LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED

Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Foreword by
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Our father, Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981), preached these sermons in 1951 in Westminster Chapel in London. These were difficult times for the people of Britain, indeed for all the Western world. The Second World War was not long over, and many economic, political, national, and personal problems were left in its wake. But there was also the menace of the Cold War, with the nuclear threat that hung over both sides. There was not the same euphoria as there had been after the First World War; people were anxious and fearful.

So it was in this atmosphere that our father preached this short series of sermons. They were intended to comfort, strengthen, and build up Christians in their “most holy faith” (Jude 20) and to bring unbelievers to a knowledge of the only way in which men and women can face matters of life and death. He sought to show that these familiar words were not only relevant in funerals but could be applied to all facets of our lives, and the way in which he handled these words was characteristic of his ministry. He did not use them as a kind of soothing refrain that would lull our fears to rest. Rather, he went through them carefully, showing that the way to deal with our fears was first to confront them and recognize them and then to realize that the answer to them was only to be found in the great and unchanging truths of the Christian gospel.

So he shows what these truths are: belief in God, belief in Jesus Christ and his work, the certainty of his promise that he will take us safely to his Father’s house, and so on. These are foundational
doctrines, but he does not deal with them clinically. Throughout we are reminded of the love that brought it all to pass.

He once described preaching as “logic on fire,” and this is evident in these sermons. They are perhaps briefer in their exposition than, for example, his later great series on Romans and Ephesians, but the truths and the spirit are the same.

Toward the end of his life, when he was very weak, he experienced for himself these things that he had preached earlier. One evening his doctor said to him, “I don’t like to see you weary and worn and sad like this.”

“No,” came back the whispered answer, “not sad!” He pointed those of us in the family to the great verses in 2 Corinthians 4:16–18:

For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

He also asked us not to pray for healing. “Don’t try to hold me back from the glory,” he said. He was ill for many months, but the great truths of John 14 held him fast. He knew that the Savior whom he had served so faithfully for so many years had prepared a place for him. He knew the quiet heart, the stillness of the soul, of which these sermons speak.

Elizabeth Catherwood
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We Must Believe

Let not your heart be troubled:
ye believe in God, believe also in me.

JOHN 14:1
LET NOT YOUR HEART BE TROUBLED

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JOHN 14:1

As we come to consider this great passage together, I think most commentators agree that a better way of translating it is, “Let not your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in me.” In other words, it is probably right to say that it is the imperative that we have in both cases.

However, these words are probably familiar to most of us; indeed they are perhaps some of the most familiar and tender words ever uttered by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They are words, therefore, that we often tend to take without really facing them and their true meaning and without analyzing them as we should. It is to me a tragedy that so often we rob ourselves of the actual message of some of the most glorious statements in Scripture simply because we regard them as literature. We are content with some general effect or influence that they may produce upon us instead of taking the trouble to arrive at their exact meaning and their precise import.

Now that, I think, is very true of these words, words that may be most familiar to us in funerals. They are words of comfort and consolation, which we tend, therefore, to think of far
too often as some kind of beautiful music or some wonderful diction. So we never get any further, almost feeling at times that it is a sacrilege to analyze something that is so beautiful.

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 and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. . . . Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you. . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:1–3, 27)

We have heard those words many times, but I wonder what would happen if we suddenly had to sit down with paper in front of us and face a question such as, state the doctrine contained in those familiar words—what exactly do they say? Have these words, I wonder, come to us merely in that general manner, that kind of general consolation, that can be done equally well by beautiful music or by any beautiful thoughts or passages of literature? Or have we derived comfort and consolation from them because we have realized the doctrine that they are announcing?

Our Lord’s whole purpose in uttering these words was that he might instruct his disciples and help them by bringing them to a deeper knowledge and understanding of truth. He was addressing their minds primarily, and the way in which he came to do so is of significance and importance. He had just been telling these men, who had now accompanied him for about three years, that he was about to leave them. He was still young, in his early thirties, and to their astonishment and utter chagrin he announced that he was going to leave them. “Now,” he said, “is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. . . . Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to
you” (John 13:31, 33). But he realized at once that this information had upset these disciples and had made them unhappy and disconsolate. Their hearts had become troubled, they were ill at ease, and they had lost their peace because they were suddenly confronted by a problem.

Now we need not go into detail as to why the disciples felt this so acutely; that has its interest and its importance, but we need not stay with it now. It might very well have been due to the fact that they had become overdependent upon him. They had never met anybody like him before. They had been ordinary men living ordinary lives in this world, having their ups and downs and problems, but suddenly they had met him and had been called by him to follow him and keep him company in a very special way, and it had been a marvelous and thrilling experience. His very personality was something quite apart and unique; they had never seen anybody like this before. There was something in his very person; to look into his eyes was to recognize something that they had never known.

Then it was amazing to hear his extraordinary teaching, his gracious words, his knowledge, his understanding; to see him performing miracles, cleansing lepers, making the lame walk, giving sight to the blind, even raising the dead; and thus, imperceptibly, they had become entirely dependent upon him. I suppose the temptation in such a situation was that they would not stop to think, they just relied utterly upon him; and then, suddenly, he announced that he was going away, and at once they were filled with a sense of alarm and concern. Did that mean that they would have to go back to where they were before? Did it mean a reversion to their hopeless kind of life? “How can we do without him?” they thought. “If he is going, then we are finished, we are undone.” And our Lord recognized that they were thinking all this.
We Must Believe

Or it may have been that they had recognized in him, rather vaguely and dimly, yet surely, the Messiah who was expected. They had their Jewish notions as to what the Messiah was to be and about the kingdom he was to establish, and it was largely political. They had been troubled because he had not set himself up as king; some had tried to force him to do so. They had decided to wait upon him, feeling that at some point not far removed he would declare himself. He would set himself up as king, make a great attack upon the Romans, and so rid them of the Roman tyranny and set up a wonderful kingdom. But here he was, announcing that he was going away! He had done nothing about bringing in the kingdom. So they were unhappy and had a feeling that they had been misled and somewhat deluded; he was not what they thought he was going to be.

Well, they no doubt had many such thoughts, but the important thing is that our Lord sensed all this in them. He saw that they had become disturbed and unhappy and that, above all, their trouble was in their hearts. Their hearts were “troubled,” and so, in a very characteristic manner, he dealt with their troubles and administered to them this glorious word of consolation.

There is one other preliminary remark that I must make at this point: it is vital that we remember at what time in his life our Lord did this. It was on the very eve of the cross. He knew what was coming; he had been earlier on the Mount of Transfiguration, and there Moses and Elijah had spoken to him concerning “his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). He knew what was going to be involved on the cross; he knew he was being made sin for mankind. He knew that when God would lay on him the sins of us all, it would mean a terrible moment of separation from the face of God. He knew all that, and as he said later on in the garden of Gethsemane, his soul was “exceeding sorrowful” (Matthew 26:38); nevertheless he turned aside to
comfort these unhappy followers of his. He was more concerned about their unhappiness than his own immediate problem, and thus we have this wonderful view that on the very eve of the cross, our Lord gave himself freely in comfort and consolation to others.

*Bearing in his own body the sins of the world, he had sufficient compassion and love and sympathy and understanding to turn to the wretched man who was there being crucified with him.*

How typical and characteristic of him! He did the same thing on the cross itself, you remember, even after they had driven the cruel nails into his hands and his feet. There, dying on the cross, he had time to speak to that thief dying by his side. Bearing in his own body the sins of the world, he had sufficient compassion and love and sympathy and understanding to turn to the wretched man who was there being crucified with him.

Now I emphasize all this at the beginning because whatever else we may or may not learn as we consider this passage, let us realize that the one about whom we are speaking, the one about whom we are concerned, is one like that. That is Jesus, the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ whom we preach. He is the center of this New Testament message and gospel. He is the one who, though he is the Son of God himself, is ready and willing and able to meet us exactly where we are. He even takes the trouble to read our minds and thoughts in order to answer our questions before we ever ask them, and he gives us consolation before we even give expression to our need and unhappiness.

So as he said this to the disciples, he says it, of course, once and forever, to all others who at any time or in any age or in any place know this same condition of the troubled heart. Here in