

Preacher: Jack Kapinga

Date: 21/11/2021

Reading: John 14:1-21

Title: Gentle and Lowly: **His Heart Revealed By The Spirit**

Introduction

I want you to think about the most dearly loved person in your life, the person who's more important and precious to you than anyone else. It could be your best friend, or your wife or husband, or a parent, child or sibling. It doesn't matter what the relationship is, just think of someone who you care about very deeply.

And now I want you to imagine that for some reason this person is living far, far away, let's say in Europe. And on top of that the only contact you have with them is by email. So what would that be like? Well I'm sure you'd send lots of messages to each other, that you'd try to share your lives and do your best to remind and assure each other of your fondness and affection. But yet it would be difficult wouldn't it? For the distance is great, and there'd really be something missing between you.

But now I want you to imagine that you're at the airport and after a long time of separation, this person is about to arrive back in Launceston. Imagine seeing them come off the plane and through the doors and then at last you're holding them tight in your arms. At last you can feel the warmth of their embrace, and the joy of their presence. At last you can hold their hand, and smell their familiar scent, and hear the sound of their voice, and see the expressions on their face. And as a result you no longer have to just read about their love, but you see it, and feel it, and experience it, and enjoy it. Can you understand the contrast between a loved one who's far, far away, and a loved one who is present in your life, who you can see and touch and talk to and embrace? It makes such a huge difference doesn't it?

I mean we've seen this during Covid. There are friends and family who've been apart for much longer than usual. And let's be honest, they've had a lot more than just email. They've been able to talk on the phone, send gifts through the mail, and see each other over Zoom. But yet time and again we've seen it on the news, or even experienced it in person, those physical reunions and just how incredibly important it is for us to be together, to not just hear about each other's love and affection from a distance, but to feel it and enjoy it up close.

But that then leads us to a question. And that question is this. What kind of relationship do you have with the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it more like the relationship you might have with a loved one in Europe, where you can read about his affection from a distance, but that's about it? Or is it more like the relationship you might have with a loved one who's right here, living close by, visiting regularly, present in your life every day, one where you can experience his love in a real and meaningful way? Well that's a good question isn't it, an important one. For who could be more significant and precious than our Saviour, our Redeemer, our dear friend and brother Jesus Christ?

In this sermon series we've been talking about his heart, his own heart for sinners and sufferers just like us. But how do we come to truly know his heart for us? Do we only read about it in the pages of the Bible, or can we feel and experience it in a real and tangible way? And so I ask you, is Jesus distant and far off, or is he near and present in your life every day?

Jesus With His Disciples.

Well as we think about this, we should begin with those first disciples. I don't know about you but I sometimes think about what it must've been like to be one of them. I mean it all started when Jesus began his public ministry and invited 12 men to follow him. I guess they'd been strangers

before that but then they began to get acquainted. It seems that they lived together, went everywhere together, did everything together for at least 3 years. And so they would've gotten to know Jesus extremely well.

Of course they would've listened to his marvellous teachings and parables, and they would've seen his amazing healings and miracles. Those things are described in the 4 gospels in great detail. But more than that, they would've heard him speak their own name and grown familiar with the tone of his voice, and the sound of his laughter. They would've come to know his gestures, his knowing looks, his posture when he sat and his gait when he walked. They would've felt the touch of his hand and tasted the food he prepared, whether naturally or miraculously. But still more than that, they would've experienced his personal friendship and devotion, his understanding and tenderness, his wisdom and his knowledge, his compassion and his mercy, his approval and his disapproval, his joy, frustration, sorrow and passion. Those first disciples didn't just hear about Jesus but they lived with him, he was right there in their midst. They didn't only know about what Jesus did but they truly knew who he was.

And we see this reflected in our passage today. For Jesus is explaining his solidarity with the Father, that they're on the same page, sharing the same heart of grace and compassion. And so he says from verse 7, "If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. Philip said, Lord show us the Father and that will be enough for us. 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." Jesus says to his closest companions, you've been with me and now you know me, and if you know me then you know my Father as well. And so they had developed a very close, personal and intimate relationship with Jesus, they'd genuinely delighted in his love, they'd truly experienced his heart.

Jesus Leaves His Disciples.

But yet it wouldn't be long until everything changed. These disciples would've hoped that Jesus would be with them forever. But yet it wasn't to be. For he started telling them that he was going to leave. In John's gospel this begins in chapter 12 when Jesus proclaims, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies it produces many seeds." And later in that same chapter he says "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light."

Then at the start of our reading today in John 14 he speaks more clearly. Jesus says "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? 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." And then later in chapter 16 he says "but now I am going to him who sent me", and later "In a little while you will see me no more", and later still, "I came from the Father and entered the world; now I am leaving the world and going back to the Father."

These disciples had such a wonderful relationship with Jesus, but it wasn't going to last. And before long his words were fulfilled. For Jesus was arrested and tried and sentenced to death. And then he suffered and died on the cross, before being buried in a tomb. And amazingly he rose again on the 3rd day and appeared to his disciples. But that lasted only 40 days until he ascended and they saw him no more.

And so even though these men once had Jesus right there in their midst, even though they'd known him so intimately, experienced his love so personally, now he was gone. He'd left them, and not just to travel to another town, or even to the other side of the world, but he'd left them for the glory of heaven, where he took his place at the Father's right hand. These disciples could certainly remember Jesus, and talk about him and share about him, but yet it wouldn't be the same, things had changed dramatically. In fact they found themselves in a situation similar to our own. They must've felt so far away from their Lord, far from his love, and far from his heart.

But He Would Still Be with Them.

But there's more to this story isn't there? For while it's quite true that Jesus departed, do you remember what he revealed in the later part of our text? In John 14:15-21 he said this, "If you love me, keep my commands. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Before long the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

So what do these verses teach us? Well first of all they assure us that the Lord Jesus loves us. He says "The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them." My friends, if we want to know the heart of Jesus for us, then we need to understand that his heart is a heart of deep love. It was out of love that he left the glory of heaven and was born upon this earth. It was out of love that he lived here among us, sharing our human experience in every way. It was out of love that he went to the cross, taking all our sins and failures on himself and paying the price for every single one. It was out of love that he purchased our salvation with his own blood.

And it's out of love that he continues to care for us every single day. And we see this ongoing care in that word "advocate". In this passage Jesus describes himself as our "advocate". But what does that really mean? Well in Greek it's the word Paraclete, but this is a word that's notoriously difficult to translate. While our Bibles have Advocate, other translations have Counsellor, Comforter, Helper or Encourager. And it's only really a combination of these words that really brings out the true meaning. My friends, Jesus is telling us that he supports us in every possible way. He guides and advises us, protects and defends us, strengthens and uplifts us, consoles and calms us, reassures and inspires us. He's like our lawyer, our therapist, our patron, our personal assistant, our bodyguard, our mentor and our cheerleader, all rolled into one.

And so it's little wonder that in verse 1 he says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled". Who needs to have a troubled heart when Jesus is by your side? He's our Rock and our Defender, he's the best friend a person could ever have. And this is all because his heart is full of love. My dear friend, maybe you've never thought about this, or maybe you've not thought about it enough. The Lord Jesus loves you with a deep and perfect love, of that you can be certain. He loves us so much that he gave his life for us. And if he gave his life for us, then won't he also help us in every possible way?

But that leads to the second thing these verses teach us. And that is that because of his love, Jesus will never abandon us. Even though he'd earlier said he was going away, in verse 18 he says "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you." And in other verses he says that we'll see him,

he says that he'll be in us, he says that he'll show himself to us. So even though Jesus would soon depart, he assures his disciples that somehow he'd still be present among them. And he assures us that even though he is far away now, that somehow he's still present among us.

And that leads straight into the third thing these verses teach us. And that is that our Lord Jesus is present with us by his Holy Spirit. And here we really focus in on the main verse that we're considering today, verse 16. For Jesus declares, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever – the Spirit of truth."

Do you see what he's saying here? Jesus has literally been living in the midst of his disciples. They've come to know him, love him, depend on him. He's been their Advocate, Counsellor and Encourager. And soon he'll be gone, he'll be with them no more. But Jesus says that after he leaves, he and his Father, who we've already seen share the very same heart of grace and compassion, they'll send another Advocate, who shares their heart of grace and compassion as well. And that Advocate is the Holy Spirit.

And let's be absolutely clear, the Holy Spirit is no poor substitute, he's no second-best option or disappointing consolation prize. In fact in John 16 Jesus says, "But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you." Jesus says that it's actually better to be living today, in the days of the Spirit, than to have been living when he was on earth. For the Spirit is with all of us, and he's in all of us, and he's in us forevermore.

My friends I'm sure we all know some of the roles of the Holy Spirit. He's the one who enables us to understand God's Word. He's the one who convicts us of our sin and gives us faith to believe. He's the one who empowers us to love, serve, obey and witness for the Lord. But I want you to listen to what Dane Ortlund says in his book *Gentle and Lowly*. He says, "These (things) are all gloriously true. (But) In this chapter I'd like to add just one more to this list: *the Spirit causes us to actually feel Christ's heart for us*." That's right, the Spirit causes us to actually feel Christ's heart for us. And later he writes, "the Spirit makes the heart of Christ real to us: not just heard, but seen; not just seen, but felt; not just felt, but enjoyed. The Spirit takes what we read in the Bible and believe on paper about Jesus' heart and moves it from theory to reality, from doctrine to experience."

Conclusion.

Do you get it? We could see Jesus as being like a loved one in Europe, he's far away and we can only read and hear about his love. But that's not how it has to be. For we can have a relationship with Jesus which is more like a loved one who's arrived back home, he's right here with us, present in our lives every day. And all because of the Holy Spirit. It would've been so wonderful to be there with those first disciples, having Jesus as part of their lives, as their companion, counsellor and comforter, their dearest friend. But Jesus assures us that in the Spirit we have another advocate, and as a result he's right here with us today, he's still our constant companion, our counsellor, comforter and friend. For he's with us and he's in us. And so just like them, we can know him intimately, we can feel his love and experience his heart.

My friends, why do you think it is that when we read about Jesus in the Bible, that it's not just words on a page but it's the words of life, it convicts us and transforms us, motivates us and gives us peace. And why do you think it is that when we hear a sermon about Christ, like Reuben's 2 weeks ago when he so beautifully assured us that Jesus is gentle and humble in heart, and last week when we saw that he has a persevering heart that will never drive us away, why do you think it is that we don't just hear those messages as information, but they move us and affect us as we

actually experience the Lord's love. And why do you think it is that when we sing a beautiful song about Jesus, that it's not just entertainment like most of the music in this world, but it gets inside of us and we feel it's truth and it can bring us to tears.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit, making Jesus real in our lives. And as a result we don't just read of him, but we know him. We don't just hear about his salvation but we go through it deep in our hearts. We don't just talk about his peace and comfort and hope, but we feel these things in real and amazing ways. We don't just theorise about the way he can transform us, but we experience it as he genuinely changes our lives. Because of the Holy Spirit we can really feel the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we can truly experience his heart. For he's not just far back in history in the pages of our Bible. And he's not just far away in distance in the throne room of heaven. But he's right here in our lives, and in our hearts, for he's given us another advocate, the Spirit of truth.

So let me urge all of us today to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Lord to make himself authentic in your life, to turn the theory into reality and the doctrine into experience. Ask him to truly lift the guilt and worries and sadness from your shoulders. Ask him to truly fill you with trust and joy and hope. Seek to know his real presence like a warm embrace, like a dear companion, like a loving friend. Let us ask the Lord, by his Holy Spirit, to let us truly feel Christ's heart for us. Amen.