

## **PRESENT TENSE— FUTURE PERFECT**

Dr. John Allan Lavender

John 14:1-3

There is a rather cute story going around about a young mother who was out shopping for her 5 year old son. As she wandered through the toy department, she saw a puzzle that seemed terribly complicated. She called the clerk over and suggested that perhaps they had put this toy on the wrong display rack, that, in all probability, it should be with toys for older children because it seemed too complicated for a 5 year old.

“Oh no,” answered the sales person, “that's an educational toy designed to help our children adjust to our present age and its particular problems. Anyway they put it together, it's wrong!”

Well, we can laugh at our problems, which is a good thing, but all  
of our laughter does not remove the  
reality of their presence. We live in a  
confused and bewildering world. As  
someone has pointed out:

“Nothing seems to fit the traditional pattern of living any more. War's end doesn't bring world peace. Heavier taxes do not balance the budget. More educational facilities have not produced better citizens.”

In fact, the very opposite seems to be true.

A short time ago, Supreme Court Justice Jackson said,

“It is a tragedy that the only one we need to fear is the educated man.”

All of the advances of science have not produced a utopia, but a means of universal annihilation. Every time we turn around, we face the mounting problem of what to do about the “seething, yeasting, revolutionary forces” which are hell bent upon destroying us.

All of this has taken its toll upon the individual.

We think about the past and it becomes a mirage.

We try to do something about the present and it seems like a mockery.

We attempt to plan for the future and we are filled with misery.

Everywhere we turn, we seem to stand directly in the path of our 20th century version of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Fear, Frustration, Frenzy and Futility. Indeed, ours is a troubled world.

As a result, there is a single question that finds itself upon the lips of men and women around the earth:

“TO WHOM CAN WE GO?”

It is interesting to note that the question is no longer “To What Can We Go?” A few years back, we would have cried out for new and wider social reforms. We would have attacked our problem by passing resolutions and legislating laws. But now, instinctively, we seem to see that tightened regulations and well-greased programs are not enough.

It is not something, but someone we need. The message I bring this morning is that the One we need is Jesus Christ!.

Turn with me to that beautiful passage of scripture in John 14. A favorite of so many of us, it contains Christ's answer to the dilemma of modern man:

“Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3).

What is the Christian message in these troubled times? It is first of all that

**We Are Not Alone. God Understands Our Need.**

How often we think of God as some vague, cosmic force, controlling the clock-like movement of the stars, but far removed from any concern about us. Even when we come to the place of

believing in Him as a personal being, we somehow find it hard to believe God could care about us and our picayune problems.

But Christ put the sickle to this false idea when he said, “Let not your heart be troubled...”

His very words were evidence of the fact that we are not alone in this thing.

God understands. And what is more, He cares!

Study the New Testament record of Christ's ministry among us and you will see that never once did He minimize our problems. Instead, He was always ready to acknowledge them.

Look at Him with the woman taken in adultery (John:8).

He does not condemn her.

Nor does he minimize the graveness of her sin.

His words to her are not “go,” but “Go and sin no more” (John 8:11).

How deeply He penetrates into her soul with those words: “No more. No more.” He did not whitewash her condition, he acknowledged it. And then, He provided her with moral courage to overcome it.

Look at Him as He stands with Mary and Martha at the grave site of Lazarus (John 11).

Twice we read that Jesus wept.

One of those occasions is here.

But why should He weep?

Will He not shortly cry out: “Lazarus! Come forth!”?

Does He not know that in but a matter of minutes there will be a glad reunion of the family separated by the black specter of death?

Why then, should He weep? Beloved, put this down as a basic fact:

God not only knows of His great strength. He also knows of our vast weakness.

How eloquently the tears of Jesus speak this truth to our souls. For while He knew of the future

triumph, Jesus would not minimize the present distress. He acknowledged the fact of human sorrow, but more than that, he entered into it! “And Jesus wept” (John 11:35).

Even so He comes to grips with our present plight.

He faces with us the undeniable fact of our troubled times.

He does not mock our struggle.

He does not minimize our fears.

He acknowledges them.

“Let not your heart be troubled...” is not the message of one who is blind to human need.

It is not the cry of one who is aloof from our problems.

It is the arrow of hope that sends its shaft deep into the very core of our dilemma, for this is the message of one who knows first-hand of our distress.

That's why Christ is able to meet us at the point of our deepest needs. It is possible because He experienced them himself. In the beautiful words of the writer of Hebrews:

“We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted as *we are*, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

How well he knows the trial of our temptations.

Three times the devil sought to set him down.

Three times the “easy way” was opened up before him.

Three times the wide range of sin's temptation was placed in his path as he met head on “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (I John 2:16).

Oh yes, Christ knows the tug of sin's temptation.

He also knows the yawning pitfalls that would destroy us.

He understands the lure of “easy street” for He faced all of these himself. And thus He can say with power and authority:

“Let not your heart be troubled. (I am in this with you). Fear not, I

have overcome the world” (John 14:1;16:33).

Again, He knows the frustration of our shattered dreams.

What other meaning is there to His lamentation over the city of Jerusalem? Knowing what might have been and seeing what really was, he cried:

“Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem. How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but ye would not. Behold, your house is forsaken” (Matt.23:37g).

“How often I would...but ye would not.”

The frustration of shattered dreams. No wonder then that in our moments of grave despair the Lord can answer: “Let not your heart be troubled,” and we are willing to listen, for we know that He is in this with us too.

And then, how well he knows the loneliness of life's dark hours.

We need only stand outside Gethsemane’s gate and listen as he prays “Take away this cup from me” Mark 14:36), to know that Jesus did not want to suffer.

He did not want to die.

No one wants to die except the person who is already dead inside.

And Jesus was anything but dead.

He was vibrantly alive.

“In Him was life,” the Bible says (John 1:4a), and people recognized that.

They thronged around Him. He was someone they liked to be with. We read that He was often a guest at feasts and weddings. No one who was dead inside could have commanded the admiration and allegiance that Jesus did.

Sometimes folks think of Him as an old man. Perhaps it's his beard that makes them think that.

But remember—Jesus was my age when he wrought His first miracle, and He was just three years my senior when He died upon the cross. He was a young man. He was vibrantly alive.

No! Jesus did not want to suffer. He did not want to die.

The fervor of His prayer,  
the agony of anticipation that caused Him to sweat great drops of blood,  
the urgency of His plea:

“Take away this cup from me” (Mark 14:36)

all of these are proof that Christ knows the loneliness of life's dark hours.

No wonder then, that in the blackness of our Gethsemanes there is so much comfort in the words of Christ: “Let not your heart be troubled.” For we know that He is in this with us, too. No! We're not alone. For our God understands our need and --

### **There Is Hope.**

I think perhaps it is this little word “hope” which makes the Christian faith unique.

Ours is a religion of hope.

A hope that is genuine and real.

A hope that is built on nothing less than the unlimited resources of our God who cares.

“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me” (John 14:1).

The basis of our Christian hope is found in the word: “Believe!”

But what does it mean to believe? Well, Christian belief is more than mere ascent.

It is more than a casual, “Sure, I'll go along with that idea.”

Such “belief” is not only dangerous, it is disastrous, for the Bible says: “The devils believe and tremble” (James 2:19).

Redeeming faith is dynamic.

It is positive.

It is life changing.

It is courageous.

When the great missionary, John C. Paton, was translating the Scriptures for his South Sea islanders, he found there was no word for “believe” in their tongue. One day a native came to his study, flung himself down on a chair, rested his feet on another chair, and laying back full length said how good it felt to lean his whole weight on those chairs.

Instantly, Dr. Paton noted the word the man used for lean his whole weight on. The missionary had his word for believe, and used it from that time on in his translation. Try it yourself and see how it works:

“Let not your heart be troubled, you ‘lean your whole weight’ upon God.”

This is the character of true belief. It has force and comfort because it has direction. For it is belief in the God who has revealed himself in Jesus.

It is not just a matter of accepting certain doctrines to be true. It is not even a matter of believing that Jesus lived and died and rose again.

Christian belief is not what we believe, but whom we believe.

It is not belief in something, but someone.

Jesus said: “Ye believe in God, believe also in Me.” He was asking that we “lean our whole weight” upon Him.. That we place our trust in Him. That we express our confidence in His power to redeem us.

Dr. James Denney makes this very clear when he says, “It is not just the life of Jesus that saves us, or even His death on Calvary. It is Jesus himself, through His atoning death and resurrection.”

Christ said “Ye believe in God, believe also in Me.” And this kind of believing is that which we call trusting.

We do not need an etymologist to explain what trusting means, for we exercise it and experience it every day.

We trust our physician when we place our lives in His hands and depend upon Him to protect our health.

We trust our banker when we place our money in his hands and depend upon him to keep it safe.

And to trust in Christ is to place our souls in His hands with confidence, believing He is able to do what He has promised and

“will present us faultless before the throne of God with exceeding great joy” (Jude 24).

Which brings me to this thought about --

### **The Fulfillment Of Our Hope.**

Jesus not only told us God is concerned about our difficulties and that there is hope, He also gave us a fleeting picture of what the fulfillment of that hope will bring.

“In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2,3).

This is not pie in the sky by and by.

This is not some sort of spiritual aspirin which dulls our sensitivities to our present plight and by removing the pain gives the illusion of having solved our problem.

That is not the Christian message.

The Christian message admits that we are sick of soul.

It diagnoses our malady as sin.

It describes a drastic cure: prompt and serious surgery.

It cuts right through to the center of infection which is our rebellious heart, and ruthlessly severs any tie that this spiritual malignancy has fastened upon our souls.

Such surgery is not easy. Sometimes there are post-operative relapses, for the shock to our



system is great. And when these crises arise, the gospel does not become a narcotic to dull the pain, it becomes a transfusion imparting life, and energy, and strength to surmount the crisis. No! Our blessed hope is not for pie in the sky by and by. Christ’s prognosis—His forecast of our spiritual health—is

Present Tense—Future Perfect.

In time, the wounds will heal. The scars will remain to remind us of what we were and what, under God, we have become. But the hurt and the pain will be gone! For this is the gospel:

“Let not your heart be troubled, ye believe in God.”

There is a picture hanging in one of the art galleries of New York City. I have never seen it. If some of you know where it is, please tell me, for I would love to see it for myself sometime.

As I understand it, it is a picture of a group of people climbing up a very steep hill. There are rocks and briars along the way to add to the difficulty of the rugged climb. Beyond the summit of the hill, where the people cannot see it, is the beautiful City of God. I'm told the artist has used every bit of talent at his command to make it the most beautiful painting of Heaven on canvas.

The question that comes to mind when you think about the picture is: “How do the people know they are going in the right direction to reach the City of God?” The artist provides the answer. Up in the corner of the painting above the unseen city, he has put the face of Jesus shining through the clouds. And the people know that as long as they keep their eyes on Him, they are moving in the right direction.

My friend, are you facing one of life's Gethsemanes?

Are you struggling to maintain your equilibrium in the face of the Four Horsemen of Fear, Frustration, Frenzy and Futility? If so, raise your sights a bit.

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Look full in His wonderful face.

And the things of earth

will grow strangely dim

In the light of His glory and grace.”

For this is the message Christ has for you:

“Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3).