

## Easter 5

A small child goes to God and says, "Lord, is it true that a minute is like a thousand years in your sight?" "Yes, my child" said the Lord. The child continued: "And is it true that you'll give me anything I ask for in your name?" "Yes my child," said the Lord. "Lord," the child said, "can I have a million dollars?" "Sure kid" said the Lord, "just give me a minute."

I have a hunch that, as you listened to this gospel lesson, one or two parts jumped out at you: either the part my little story was based on about Jesus giving us whatever we ask for, or the earlier part where Jesus said, "No one comes to the Father but by me."

They are both perplexing because, at first glance, they both appear to be absurd statements. God clearly does not give us everything we ask for (thank God), and if everyone has to come through Jesus then what happens, for example, to those born in China in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC?

I've been in lots of Bible studies on this passage where the conversation tends to focus on whether Jesus really said these things or, if he said them, whether he really meant them. In other words, we find ways to rationalize them into something we find more acceptable.

But I want to take a different approach. I'm going to assume that Jesus said these things and that he meant them as he said them. The question I want to ask is exactly what he meant by them. It seems to me that the best way to get at this passage is to ask: Whom? When? And why?

Whom. Jesus was speaking to his disciples. He wasn't speaking to you, or me, or children who want to get what they want or Chinese people from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. One of the BIG mistakes we make with the Bible is to take a passage, pry it out of its context, and apply it as if every statement in the Bible is universally applicable. This can be very dangerous. In this passage, Jesus is speaking to his disciples and only to his disciples.

When. God is eternal but Jesus of Nazareth spoke in a time and place. This passage takes place on the night before he died at his last supper with his disciples. This is not the Sermon on the Mount or one of his teachings in the Temple. Jesus is telling his disciples things they needed to know on the night before he was killed.

Why. This is the key to the whole passage and, in my view, any problems we encounter in it. If we took out our Bibles and backed up a few verses, we would see that Jesus had just told his disciples of his impending death.

The disciples were deeply distressed and Peter even started to panic, saying he would lay down his life too. Seeing their anxiety, Jesus said, "Let not your hearts be troubled. In my Father's house are many dwelling places and I will prepare one for you. Don't worry about the way because I am the Way, and I will give you everything you need.

Do you see? Jesus is providing words of comfort at a time of great uncertainty and distress. And while some of his words spark other questions in us, we have to realize that he's not talking about those things; he is speaking words of comfort to his troubled disciples on the night before he died. So the Word of God for us in this passage comes to us as we explore the uncertainties and distress of our own lives.

Is there distress within you? Does it have to do with your family, your school, or your work? Jesus looks into the uncertainty of your life and says: "Do not let your heart be troubled. Do not worry about the way forward because I am the Way. Follow me. I will give you everything you need."

Amen.