

John 14.18-24: Loneliness¹

INTRODUCTION:

I've already mentioned many times how it is that we're preaching through Jesus' "last will and testament" in John chapters 13-17. These are the last words he speaks before his crucifixion and he wants them to be as prepared as they can be.

Jesus, we read, *was troubled in his spirit*. He was so fully aware of the incredible burden of the moment that in an hour or two he's going to be praying *Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me*. But he doesn't waver from his task, nor does he turn aside from his love for his wayward disciples. *Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*²

In the context of such anguish, do you think that Jesus is going to talk about some subtle theological point? Not at all. Rather, He expresses his love for his disciples by reminding them of the most essential truths there are and the most basic facts. Minutes count and so his words count.

As part of my sermon preparation, I have been reading the whole section over and over again and I keep finding new connections and themes. This last week something jumped out at me for the first time. I noticed that Jesus is dealing with some of the most fundamental pieces of our emotional makeup. He talks about love, and fear, and peace, about purpose and joy. And – as we'll see today – He talks about loneliness.

Vs 18: *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.*

Isn't that a rather strange thing to say? *I will not leave you as orphans?* I suspect most of these disciples have relatives. So why this comment?

LONELINESS INHERITED:

Loneliness and related themes such as despair, alienation, rejection, solitude, abandonment, isolation occupy human thinking a great deal. Who are my friends? My enemies? Who is for me or against me? She loves me ... she loves me not.

Perhaps some of these words will be familiar to you.

*One is the loneliest number that you'll ever do
Two can be as bad as one
It's the loneliest number since the number one ...*³

¹ #1: 100718, SJEAC.

² Joh 13.21, Luk 22.42, Joh 13.1 respectively.

³ By Harry Nilsson, ... in 1969, rock band Three Dog Night covered the song on their debut album Three Dog Night, with Chuck Negron on lead vocal.
(en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Is_the_Loneliest_Number)

*Livin' alone,
I think of all the friends I've known,
When I dial the telephone,
Nobody's home.
All by myself,
Don't wanna be,
All by myself,
Anymore.⁴*

*Hiding in my room,
Safe within my womb,
I touch no one and no one touches me.
I am a rock,
I am an island.
And a rock feels no pain;
And an island never cries.⁵*

There's no wonder that loneliness is such a popular theme. Relationship is a fundamental part of our nature as humans – it's what we were created for. But the fall perverted our natures in this, as in every area of life, so that we inherited loneliness instead.

- 1) Adam and Eve sin and the first result is suspicion of God! Satan said to Eve: *God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*⁶ He has planted a thought in their heads that maybe the Father is jealous of them and doesn't want what's best for them. And so begins isolation from God.
- 2) The second thing that happens is that when he is confronted by God, Adam throws Eve under the bus without hesitation. *The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.*⁷ Notice the creative way in which Adam indicts both God and Eve in one sentence ... and thus begins the high art of blame shifting. I'm sure he slept on that couch that night!

⁴ Written and performed by Eric Carmen in 1975, borrowing heavily from the second movement (Adagio Sostenuto) of Sergei Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 in C minor, Opus 18 (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/All_by_myself).

⁵ Written by Paul Simon, first performed ... alone as the opening track on his album The Paul Simon Songbook ... in August 1965 ... Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel ... re-recorded it on December 14, 1965, and included as the final track on their album Sounds of Silence, which they released on January 17, 1966.

On a more contemporary note: Smashing Pumpkins put out an album called "Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness," which was described as an album based on "the human condition of mortal sorrow." It "is a loose concept album, with the songs intended ... conceptually as a symbol of the cycle of life and death" (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mellon_Collie_and_the_Infinite_Sadness).

⁶ Gen 3.5

⁷ 3.12

- 3) From there we see the effects of the curse of God on these disobedient parents: Adam's labor in the fields is cursed, their accustomed walks with God in the garden are over, and they're thrown out of the best living situation ever.
- 4) In one brief moment, their relationships with God, each other, and creation are broken at a most basic level.

And this theme of rejection and being "orphaned" goes on and on throughout Scripture. Think of:

- the isolation of Ruth from her people,
- Mary is "widowed" both by her husband and – in a sense – orphaned by the death of Christ.
- The people of God are called by Hosea, for a time, *Lo-Ammi*, "not my people" by God, because of their overt wickedness.
- Esther is being raised by her uncle and then is torn even from him by high level royal politics.

These stories grip us on a basic level. And it's not just Bible stories either.

I once asked someone: "What are you afraid of?" This person happens to race cars and he told me: "Afraid? You must be kidding! I drive my car at over 200 miles per hour with a 1,000 horsepower engine right next to me. I'm not afraid of anything!" I quickly followed up and asked: "What about loneliness?" Without hesitation, he answer answered "Loneliness? I am afraid of that."

We are indeed orphans; cut off from each other, from creation, from God himself! No wonder there are so many songs about this topic. No wonder people try to hide loneliness behind so many things. But for all our efforts, we still often feel like "orphans" in a world full of people.

What's more frightening that solitude and isolation, especially the final and ultimate isolation of death? But here's the really broken part of us: even though we hate and fear being "orphaned," we also desire it more than anything else! Just on a superficial level, people are afraid to be with themselves alone. Radios, TVs, computers, events; these things are all a kind of "noise" that helps drown out the necessity of facing the moment.

And then on a deeper level: make ourselves vulnerable? Not me! Show the weakness of wanting companionship? I'd rather saw my arm off. Trust intimacy? Right, what if the other person doesn't really want or need me? Be open to someone else's loneliness? Not likely! Not when it only creates pain and hardship! I'd rather be alone and die alone! And most of all, seek God? Adam and Eve ran from him in the garden, not towards Him! Are you any wiser than they?

That's exactly the meaning of the Paul Simon song:

*I am shielded in my armor,
Hiding in my room, safe within my womb.
I touch no one and no one touches me.
I am a rock ...*

One final thought. To those of us who are married and those of us who are not (which includes us all, I think): we all deal with loneliness, don't we? And we somehow hope that our spouse, or special friend, or future spouse, or some other kind of relationship will somehow solve the isolation we feel. Let me just remind you of this: they are as incapable of solving YOUR loneliness as they are solving their own. For that matter, they are as incapable of solving your loneliness as you are solving theirs and your own!

LONELINESS RELIEVED:

The Lord Jesus is the only true relief for loneliness and isolation. *I will not leave you as orphans; he said, I will come to you.*

We cannot address all the references that Jesus makes about leaving, staying, coming back, going to the Father, and so on. If you read these chapters too quickly, you can easily become confused. Over in chapter 16, we see that even the disciples became confused! *What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me' ... we do not know what he is talking about*⁸

So let me simplify a little. Jesus' reference to orphans is rich with Biblical content.

First, God repeatedly commands us to care for the widow, the orphan, the stranger, the vulnerable, and the isolated.

You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn ... and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless.

This is also echoed in James words, part of *religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction ...*⁹

And he demands that we care for them, because He cares for them. The Psalmist reflects this special kindness of God toward the vulnerable, the weak, the lonely, the outsider:

*Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry ... the LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*¹⁰

And perhaps you remember some of those Biblical stories.

- Remember how well the Father watched over the widow Ruth,
- He cared for the outcast Hagar and her son Ishmael,
- He never forgot the forgotten Tamar. Tamar's sons are numbered with the son's of Judah and one becomes the direct ancestor of our Lord.

⁸ Joh 16.16-18

⁹ Exo 22.21-24, Jas 1.27 respectively.

¹⁰ Psa 146.5-9

Second, and more importantly, consider Jesus himself.

- Wasn't he *despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and ... we esteemed him not?*¹¹
- Wasn't he the rejected stone that becomes the chief corner stone?
- Don't even his own relatives sometimes doubt his work, if not his sanity?
- Don't his disciples run away in the time of his greatest need for companionship?
- Doesn't Peter reject him with a curse?
- Doesn't he tremble in the garden pleading with the Father: *Abba ... all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me?* And didn't he hang on the cross crying out *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*¹² And weren't the heavens are silent?

Why did he voluntarily undergo all these things? He did them for our sakes. He became "orphaned" for the orphans, widows, the sojourner, and every person who is isolated, rejected, outcast, alienated, in despair and lonely.

He is the one who thereby brings us close to His Father and His Father close to us.

- *In Christ Jesus, Paul writes, you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.*
- *And again: Through Christ we ... have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.*
- *And once more: being justified by his grace we ... become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*¹³

Heirs? Orphans don't get an inheritance! They're not part of anyone's household! They don't have a mother or a father. They don't have the comfort and security of family. They don't have the oversight of age, strength, and wisdom. They have no siblings. They have no past, in a sense, and their future is unsure.

But we are not orphans. When Jesus says to his disciples *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you*, He's referring to all the ways in which He will continually be with them – and with us!

- In his resurrection, he's with us.
- In His sending of the Holy Spirit, we have a continual witness and presence.
- In his continual intercession for us at the right hand of the Father, he remains by us.
- In his coming again, he will make it clear that he has always been with us.¹⁴

¹¹ Isa 53.3

¹² Mar 14.36, Mat 27.46

¹³ Eph 2. 13-16, 18-19 and Tit 3.5-7 respectively.

¹⁴ See Col 2.13, Joh 15.26, Rom 8.34, Joh 14.3.

Jesus rejoiced to be in that exquisite fellowship with the Father. *You heard me say to you, 'I am going away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.* And that's exactly where he wants us to be. *In my Father's house are many rooms ... I go and prepare a place for you, and I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*¹⁵

I know that many of you understand these things well. I was discussing being alone with one of you recently and you told me: "I know that God has promised never to leave me nor forsake me."

But what I found particularly moving is the story of another sister ... talk here about S C. She knew isolation, rejection, abandonment in ways we could scarcely imagine. They would be the things nightmares and horrible movies. And in the context of all those things, she said: "He was always there. I would go through it all again for the sake of knowing Jesus ..."

*I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.*¹⁶

She's no longer abandoned, isolated, cut off, rejected – **orphaned** – because she was the one who sees to it that such things never become true.

John 14.14-24, Loneliness

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (18)

1. Loneliness Inherited

1.1. Isolation, rejection, solitude and related themes are very much part of our thinking.

This is a result of the Fall.

1.2. Though created for relationship, sin immediately brought alienation; from God, from each other, from the created world. See Genesis 3.8-13.

1.3. This theme is reflected throughout Scripture: Ruth, Mary, prophets (Hosea and *Lo-ammī*, "not my people), Esther, Tamar (see context of these: Hosea 1.8, Ruth 1.15-18, John 19.26, Esther 2.5-7, Genesis 38.6-30).

1.4. We will avoid or terminate relationships, when it's too hard, even from God himself.

¹⁵ Joh 14.27-28 and 14.2-3 respectively.

¹⁶ Phi 3.8-11.

2. Loneliness Relieved

2.1. Special care For “Orphans and widows.”

2.1.1. God commands us to care for the “orphans.” Too many references to cite, see this example: Exodus 22.21-24.

2.1.2. He commands their care because He himself cares for them. See Psalm 146.5-9.

2.2. Jesus is orphaned for our sakes

2.2.1. Despised and rejected, the rejected stone, his relatives’ doubt, disciples run away, Peter’s rejection, even the Father’s abandonment for a time (see Isaiah 53.3, 1 Peter 2.7, Mark 6.4, Mark 14.51-52, Matthew 26.73-75, Mark 14.36, Matthew 27.46).

2.2.2. He does this to bring us to the Father and the Father to us. See Ephesian 2.13-16, 18-19 and Titus 3.5–7 respectively.

2.3. He is with us in His:

2.3.1. Resurrection, making us alive together with him, Colossians 2.13,

2.3.2. Sending of the Holy Spirit, John 15.26

2.3.3. Intercession, Romans 8.34

2.3.4. Return, John 14.3.

I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (Philippians 3.8-11).