A Better Place to Live

What Do You Do When You Are "Up Against It"?

A couple months ago we hosted a Vacation Bible School with New Life Community Church, and we didn't have a lot of money to advertise it so one of the ways we chose to get the word out in our neighborhood was for me to pass out flyers promoting it. It was tedious work. It was hot most of the days and my knees hurt quite a bit as I walked from house to house. Paul, who was the vacation Bible school director kept track of registrations and after I had passed out 2,000 flyers, he told me that we did not have anyone registered who was not already attending New Life Community Church or another local congregation. I must admit that news was extremely deflating to me. I had set a goal of distributing 3,000 flyers but it did not seem like it was worth the effort. If it was up to me I would have quit but rather than just giving up, I went to the Lord in prayer and gave Him my discouragement. As I sat with Him in the quietness of my office, I felt the Holy Spirit comfort me and take away the sting of what seemed like failure. Gradually, God's peace came to me and He reminded me I had more flyers to distribute for Him and so I kept going. Many times we let our emotions get the best of us and disappointments can incapacitate us. A young woman fails a test, and she wants to drop out of college. A father starts drinking again and he feels like he can't stop and becomes depressed. A grandfather tries to reconnect with his sons and when they ignore him, he quits trying. A grandmother discovers she has cancer and wants to cut herself off from others. How often does life make people like you and me want to quit, feel like we have nowhere to turn, backed into a corner with no way out. Today we will take a deeper look at a moment when the disciples felt overwhelmed and Jesus gave them the best advice they or you could ever receive. Our big idea flows from what the Bible offers us. There is a place you can go to be revived and gain peace and hope again.

Just before Jesus was about to be arrested and then crucified, He spent some quality time with His disciples and gave them this command. **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.** (John 14: 1 NIV) This was not something Jesus considered optional or a suggestion. It was a direct order to not stay troubled in their hearts but rather to trust God, to trust Himself. In the other Gospels, Mattthew, Mark and Luke, the heart is the center of the will, the place of decision making. But in John, the heart is where the emotions are located. Who was it that Jesus was telling not to have a troubled heart? It was Peter who had just been warned by Jesus that Peter would deny Him three times. It was the disciples who had been told that one of them was a traitor. It was the disciples who watched Judas go off into the night. It was the disciples who were informed by Jesus that He would soon leave them and where He was going, they could not go with Him. This was a dreadful night for Peter and the rest of the disciples, and they certainly would have been upset but Jesus told them not to fret. "Trust me", Jesus commanded. How do you trust Jesus when your world has been turned upside down, when your dreams have been crushed, your plans have fallen apart or your relationships have crumbled? It can seem impossible to believe in God then and probably the disciples had a tough, if not seemingly impossible time of it to trust God at that moment.

In what is often mistakenly thought of as a declaration of how heaven is structured, Jesus tells you and me and the disciples how we can keep the command of not letting our hearts get agitated and disjointed by worry and fear and consternation. It is possible but not by human means. It is a miraculous, supernatural working of God He promises. Here is what He told the disciples. **In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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. You know the way to the place where I am going."** (John 14: 2-4 NIV) The term translated rooms is rendered "mansions" by the King James Version. The problem with understanding this properly is that mansion when the scholars of the 1600s did their English translation of the Greek text did not mean then what mansion means today. Mansion was not a palatial home but instead just a place where one lived whether big or small. The Greek term "monai", which is what Jesus is quoted as referring to is probably best understood as a resting place, a night stop where a traveler could stay. This was a very practical term, and it is for you also. Rather than telling you that you have a fabulous palace up in heaven awaiting you some day, He is promising that you have a place that Jesus Himself has prepared for you where you can now find peace and solace and where your spirit can be revived.

Psalm 23 is a perfectly constructed song metaphorically describing what Jesus has done for you. **The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort**

me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23 NIV) This Psalm is not about death but rather all about life. It is a celebration of God's presence with you whatever you have before you and the promise He will bring you peace and comfort and strength to face whatever comes your way. It is not a morbid funeral dirge. It is the most stupendous hymn of life you will find. You do not have to dread anything on your path; you have God to go with you and keep you strong psychologically and emotionally as His Spirit fills you with life. Now let us turn back to Jesus' promise to you as He met with the disciples.

When Jesus left, He did not go off to make a better heaven, He went to die for your salvation. His death on the cross took your sins from you and built for you eternal life. Keep in mind what He promised, and this is crucial to understanding what these resting places are that He offers you. Jesus said this at the same time He informed the disciples and you of the resting places He has made. **Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.** (John 14: 23 NIV) This cannot be emphasized enough. It perhaps should be reiterated every single week or even more often because we lose sight of it all the time. The resting place Christ has for you is not somewhere you go but rather someone who goes with you. It is the Father and the Son who when you love Jesus and obey Him, lives in you and makes His home in you. John later reiterates this in His letter. **We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.** (1 John 4:13 NIV) Because of our up and down faith and our tendency to go off without any sense of God we become unaware of what Jesus has given us. He has placed in us resting places where we can have peace and hope and strength that wells within us. You have God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit all living within and they are there for you all the time. The house of the Lord the Psalmist promises is not some place over the river or down the road or on the other side of death. It is here and now your place of God who is in you.

Let me share how this operates for you in real time. You face tough struggles and even battles. Often they involve temptations but also they involve relationship problems, job issues, perhaps unemployment or family difficulties and you will be overwhelmed by what you face. David, the author of Psalm 23 who testified that the Lord was his shepherd, who when he went through tough times was not afraid because he knew God was with him, this same David felt oppressed and struggled with fear. He and his men had gone off to fight in a war and left their wives and children and possessions behind in a small village named Ziklag. But after several days they returned home only to find their wives and children and all they owned had been taken away by pillaging marauders. David's men however did not see it as some terrible crisis they all faced but a tragedy caused by their leader David. **David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters.** (1 Samuel 30: 6a NIV) Perhaps you too have felt like David did, greatly distressed. Perhaps you were not afraid your life was at risk, but the quality of your life was, the value of your life was. In an experiment that proved what he proclaimed in Psalm 23 and which Jesus promised you and the disciples, David turned to God and discovered He was there. Something within him changed, something supernatural worked within Him as God was there for David. The Bible gives this report. **But David found strength in the Lord his God.** (1 Samuel 30: 6b NIV) David's problems did not immediately go away. He still had to try to convince the men to go off to fight the Amalekites who had kidnapped their family members, but David was different. He was supernaturally transformed by God who was there in Him.

Remember the big idea. There is a place you can go to be revived and gain peace and hope again. Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, that resting place, that sanctuary, that green pasture is there for you every time you have the faith to go to Christ and have Him as your Savior. I have found this to be true again and again. Once someone I trusted and had done much to support his ministry betrayed me badly and I did not know if I would be able to continue as a pastor. It was a Sunday morning, and I went to my office before the service and I wept. I did not know how I could get up and stand before the congregation and give a sermon. But I discovered again that the Lord is my hiding place, my refuge, if you like the KJV term, my mansion. And in Him I had the supernatural strength of God to share the Bible unhindered with the church. Don't wait long to go to your resting place. In the moment you find yourself needing strength and courage and peace you do not have in yourself, turn to God and like David, find your strength in Him.