

Jokes

A little girl finally got to attend a wedding for the first time. While in the church, the girl asked her mother: "Why is the bride dressed in white?" The mother replied to the girl: "because white is the color of happiness and it's the happiest day of her life today."

After a little bit, the girl looks up at her mother and says: "But, then why is the groom wearing black?"

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A middle-aged woman has a heart attack and is taken to the hospital. While on the operating table she has a near death experience. During this experience, she sees God and asks him, "Is this it"? God says, "No" and explains that she has another 30 years to live.

Upon her recovery, she decides to just stay in the hospital and have a face lift, liposuction, tummy tuck, and so on. She even has someone come in and change her hair color. She figures since she's got another 30 years, she might as well make the most of it.

She walks out of the hospital after the last operation and is killed by an ambulance speeding by. She arrives in front of God and complains, "I thought you said I had another 30 years."

God replies, "I didn't recognize you!"

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A man walking along a California beach was deep in prayer when all of a sudden, he said aloud, "Lord grant me one wish". The sky clouded and a booming voice said, "Because you have tried to be faithful, I will grant you one wish." The man said, "Build a bridge to Hawaii so I can drive over anytime I want to."

The Lord answered, "Your request is very materialistic. Think of the logistics of that kind of undertaking; the supports required to reach the bottom of the Pacific; the concrete and steel it would take. I can do it, but it is hard for me to justify your desire for worldly things. Take a little more time to think of another wish, a wish you think would honor and glorify me".

The man thought for a long time and finally said, "Lord, I wish that I could understand women. I want to know what they feel inside, what they are thinking when they give me the silent treatment, why they cry, what they mean when they say 'nothing', and how I can make a woman truly happy?"

After a few minutes God said, "How many lanes do you want on that bridge?"

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* We are in week 11 of our Ashes to Fire series and I am excited share with you what I have learned as I poured over the scriptures in preparation for today's message.

Let's pray:

Lord, as we come together to study Your Word, help us to have ears to hear. Bring insight where there is confusion and let my words be Your words. We ask that You help me deliver the message that You have for us, speaking only the words You want me to say. Thank You for Your faithfulness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

In the bible study that Krista is leading, Jesus and Women, the speaker talks about sitting down to feast on the Word. Often, we dig in God's Word, as orphans, desperate for a scrap. But let's think of it this way this morning. Let us lean back, open our mouths and allow God to feed us. Let us open God's Word and feast on it, eat it, and allow it to do in us what God desires. Lord, thank you for your Word.

If you are able, please stand for the reading of God's Word.

* **John 14:1-14**

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. ² My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 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. ⁴ You know the way to the place where I am going."

⁵ Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?"

⁶ Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

⁸ Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? ¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will

do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. ¹³ And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. ¹⁴ You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.

This is the Word of God, given for the people of God and together we say, "Thanks be to God." You may be seated.

* So, backing up a little, Jesus has just told his disciples that one of them will betray Him, all of them would deny Him and that He was leaving that night. He then goes on to say, do not let your hearts be troubled. He knew what He had said was deeply disturbing to them, He cared for them and wanted to bring them comfort. They had traveled together for three years, doing life together. That He was leaving was not good news to them, no matter how Jesus spun it. They were happy with the way things were and it was hard for them to understand how it could be better that He go. Could you imagine your very good friend telling you that they are going away and that it is BETTER for you that they do? Hard to comprehend. Though He had told them, they didn't understand that the Holy Spirit would come, and Jesus is promising that death will not interrupt the intimacy they enjoyed with Him. They would not be forgotten.

They had no reference point for Him leaving and then coming back, they thought He was going to another city or place. This reflects the disciple's inability to comprehend that the cross would be the way Jesus would return to the Father.

Jesus' leaving is purposeful. He is working on their behalf; He is going to prepare a place and the Holy Spirit will come after He is gone. Jesus' death would LEAD them into an intimate relationship with the Father. They also didn't understand that this was not the end of their ministry, but the beginning. They would share in God's power! He is encouraging the disciples to hold fast in light of the upcoming crisis.

* In verse 3, When the text states, "I go" it speaks of Jesus' own planning and initiative. He wasn't taken to the cross, He knew what was going to happen and went there of His own accord. The disciples thought His death was an unforeseen calamity, but Christ was teaching them that it was the path of His own planning. The "going" is itself the preparation. His death and resurrection makes it possible for eternal life and dwelling with the Father.

When we think of Jesus preparing a place for us, love prepares a welcome. With love, expectant parents prepare a room for the baby. With Love, the hostess prepares for her guests. Jesus prepares a place for His people because He loves them and is confident of their arrival. There is plenty of room in God's house. He wants ALL to come to know Him. We will talk more about that in a minute.

Verse 3 also says, "That where I am, there you may be also." The entire focus of heaven is being united with Jesus. Heaven is heaven not because of streets of gold, or pearly gates, or even the presence of angels. Heaven is heaven because Jesus is

there. We take comfort in knowing that even as He prepares a place for us, Jesus also prepares us for that place.

* In verse 5 Thomas says to Him, “Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?”

Charles Spurgeon makes the observation, “We notice how they speak to him with a natural, easy familiarity; and He talks to them in full sympathy with their weakness, teaching them little by little as they are able to learn. They ask such questions as a boy might ask of his father. Often, they show their ignorance, but never do they seem timid in his presence, or ashamed to let him see how shallow and hard of understanding they are.” He repeatedly told the disciples who He was and where He was going, but they didn’t understand.

Thomas should be praised for his honesty and clearly explaining his confusion. I am grateful for the Lord’s patience with us.

This passage shows us it is OK to wrestle with our faith. The disciples wrestled and they WALKED with Jesus. In my Sunday school class recently someone brought up that if we just tell people to believe in faith that they don’t feel like they can wrestle with their faith. We need to be OK with questions and allow people the freedom to wrestle and come to the conclusion themselves. In this way we strengthen our faith and God works in it. He reveals what we need when we need it. We also don’t talk much about how we struggle with certain scriptures or have doubt. There is not a person here today that doesn’t struggle at times. You are not alone in it.

* Verse 6 Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Jesus didn’t say that He would show us a way; He said that He is the way. He didn’t promise to teach us the truth; He said that He is the truth. Jesus didn’t offer us the secrets to life; He said that He is the life.

* If you are wandering about and don’t know where you are going. Jesus is the way.

If you are confused; and don’t know what to think. Jesus is the truth.

If you feel dead inside and don’t know if you can go on. Jesus is the life.

* One commentary states, “Jesus is the way, the only way, to the Father. No good works, religious ceremony or costly gifts will get you into heaven. Only by Jesus can we come. If Jesus is not the only way to God, then He is not any way to God. If there are many roads to God, then Jesus is not one of them, because He absolutely claimed there was only one road to God, and He himself was that road. If Jesus is not the only way to God, then He was not an honest man; He was most certainly not a true prophet. He then would either be a madman or a lying devil. There is no middle ground available.” (Guzik commentary). Jesus is not just a great religious teacher or a prophet.

Either He is the Son of God, or He is not. There is no middle ground. Jesus is not just one of many choices. He is the only choice.

Some are offended by the narrow path, thinking it is too restrictive to be set by a loving God. First, let's be grateful that God made a way for us to come to Him. Second, Biblical Christianity is the most pluralistic, tolerant, embracing of other cultures religion on earth. Christianity is the one religion to embrace other cultures and has the most urgency to translate the Scripture into other languages. A Christian can keep their native language and culture and follow Jesus in the midst of it.

An early criticism of Christianity was the observation that they WOULD take anybody! Slave or free; rich or poor, man or woman, Greek or barbarian. All were accepted, BUT on the common ground of the truth revealed in Jesus Christ. The Christian faith will receive anyone who comes through Jesus.

God is not building fences to keep people from Him and we shouldn't either. There's nothing required beyond believing in Christ. God loves everyone. Even the people we don't agree with, even the people that look different than us. Even the ones who sin differently than us. He is not looking at people on their own merit but with the lens of Jesus and His sacrifice for us. How will WE welcome people that God sends that are different? How can WE swing wide the doors and help them to come to know Him. The time is coming and we ALL need Christ and the salvation he provides.

The Lord wants everyone to come to Him. He is building rooms in heaven, longing for you to make the decision to make Him Lord of your life. Your church family wants you to come to know Him too.

Do you know why we want you to come to the Lord? Because not only have we found salvation, but we have found the amazing grace that comes from knowing the Lord. We have found peace in living with Christ in our lives. We have found in Jesus the love of the Father. We have seen Him love us, even when we doubt Him. We want to link arms with you and walk this path as Christ-followers together.

* In Verse 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."

Philip wants more proof, as we often do. We want one more move of the Spirit, one more miracle, one more word of the Lord.

* Verse 9 Jesus says, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." They had known Him for a while and yet missed the point that He and the Father are one. Jesus is the embodiment of who God is. Philip doesn't understand that by knowing Jesus they have already seen the Father.

Jesus Christ is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. In Him we see heaven's eternal heart walking around on two legs in time and space. When we see the heart of Christ we are seeing the very compassion and tenderness of who God himself most

deeply is. Jesus reveals God's nature and purpose. To fail to see God in Jesus was to fail to know Jesus. Jesus was sent by the Father as the ONE way to know the Father. He was God in the flesh.

* In Verse 12 When Jesus talks of greater things, He is not talking about more sensational, but greater magnitude. The greater things are not just miracles, but deeds of humility, service and love. The disciples lives, and our lives, are a continuation of Jesus in all we do to glorify the Lord. More believers will influence a greater number of people over a much larger geographical area over thousands of years. Jesus is still at work on the earth because His very Spirit lives inside of us and now we get to do His work.

* Verse 14 says if we ask anything in Jesus' name that we will get it. In order for this to be true, first we have to get our hearts beating in harmony with God's heart. When Jesus says we can ask for anything, we must remember that our asking must be in His name- that is, according to God's character and will. God will not grant requests contrary to His nature or His will, and we cannot use His name as a magic formula to fulfill our selfish desires. If we are sincerely following God and seeking to do His will, then our requests will be in line with what He wants, and He will grant them.

The Lord is not a vending machine, where if we just put the right words in, He will spit out a positive answer. One commentary said, "True prayer moves in a cycle. It begins in the heart of God, with the purposes and desires of God. Then God places those desires in our hearts, then we express it back to Him in prayer. We don't pray because it is the way to get something from God- or for that matter, even to discover the will of God. The goal of prayer is not to work through our list of requests, hoping to prod God to act. Instead, the purpose of prayer is to know God, personally and intimately. Prayer allows us to be in communion with God.

I am convinced that every good and right thing you have ever prayed for, God intended to give you before you bowed your head. Jesus said our heavenly Father knows that we need all these things before we ask Him. Prayer opens the door of our will, thereby allowing God to do what He desires to do for our benefit and for our good. Jesus claimed the purpose of answered prayer is that the Father may be glorified in the Son. So self-serving prayers are excluded. Yet, the prayer that says, "Thy will be done" will always be answered.

Would we really want to pray and change God's mind? Do we really think we know what is best? He is the Alpha and the Omega. He sees the beginning and the end. He promises good things for us, so would we really want to change his mind? His plan is good and He is good.

David Busic, in the book *The Praying Pastor*, tells us, "While we may not understand the unfathomable depths of prayer, we can hang on to something bigger than our questions: any answered prayer is because God is good, and any seemingly

unanswered prayer is also because God is good. Faith in our “how much more” Father believes that either our prayer will be answered or that something better will be given instead. God will either give us what we ask or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything God knows. Submission to God means that, even as we pray for certain things, we trust God’s wisdom and goodness to do what is best for us. We can pray with the confidence, knowing that our requests will be granted- or, if they are not, that their granting would not be good for us.”

We don’t pray to tell God what He does not know or remind Him of things He has forgotten. He already cares for the things we pray about. He has simply been waiting for us to care about them with Him. When we pray we stand by God and look with Him toward those people and problems.

Our Heavenly Father is a good Father. His ways are good and He loves us beyond measure. Let us rest in that and learn to trust in Him.

* As we move into communion, I want to welcome you to the Lord’s table. Anyone who declares Jesus as Lord is welcomed to come. You don’t have to do anything more than believe in Him as your Lord and Savior. You don’t have to clean up before you come. You don’t have to change your life before you come. We, as a church family, want to welcome you to the table. As we come to the table, we remember the amazing sacrifice that Jesus gave for us.

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

(Communion instructions)

Please come up the aisle, take the communion and go back to your seats, walking the aisle along the wall. Please hold your communion and we will take it together, as a church family. I encourage you to pray also for those around you before you take communion, praying that the Lord will move in their lives and bring them closer to Him.

Let’s pray. Search us, Oh God, and know our heart; test us and know our anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in us and lead us in the way everlasting.
Amen

Come to the table.

Conclusion:

*The very Lord of heaven and earth is our Father. There is no need for us to have troubled hearts. He is in control. The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in comforting, empowering and reassuring us. I pray that the Spirit gives you peace this week. And as you go throughout your week, remember His love for you and the wonder of the Way, the Truth and the Life that Jesus brings. Go in His peace.