

Series: The Upper Room Discourse

John 16:25-33

It's not what you know but who you know

by Scott Grant

The people of Italy

When I visited Italy several years ago, I made a determination to get to know the people of the country. I didn't want just to go places, see things and read about them. I thought my trip would be much more satisfying if I was able to converse with some of the locals. I met a painter, a printer and a restaurateur, among others. Though we spoke different languages, we related. The trip was satisfying because I ended up knowing not just things but knowing people. At the conclusion of the trip, I was at peace.

We think peace comes from knowing the right things. But peace comes from knowing the right Person. If we can just know the right things, we think, we'll be in control, safe from harm. But knowledge does not mean control. No matter how much we know, life is still fragile. Knowledge, even knowledge about Jesus, doesn't protect us. Peace comes not from knowing the right things but from knowing Jesus.

Jesus is approaching the end of his words to the disciples. In John 17, he will speak to the Father. But at the end of John 16, he has a few more words for his disciples. First, he sets the stage for peace.

Setting the stage for peace

John 16:25-28:

(25) "These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; an hour is coming when I will speak no more to you in figurative language, but will tell you plainly of the Father. (26) In that day you will ask in My name, and I do not say to you that I will request the Father on your behalf; (27) for the Father Himself loves you, because you have loved Me, and have believed that I came forth from the Father. (28) I came forth from the Father, and have come into the world; I am leaving the world again, and going to the Father."

Jesus says he has spoken to them in "figurative language," which is contrasted with plain or open speech. The figurative language would therefore be speech that somehow contains truth but doesn't completely reveal it. Jesus' words, from his parables to his discourses, often didn't obviously reveal the truth of which they spoke. Jesus has revealed truth to his disciples progressively, not all at once, because they can only handle so much truth. As it was, their world was rocked when Jesus was crucified, even though he told them, in ever more clear terminology, that he was headed for the cross.

He says the hour is coming when he will not speak obscurely about the Father but will speak plainly about him. The hour that is coming, the one that Jesus has been anticipating throughout this discourse, concerns the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. Jesus couldn't tell them plainly about the Father because the Father couldn't be understood apart from the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of his Son. Following these events, the Holy Spirit would come to explain. And come he did. Peter, informed by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, himself speaks openly of God, because the Spirit has given him understanding (Acts 2:14-36).

Jesus says that "in that day," when the Spirit has come, the disciples will be able to approach the Father in the name of Jesus, that they won't need Jesus to approach the Father for them. As of now, they have no idea what to ask the Father for. Jesus, in fact, is about to pray for them (John 17:6-26). But when they are better informed, they will ask the Father in the "name" of Jesus. After the crucifixion, resurrection and

ascension of Jesus, and after the coming of the Spirit, they will be more fully aware of what Jesus wants and will ask the Father for what Jesus would ask for. They therefore won't need Jesus to petition the Father, because they themselves will know what to ask for, for their wills will be in line with that of Jesus. That's what it means to ask for something in the name of Jesus - to ask for something Jesus would ask for.

Three reasons are given for their enablement to ask in the name of Jesus: 1) The Father's love for them. 2) Their love for Jesus. 3) Their belief that Jesus came from God. These three factors will prompt them to petition the Father "in Jesus' name," to ask as Jesus would ask. Their transformation into people who think like Jesus begins with the Father's love for them, and this love will be more fully understandable after they see how he has given up his Son. Already, they have loved Jesus and have believed in his divine origination - they are well on their way to being able to approach the Father in the name of Jesus.

The most important thing to note about verse 26 is that it speaks of relationship. The disciples will relate to the Father; the Father loves them; they love Jesus; they believe in Jesus. These are words of relationship. True peace, Jesus will tell them, comes from relationship - relationship with him, relationship with the Father. When the Spirit comes, he will nurture this relationship.

Jesus then affirms their belief in him, telling them directly that he came from the Father and that he has come into the world. Then he tells them that he is leaving the world again and returning to the Father, but he makes no reference to their belief in this eventuality. He makes no reference to their belief in this, because they don't understand it. All along, his statements that he would be leaving them have left them befuddled and dazed.

The day is coming when they will be clearly informed about the Father. The day is coming when they will be able to approach the Father as Jesus would. The day is coming when they will be caught up in relationship with the Father. But first Jesus has to leave the world and return to the Father. Then the day will come.

Jesus here is setting the stage. He has the words of peace, and though the disciples are not yet ready to understand them, one day they will. It's like that for us as well. We hear the words of Jesus, and sometimes they don't coalesce. We try to understand them, to apply them, but we're just not sure we've got it right. We have the Spirit, but the Spirit doesn't seem to make things so clear all the time. But he will. The words are there; the truth is there; it just needs some time to incubate to the point that we understand, at a place deep within us, that life is all about relationship with Jesus. But as the Spirit makes that clear to us at deeper levels, we can be thankful that we have the words of Jesus that will one day be made clear.

The disciples, though, think everything is clear right now.

Arrival of false peace

John 16:29-30:

(29) His disciples said, "Lo, now You are speaking plainly, and are not using a figure of speech. (30) Now we know that You know all things, and have no need for anyone to question You; by this we believe that You came from God."

Jesus has told the disciples that the hour is coming when he will speak plainly, not obscurely. The disciples, however, tell Jesus that he is "now" speaking plainly. Jesus says he isn't yet speaking plainly, but they tell them that he is. They say that "now" they know that Jesus knows all things and that they have no need for anyone to question his authority. Jesus' supposed plain speech has created for them a sense of security about who he is. The disciples heard Jesus validate their faith, and they jump on that validation, proclaiming to him that they believe he came from God.

But there was something else that Jesus told them that they apparently didn't hear correctly. They heard him affirm their belief in him, but did they hear him say that he was leaving the world? If they heard him say this, why isn't this included in their supposed understanding of his plain speech? They dismissed what

Jesus said about his departure. They accepted the supposedly good (the affirmation of their faith) and dismissed the supposedly bad (Jesus would be leaving the world).

They seize on what they "know." They "know" Jesus knows all things, and they "know" that his authority is beyond question. They "believe" he came from God. In all this knowledge and belief, they are secure. They are at peace. Their knowledge brings them peace.

What they don't "know" is that Jesus is about to shatter their world - that soon they will not be so sure that he knows all things, that they themselves will feel the need to question him and that their "belief" in him will crumble. When Jesus leaves the world to return to the Father, just as he said he would, they would not be so secure in their knowledge and belief.

Their assertion regarding the status of Jesus is certainly accurate - he does indeed know all things, his authority is certain, he has come from God. These things about him are true. What isn't true is the disciples' understanding of what it all means. Because of their knowledge of the authority of Jesus and their belief in him, they think their world is secure. Because they believe these things about Jesus, they can't even begin to fathom that he would end up crucified. One who knows all things being crucified? One who is beyond question being crucified? One who came from God being crucified? So they closed their ears and didn't let it enter into their belief system that Jesus would be leaving the world.

Because they know certain things about Jesus, they think they have things under control. But it's a myth, a false security, a false peace, because they don't know the whole story. Their belief system does not allow for a crucified Messiah.

Aren't we like the disciples? Don't we hear what we want to hear, taking in the supposedly good and dismissing the supposedly bad? Don't we long for Jesus to speak plainly with us? Don't we jump to conclusions, attributing to him plain speech because we are uncomfortable with obscurity? Don't we rush to "know" all the right things so that we can be secure in our knowledge and belief? Don't we think that if we just know the right things, all will be well with the world? Don't we think that our knowledge will somehow give us a measure of control? Don't we jump to supposedly favorable conclusions about the meaning of the authority of Jesus? Don't we think that if Jesus knows all things and is beyond question, then life should go well for us? Don't we, again and again, assume that we've "arrived" based on our knowledge and assume that such knowledge will somehow make life manageable? Don't we think that knowing the right things will bring us peace?

And doesn't that "peace" crumble, time and time again, when God shatters our well-crafted systems of belief that don't allow for a Savior who knows all things and yet allows things that break our hearts? And don't we, when our false peace lies in pieces at our feet, start all over again, striving to know the right things, thinking that such knowledge will restore the peace?

True peace concerns something else entirely.

Possibility of true peace

John 16:31-33:

(31) Jesus answered them, "Do you now believe? (32) Behold, an hour is coming, and has already come, for you to be scattered, each to his own home, and to leave Me alone; and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. (33) These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."

"Do you now believe?" At this time, the disciples believe in Jesus. They think they have arrived in their belief; that's why they use the word "now." They use the word "now" in terms of "finally" or "at last." Jesus uses the word with respect to the future. "You think you believe now," he is telling them, "but that belief will be tested in the future."

hour is "coming" when he will speak plainly. The disciples falsely assumed that the hour for plain speaking had already come. In fact, the hour that has "already come" is the hour for them to be scattered. Before Jesus speaks to them plainly, they will be scattered.

The hour that has come is the hour for their categories to be blown, their world to be shattered. They will scatter to their own homes and abandon Jesus. This hour will be upon them momentarily, when Judas approaches with the officials (John 18:3). Then where will their "knowledge" be? Then where will their "belief" get them? What they know and believe about the way things should be will make no sense. Earlier, they thought they had no need to question Jesus, but soon they will be full of questions. When their faith is tested, they abandon Jesus and flee to that which is familiar - their homes. Faith in Jesus will no longer makes sense, because Jesus will have broken their hearts.

When our hearts are broken, don't we do the same things? Don't we scatter and head for the familiar? Don't we look around for familiar props that we think will hold us up now that God has failed us? Don't we often return to a familiar world of fantasy in which we can daydream about life working marvelously according to our plans for it? Don't we abandon Jesus and "leave him alone"?

When the disciples abandon Jesus, he is not alone, for the Father is with him. It will look for all the world that the Father has abandoned Jesus, but this is all part of the Father's plan. This would come as a great shock to the disciples, whose belief in the divine origination of Jesus would have precluded anything so mind-bending as crucifixion. Despite all appearances to the contrary, the Father will still be with Jesus.

And if the Father is with Jesus, then Jesus - and not Galilee - is the place to be. Yet they abandon Jesus, so they abandon the Father. They return to something they deem more dependable. This Jesus cannot be trusted. This Jesus exposes them to unspeakable horror. This Jesus does not give peace.

Yet, Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you that in me you may have peace." He has spoken things to the disciples so that they might have peace. They heard those things, or some of those things, and they had peace - a false peace, as it turns out, that didn't last. Why didn't "these things" that Jesus said give them true peace, true wellness, a wellness that lasts? Because they were searching for peace apart from two little words: "in me." They were searching for peace in the things Jesus told them, and if they could understand and believe those things, they thought, they'd have peace. But Jesus told them things not so that they could have peace in those things but that they'd have peace in him.

What does it mean to have peace in Jesus? It's a relational peace, a peace based not on knowing the right things but based on knowing Jesus. Knowing the right things is simply an avenue to know the right Person. When we cling to our knowledge, even our knowledge about Jesus, for peace, we always end up scattering to our own homes, so to speak, when affliction comes. We return to the familiar fantasy world. But relationship with Jesus, not knowledge or belief about him, is the true source of peace. To us, relationship seems much less trustworthy. How many relationships have we really found to be totally dependable? None, probably. Relationship seems mysterious; knowledge seems solid. Knowledge is not bad, but knowledge is always incomplete, and our knowledge deceives us into thinking that we know what needs to be known so that life cannot hurt us. When life hurts us, we assume we just didn't know the right things. But when life hurts us, that's an opportunity to know the right Person. When life hurts, we can draw close to Jesus instead of scattering to the familiar. So, as usual, it's not what you know; it's who you know.

Jesus tells his disciples that in the world they have tribulation. There is no question about it. All the knowledge and belief in the world cannot prevent difficulties. But in the face of such difficulties, they can take courage, because Jesus has overcome, or conquered, the world. Jesus' victory over the world at this point is so certain that he says it has already occurred. He defeated the world, and its ruler, Satan, through his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). Jesus is like a conquering general who wins the peace after the foe is vanquished. The victory of Jesus proves that nothing can truly harm us - that nothing can affect our eternal relationship with him. Because Jesus has defeated the world, because he has defeated every foe that could harm us, we should attach ourselves to him. We should seek to know him, who is the true source of peace.

[Back to the Scott Grant Library Index page](#)
[To the PBC Home Page](#)
