,000 years later now. And yet there is one big way in which we are in the same position as they are about to be.

Jesus is gone. He is not here. Is that obvious? He is not with us. And we are, in a sense, by ourselves without him today.

You know, sometimes it takes children to ask the kind of questions and say the kind of things that adults feel they maybe shouldn't say. You know that? Daddy, if Jesus loves us so much, why isn't he here with us?

[4 : 54] When something tough happens in a child's life, I wish Jesus was here. It's really hard that he's not. Why can't I see him now?

It would be better if he was here with us, wouldn't it? Does he not care? Sneering adults in the world, of course, will latch on to his absence.

So, Christian, where is your Jesus now, this one you are following? And I don't know whether you've sensed this or have known this.

The truth is, I wonder if you would agree, it doesn't take much hatred from the world and betrayal in the church and hardship in your life or death in your family.

For you to start to become confused and anxious and afraid and actually think to yourself, he's left us. This Jesus who I've meant to, who I've been brought up to call my Lord and my God, he's not actually here with me.

[6 : 00] He's abandoning us, me. And your heart is troubled. Well, over the next 10 Sundays, began last Sunday, now this Sunday and 10 more.

We're diving together into John chapter 13, verse 31 through to chapter 17 of John's Gospel. Because in these so famous chapters, here in the upper room, on the night before he is crucified, Jesus takes an opportunity to teach.

He takes an opportunity to teach his confused and fearful disciples. In these chapters in front of us, over these coming weeks, couple of months, the upper room discourse, Jesus teaches his first disciples.

He teaches us about life as his followers and friends with Jesus gone. He opens up for us what to expect now in our world with Jesus gone.

He teaches us how to live now, a community of people, with Jesus not here. And to the confused and the anxious and the afraid and those who simply want to learn, his message this morning is, do not let your hearts be troubled.

[7 : 32] Well, after that longish introduction to the series, to this morning, come back to chapter 13 and verse 31. See what takes place. Judas having gone out and it was night.

I don't think it was just dark. There is a darkness coming. Jesus' betrayal, his arrest, his crucifixion is now in motion. Jesus immediately begins speaking to his followers and teaching about his going. Two things, four things to mention this morning. The first thing he says here sounds crazy, if you've not heard it before. But it is true. First thing this morning from these verses, that Jesus is going is for his glory.

Look, verses 31 and 32. When Judas was gone, Jesus said, Now the Son of Man is glorified. And God is glorified.

And God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself and will glorify him at once. You can't miss that.

[8 : 38] Repeated five times. Glorified. Glorify. To be glorified means to be lifted up and displayed for who you really are.

King Charles III, I think we looked at him last week, sometimes walks around just like any kind of old, friendly, quite posh English gentleman. Yet the hour came when he was glorified.

He was shown to be who he is in all his majesty and splendor. And Judas, having gone out to betray him, Jesus says, Now the Son of Man is glorified.

That is, now you are going to see me in all my kingly splendor. Here in the darkness, this is my glory moment and you'll see me as I am. In fact, you will see God glorified in me.

And so God will glorify the Son right now and at once. You say, really? What now moment of blazing glory about to take place?

[9 : 47] The glory of Jesus is this. It is the Son betrayed and taken from them, flogged and then lifted up on a cross to die.

Not failure, what's about to happen. Not tragedy or a terrible end, but glory. The crowd imagines the Messiah will remain forever.

The disciples would prefer him not to leave them, for sure. A child today, we might say, Jesus, why did you not just come into the world 2,000 years ago and stay with us?

But that would be to deny Jesus his moment of ultimate glory. He had to go. He had to leave them and us and die.

Because, do you know this, in his cruel death, the world learns and sees that Jesus loves the Father and does exactly what the Father commands. In his death, Jesus finishes the work God gave him to do.

[10:58] In his death, Jesus displays the most stunning, sacrificial love as he lays down his life for his friends. In this moment of darkness to troubled disciples, now the light, now the Son of Man is glorified, going, lifted up to die, then lifted up to heaven.

His going was good. Because it was for his glory. You imagine at this point, the first disciples and we, we could probably and really should stop and reflect on this.

But Jesus, having said that, presses on. Look, my children, my children, there's tenderness here. I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now, where I am going, you cannot come.

Think, okay. Then so, what are we meant to do, Jesus? Verse 34, a straight command. Now love one another.

So verse 34, with Jesus going, gone, and us left behind, what are we meant to do? First century disciples, 21st century church family, a new command I give you, love one another.

[12:27] As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another, three times.

In Jesus' absence, with Jesus gone, he is not here, love one another. I don't know what you make of that command.

The danger with talk about loving one another, I think, is that it can wash over you, can feel very basic and obvious, maybe even dull or wet.

But I think, I think it's the kind of bland, harmless advice you might hear from Paddington Bear.

Wouldn't it be nice if we were all a little bit more loving?

But that's not what Jesus is saying here. Look, this is a new command. Verse 34, as I have loved you, so you must love one another.

[13:28] How has Jesus loved his disciples? Well, it's not with wet Paddington-like words. He has laid down his life for us. He has stooped and served us as one washing our feet.

Sacrificial love, humble, dying for us love, our Lord. That is how he has loved us, as he went.

And he says here, today, all disciples from the first century onwards, with Jesus gone, so now you must love one another. One command here, to shape us.

Well, what do you think of that? I fear that in UK churches broadly, let me speak broadly, I think we're a million miles from obeying Jesus here.

In churches broadly, turning up on a Sunday, nodding at a few people, having a quick coffee, and disappearing until next Sunday, is not what Jesus is talking about in John 13.

[14:37] At St. John's, we're much, much more than that, for sure. And yet we can be more still. Love one another with deep affection, with practical action.

That is, know one another here at St. John's. Encourage one another, pray for one another, provide for one another's needs, feed and clothe one another, help one another, carry one another's burdens, sacrifice our time and our money for one another, actually lay down our lives for one another, if it comes to that.

That is our task. In the middle of and alongside work and life and so on. And Jesus says, verse 35, by this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

That is, with Jesus having gone now in the 21st century, there should be something about Christian community love that makes everyone go, wow, wow. These people follow Jesus.

I can see it in their life together. Wouldn't that be wonderful if over the coming six or 12 months we were to become even more deeply obedient to this new command?

[16:06] In some small way reflecting the glory of Jesus to a watching world. We're moving swiftly, as Jesus does.

Jesus is going, it's for his glory, says Jesus. Now, as we live today with Jesus gone, love one another. But Simon Peter doesn't seem to hear the love command.

That's understandable. You know, when you're confused and afraid, there is a limit to what you can take in all at once. The thing Simon Peter did hear was Jesus saying, I am going and you cannot come.

And that's why I think verse 36 is so desperately and simply put, Lord, where are you going? We don't want to lose you. And point one this morning to troubled disciples, Jesus is going is for his glory.

Now, know this, secondly, Jesus is going, it is for our good. Simon Peter asked Jesus, Lord, where are you going?

[17:20] Jesus replied, verse 37, where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later. Which is an amazing promise for disciples to hold on to.

You will follow later. Peter's not content with that. Lord, why can't I follow you now? I'll lay down my life for you, which seems so bold and so brave. And Jesus answers, will you really lay down your life for me?

Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will disown me. three times, which to be honest, that's the truth, not just about Simon Peter, but also for so many of us who would like to imagine we'd be such Christian heroes, but are not.

And yet Jesus is for disciples like Peter. And he's for us. In fact, the very reason he goes is for our salvation and for our good.

Which is chapter 14 and verses 1 to 4. Look at these wonderful verses. Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.

[18:33] Why? My father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm going there to prepare a place for you? What's Jesus talking about?

My father's house speaks of heaven, the place where God the Father dwells. And my father's house, Jesus says, has many rooms.

That is, there is more than enough space there for you and for me to be able to join Jesus and live in the presence of our God and Father. And here's the thing, end of verse 2, I am going there to prepare a place for you.

So here is the purpose of Jesus' going. He's being lifted up on a cross, then lifted to heaven. He goes to prepare a place. He goes to prepare a place for you.

And don't be confused by this. It is not that Jesus goes to heaven and then once there he starts getting things ready for you, kind of making the bed and plumping up the cushions and putting the kettle on.

[19:50] No, no, in John's gospel it is in his going through his death and his resurrection that he prepares a place for you in the Father's house. For through his death on the cross as he goes he loves you, lays down his life for you.

He deals with God's wrath towards you. He takes away your sins, he washes you clean and makes you fit for heaven. And rising from the dead and ascending to the Father he opens the way to everlasting life with God for you.

Did you know this? In his going he went to prepare a place for you, even you. But not just that because verse 3 and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

You know the way to the place where I am going. That is a promise. That having gone died risen and ascended for you I will come back and take you to be with me.

That is to every one of his followers Jesus will one day come and he will take us home to be with him in the house of his Father and our Father. God will take you to be with me to be with you.

[21:22] But what do you think of that this morning in January 2025? John 13 and 14 is just the beginnings of the upper room discourse and we've said that you and I are not in exactly the same position as the disciples on the night before Jesus is crucified.

Of course we're not. Yet here we are in the 21st century individuals, little community of disciples and Jesus is not here.

And it would not be surprising if at times in our lives, in our Christian walks, we found ourselves unsure or perplexed, our hearts troubled, or even a feeling that the one whom we follow has almost abandoned us.

and he says here to us so plainly he hasn't. His going for he is no longer here was for his glory and it was for your good.

If you are a follower of Jesus today would you allow Jesus' words of personal commitment to you in these verses to sink in? What does he say to you?

[22 : 33] He says I went to prepare a place for you. I will come back for you. I will take you to be with me that you also will be where I am.

And so if all of that is true, so simply put but life changingly true, what must we do today? We who are here this morning, aware of our own sins and failures maybe, surrounded by a hostile world in part, tempted to anxiety and fear.

What must we do? Chapter 14 verse 1 to finish. Believe in him. That's the command.

John 14 verse 1 Do not let your heart be troubled, says Jesus. You believe in God, believe also in me. Do you notice in this verse, we are not ruled by our hearts.

That is, don't say I'm anxious and afraid and troubled and there's nothing I can do. I can't take control of that. No, Jesus says do not let your hearts be troubled.

[23 : 54] Take hold of your heart this morning and believe. Believe in God. Believe in Jesus. And if you are here at St.

John's this morning and you're not yet one of his disciples, know from these verses that Jesus died and he rose so that he might open up a way for you to return to God.

Believe in him. Don't die in your sins. Turn away from your old way of life and come to Jesus. Pray to him today and say Jesus I turn to you as my Lord and my God.

And were you to do that a place in heaven with God will be yours for good. It's a promise. And secondly, finally, to the many of us who are already his disciples, will you this morning on this cold January Sunday morning, will you entrust yourself into the ongoing care of your Lord and Saviour, the one whom you have not yet seen?

Believe in him. Rely on him. Roll your anxieties and your fears onto him. Know that his going 2,000 years ago was for his glory and it was for your good.

[25 : 26] Know that this Lord Jesus, although not here, he will never abandon you nor forsake you. Do what Jesus says, love your brothers and sisters around you as God has loved you.

And as you do that, be absolutely assured that this Lord Jesus, as he has gone, he will come back and he will take you to be with him forever.

Do not let your hearts be troubled, says our Lord to us. You believe in God, believe also in me. Let me lead us in a prayer.

Let's pray together. if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me. Almighty God, we thank you for the words of the Lord Jesus Christ, spoken to first disciples and to us so long ago, for our teaching and for our comfort.

[26 : 35] Thank you that even as night came and Judas betrayed, your son knew exactly what he was doing. Thank you that in his death he laid down his life for us as he loved and obeyed you.

Thank you that having prepared a place for us with you, he will come back and take us to be with you and with him for all eternity. as we live today in this dark world, make us those who roll our fears onto you and may our hearts not be troubled.

Grant us deeper, richer, reliant faith on you this coming week and help us to love one another as our Lord has loved us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen.