

## **“What’s The Matter?”**

### **John 12:20-33**

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor  
Smoke Rise Baptist Church  
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Ever had a conversation with someone when you asked them, “What’s the matter?” and they replied, “Nothing!” You knew by their answer something was wrong but for some reason they did not want to discuss it. I suppose all of us have been on both sides of this equation, which makes life awkward for everyone. Denial adds tension to everyone’s life.

Jesus was not in denial in the story we are going to examine today. Something was bothering him and he readily admitted it. **“Now my soul is troubled,”** Jesus told his disciples. I’m sure they knew Jesus’ heart was heavy, but it helped to hear him say it.

You probably noticed the words of Jesus in John 12:27-28 were similar to the ones used while in the Garden of Gethsemane the night he was betrayed. John did not include the details of that event as other gospel writers did, but he shared Jesus’ internal struggle through this verse.

“Now my soul is troubled. What should I say, ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it is for this reason I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

**About what do you think Jesus was troubled?** I’m sure there were many things that bothered him that night. He was disturbed about the plight of the poor that were being exploited by the religious leaders. He was upset by the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees that had an insatiable appetite for power and possessions. He was troubled by the high price he was going to pay to be a spokesman for God and advocate for the poor, confronting the corrupt leaders and exposing their greed and deceit. His outspokenness would cost him his life.

The Greeks were not the only ones seeking Jesus that day. The shadow of the cross was, too. The “hour” that Jesus had always referred to in the future was now upon him. The jealous and threatened religious leaders were not going to tolerate his teaching and miracles any longer, and he knew it. If his notoriety and popularity had expanded to the Gentiles as well as the Jews, then something had to be done.

The plan to discredit and kill him had been devised. His enemies decided to conduct a trial, declare him to be a traitor and heretic worthy of death and put pressure upon the Romans to crucify him. To pull this off would require the highest level of fraud and deceit on the part of the Pharisees, but they were skilled at both. Jesus was up against a formidable enemy, one that would not be denied. “Now my soul is troubled,” he told his disciples, and it was.

**Lent is a time for troubled souls.** It is not a time of peace, tranquility, hopeful anticipation or joyful celebration like Advent. There are no hovering angels declaring peace on earth goodwill toward men. We don’t sing “Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is bright” because it is not. “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” we sing this time of the year because Lent is a time for troubled souls.

Actually, trouble is not confined to a season. The message to us this morning is that there are times throughout the year when all of us will experience trials and tribulations, dark nights of the soul. The Garden of Gethsemane will not be an unfamiliar place.

This could be one of those times for you. Your soul may be troubled as Jesus’ was. You may be struggling with a child that is wrestling with the demon of drug addiction or alcoholism. Your marriage may be on the rocks. You might have lost your job and are having a difficult time finding another one. You may have bills that you cannot pay. You may have a loved one on the battle front in Iraq or Afghanistan. Medical tests may indicate that you need to undergo radiation and chemotherapy. Perhaps you have lost a loved one and are feeling lonely and depressed. You may be disappointed in your performance on the job, the classroom or the ballfield. You may be reeling from bad decisions that have embarrassed you and hurt others. You know what a troubled soul is all about, don’t you? You can identify with Jesus and appreciate his candor.

**What do you do when your soul is troubled?** What did Jesus do? **He admitted it.** He did not live in denial or silence and we must not either.

**He did not look for easy answers or someone to rescue him.** This is not to say the idea never crossed his mind. “What should I say, ‘Father save me from this hour?’ No, it is for this reason I have come to this hour.” No one was going to rescue him and they will not us, either.

Have you seen the Staples commercial advertising office products? It has the “easy button.” When people in the commercial are faced with an overwhelming challenge that is producing chaos, one of them hits the easy button. Instantly the challenge is gone and calm returns. In real life, there are no easy buttons and mature believers understand this. Jesus certainly did.

**When Jesus was troubled, he talked to God and others.** He unburdened his heart and shared his anguish, fear and pain. He did not travel this lonesome road alone and neither should we.

This is one of many things I appreciate about this church. A family spirit permeates our fellowship. We laugh and cry with each other. We rejoice and grieve together. We carry one another’s burdens as Paul admonished us to do. We lighten loads by sharing them.

Mary Halverson makes an interesting point about the importance of community in African cultures. “Individualism and isolation are unthinkable in African cultures,” she writes. “People greet each other by using an expression related to health and well-being. ‘I am in good health if you are.’ The health and well-being of an individual depend upon the well-being of his or her community.” I want to believe this is a part of the Smoke Rise spirit.

**When his soul was troubled, Jesus remained faithful to God and his mission.** His purpose sustained him when he wanted to quit. His faith in God did, too. Jesus believed if he accomplished his mission, no matter how difficult it was or bleak it looked, good would come from it. “And I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself,” he told his disciples. The key was to trust God and remain faithful through the darkest hours.

Jesus shared this hope with his disciples a few days later. The night they gathered in the upper room, Jesus knew their hearts were heavy, too. So what did he say to them? **“Do not let your hearts be troubled.** Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back to you and take you to be with me that you may be also where I am” John 14:1-3.

Only one whose heart had been troubled and calmed could reassure them that night. He trusted God to have the final word in this saga and was assured that word would be a good one. We can trust God, too, especially when our heart is troubled.

Recently Paul Bradshaw interviewed Rick Warren, author of [The Purpose Driven Life](#). Listen to a portion of the interview.

“Life is a series of problems; you are in one now, you’re just coming out of one or you’re getting ready to go into another one. I used to think that life was hills and valleys. You go through a dark time and then you go to the mountaintop, back and forth. I don’t believe that anymore.

Rather than life being hills and valleys, I believe it is like two rails on a railroad track. At all times you have good and bad things in your life. There is always something bad that needs to be worked on. No matter how bad things are, though, there is always something good you can thank God for. You can focus on your purpose or you can focus on your problems. If you focus on your problems, you’ll become self-centered where all the attention is upon your pain. One of the easiest ways to get rid of the pain, however, is to take the focus off you and place it onto God and others. Focus upon your purpose, not your problems.

I believe Warren learned this from Jesus. I pray we can, too.