

Jesus' Manual for Managing Trouble and Fear

Reading through the Gospel accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus, we can follow the progress or growth of His clueless disciples. About a year before the crucifixion, Jesus began teaching that He must go to Jerusalem, be arrested, falsely accused, and executed. Initially the disciples like Peter argued with Jesus, and said they wouldn't let this happen, but eventually they quit expressing their opinions to Him because He had been admonishing them severely as He did to Peter in Matt.16:23, "Get behind Me Satan!" Why were they so clueless, or what factors were keeping them from receiving and embracing the teaching of Christ? The first factor was the failure to recognize the real Jesus as opposed to the fake Jesus. By this I mean everyone had a distorted view of who the real Messiah would be. They did not expect the "suffering servant" who would suffer and die on the cross. They were looking for a great heroic conqueror to come and end all their materialistic temporal troubles. Secondly, their personal ambition was separating them from Jesus' teaching on true greatness. Jesus continually taught that to be great you had to become a servant, but they desired people to serve them. Several times the Gospels relate how the disciples argued over who was the greatest, or who would be first in the kingdom. Next, the disciples felt like they had given up their lives to follow Jesus. As Peter said in Matt.19:27, we have left everything---what will we get out of it? Their leader crucified was not even on their list of hoped for rewards. Wrong thinking not only leads to wrong actions, but also worry, fear, and stress.

Therefore on the last night that Jesus would fellowship with and teach His disciples, His news to them hit them like a bombshell. Jesus first admonished them for not understanding His symbolic example of washing their feet. While they were trying to figure that out, He dropped the bomb that one of them would betray Him that night, and all of them would fall away (Mark 14:27). While they were reeling from that, He told them that He was leaving them and they could not follow. Can you imagine giving up your home, your family, your business, and all your possessions, and now your leader is dumping you? Even worse, the rulers of the country are going to kill Him, and you may be next. No wonder the disciples were "troubled in heart". Something we all have in common is suffering from perceived trouble and the anxiety it causes—no one is exempt. Peace is elusive. You can take tranquilizers, that's a chemical peace; or you can play golf, go to a movie, take a vacation—that's escapism. These are good, but temporary, and your problems will be waiting for you. Jesus offered a different type of peace in the "Upper Room Discourse". "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give you, not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful". In John 14 Jesus gave His disciples a 5 step manual for trouble and fear:

1. BELIEVE—John 14:1 "believe in God, believe also in me" We must believe in God's plan for us in spite of circumstances or appearances. It looked like all was lost, Jesus would be executed and the disciples would be left alone, leaderless, having lost everything and their own lives threatened. God had a better plan that they could not even imagine at the time. These stressed out fearful men would become bold Apostles for Christ and change the world. Believe also in Jesus. This refers to the work of Jesus on the cross to save them from their sins. They had actually been arguing with Jesus about this (Matt.16:22). The crucifixion did not make sense to them at the time but they came to

believe in it as the atoning work of Jesus on their behalf. Job asked “why” as did Jeremiah, Elijah, Habakkuk, David and many other godly men. God answered, “The righteous man shall live by faith”. God has a better plan that we will figure out later, but for now live by faith.

2. BE ENCOURAGED—v2 Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us in heaven. He hasn’t just left. He is “building” our eternal glorious place. This is not it. We have something infinitely better to look forward to and live for.

3. WE HAVE A PROMISE—v3 Jesus is coming back for us. He hasn’t just left us. We will be with Him forever. We can look forward in anticipation to that day. A promise is only as good as the one making the promise. I could promise these things and it would mean nothing, but this is the Maker, Creator, and Sustainer of heaven and earth promising, so it is guaranteed. Hold on to your promise like a security blanket.

4. WE HAVE THE TRUTH—v6 The whole world is out searching for the truth and can’t find it. Everyone wants to know the way to heaven. Everyone wants eternal life. Jesus has given His disciples the truth because He is the truth and He has given Himself for us and to us. John 1:1-4, calls Jesus the Word, and says in Him is Life. What we know about God has come to us from Jesus, “No man has seen God at anytime, the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him”. Did we discover it? No. Could we have figured it out? Never. Do we deserve it? No way. The “truth” came from heaven and this makes it unique.

5. WE HAVE HELP NOW—v16-17 Jesus has not left us alone, clueless, or without help for the here and now. When Jesus left, the Holy Spirit came to empower, convict, guide, teach, and enable them to “do greater works” than Jesus did. The example of this is in Acts 2:4, when the Holy Spirit came, they became bold and aggressive in preaching the Gospel. On that first day in Jerusalem 3000 souls received Christ. The day before there was only 120 believers in Jerusalem, but after that first Spirit empowered sermon— instant church; shortly after that 5000 more men believed (Acts 4:4). All Christians have been indwelled with the Holy Spirit whether they know it or not. Jesus gave us a great image of how this works in John 15. “I am the vine and you are the branches, he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing”. Take the help, let the Spirit lead you and help you now. It will require turning over the reigns to Him, letting Him be the Lord of your life, stepping out in faith.

Conclusion

We cannot prevent stress, but we can cope with it. Even Jesus was wiped out emotionally in the Garden of Gethsemane, but He dealt with it. In John 14, Jesus gave His disciples a COMMAND to live by faith, ENCOURAGEMENT to expect Him to come back for them, a PROMISE that we will spend eternity with Jesus, the TRUTH that Jesus is the means of forgiveness and salvation, and we have HELP now from the Holy Spirit. All that remains now is for us to respond.

CHARLIE TAYLOR