

J. C. RYLE'S NOTES ON THE GOSPEL OF JOHN
16:25-33

25. These things I have spoken to you in proverbs; but the time is coming when I shall no more speak to you in proverbs, but I shall tell you plainly about the Father. 26. At that day ye shall ask in my name, and I do not say to you that I will pray the Father for you; 27. for the Father himself loves you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came forth from God. 28. I came forth from the Father and have come into the world. Again, I leave the world and go to the Father. 29. His disciples said to him, See, now you speak plainly, and speak no proverb. 30. Now we are sure that you know all things, and have no need that any man should question you. By this we believe that you came forth from God. 31. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? 32. Behold, the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall 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 ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

25.--[*These things...proverbs.*] Our Lord seems here to begin winding up and concluding His discourse. The expression "these things" seems to me to apply to all that He had been saying since Judas went out and He was alone with the eleven. "All these things I have been saying to you in language that you have not been able fully to understand, insomuch that I seem to have been speaking to you in parables or proverbs." The Greek word rendered "proverb" is only used five times in the New Testament, and in John 10:6 is translated parable.

Besser observes here: "From the very first words of our Lord's farewell discourse--'In my Father's house are many mansions'--to to the words concerning the travailing woman, the heavenly purport of the discourse is wrapped in various similes and parables."

Do we not learn here that ministers must not refrain from telling their hearers many truths, which at the time they do not fully comprehend, in the hope that they will seek more knowledge and comprehend afterward the meaning of the things taught?

[*But the time comes...Father.*] I believe the "time" here mentioned must be the time between our Lord's resurrection and ascension, the great forty days when He taught the eleven disciples more fully than He had taught them before, and spoke more openly of the things of His Father. I say this with diffidence. But I can see no other time to which our Lord could refer excepting this. It is evidently some personal instruction that He means and not instruction by the invisible agency of the Holy Ghost. "The time is very close at hand, when my sacrifice on the cross having been accomplished and my resurrection having taken place, I will show you openly and plainly the things concerning my Father, who I am, and my relation to

Him, and will no longer use parables and figures to convey my meaning."

The promise MAY possibly include the continual teaching of the Holy Spirit, which our Lord would give His disciples after His ascension. But the language seems rather to point to direct teaching from our Lord's own mouth. Moreover, it is an "hour" that comes, in the Greek, and not a continuous period of time. So in verse 32 "the hour" means a time close at hand.

26.--[*At that day...my name.*] I believe this sentence must mean, "In the day following my resurrection, when the full nature of my mission and office is at last understood, you will begin to pray and ask in my name. Hitherto you have not done it. When I have risen from the dead and opened your understandings, you will begin to do it."

I see insuperable objection to any other view. The "day" spoken of cannot be the day of Christ's second advent, because prayer will not be needed then. Nor yet can it be the whole period of time between Christ's first and second advent, because the passage with which it is here bound up belongs specially to the Apostles. (See verse 27.) There remains, in my judgment, no reasonable explanation except the one already given.

[*And I do not say...Father for you.*] The meaning of this sentence seems to be: "It is not necessary to say that I will pray the Father to hear you and grant your requests. Not only shall I of course do this, but my Father also will willingly hear your prayer." This is the most natural meaning of the passage, in my judgment.

It is singular that the Greek word rendered "pray" at the end of the verse is the same that is used to signify "ask questions" or "make inquiry" in verse 23. But it is worth notice that the word seems specially used when our Lord is described as "praying" to the Father. (See John 17:9, 25:20.)

27.--[*For the Father Himself, etc.*] This verse is a continuation of the encouragement contained in the verse before. "You need not doubt the Father doing for you all that you ask in my name, because he loves you for having loved Me and for believing my divine mission. He loves all who love Me and believe on Me." (See John 14:23.)

Anton paraphrases the verse: "Ye need not so think of my intercession as if the Father were not Himself well disposed, but must first be coerced into kindness. No! He Himself loves you, and Himself ordained my intercession."

We should notice here how graciously our Lord acknowledges the grace there was in the disciples, with all their weakness. When myriads of Jews regarded Jesus as an impostor, the eleven loved Him and believed in Him. Jesus never forgets to honor true grace, however much it may be mingled with infirmity.

28.--[*I came forth, etc.*] This verse seems a farewell summary of the true nature of our Lord's office and mission. It grows out of the last clause of the preceding verse. "You have believed that I came forth from God. In so believing you have done well, for so it is. For the last time I repeat

that my mission is divine. I came forth from the Father, and came into the world to be man's Redeemer; and now, my work being finished, I am about to leave the world and go back again to my Father." This deep sentence contains more than at first sight appears. It points backward to our Lord's persecution; it points forward to His resurrection and ascension into glory.

Augustine, quoted by Burgon, remarks: "When Christ came forth from the Father, He so came into the world as never to leave the Father; and He so left the world and went to the Father as never to leave the world."

29.--[*His disciples said, etc.*] The words of the disciples seem to be a reference to our Lord's statement in the 25th verse, that "the time was coming when He would no more speak in proverbs, but show them plainly concerning the Father." The eleven appear to catch at that promise. "Even now You are speaking to us more plainly than we have ever heard You speaking before, and not in figurative language."

30.--[*Now we are sure, etc.*] This is a peculiar verse. It is hard to see what there was in our Lord's statement in verse 28 to carry such conviction to the minds of the eleven, and to make them see things about their Master so much more clearly than they had seen them before. But the precise reason why words affect men's minds and lay hold on their attention at one time and not at another is a deep mystery and hard to explain. The very same truths that a man hears from one mouth, and is utterly unimpressed, come home to him with such power from another mouth that he will declare he never heard them before! Even more, the very same speaker who is heard without attention one day is heard another day teaching the very same things, with the deepest interest by the same hearers, and they will tell you they never heard them before!

The words "We are sure" are literally "We know." They mean, "We know now that You know all things concerning Yourself, Your mission, and the Father."

The words, "You need not that any man should ask You," mean: "You have told us so plainly who and what You are, that there is no need for anyone to ask You questions or seek further explanation."

The words, "By this we believe" must mean, "We are convinced and persuaded by the statement You have just made," in verse 28.

31.--[*Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?*] In this verse our Lord warns the eleven of their self-ignorance. They thought they believed. They did not doubt their own faith. Let them not be too confident. They would soon find they had an evil root of unbelief within. Never do we find our Lord flattering His disciples. Warnings against self-confidence need to be continually pressed on believers. Nothing is so deceptive as feeling and excitement in religion. We know not the weakness of our hearts.

Alford thinks that "do ye now believe" should not be rendered as a question, but as an affirmation. "You now believe, I know." The Greek admits of either view. I prefer the question.

32.--[*Behold, the hour...shall leave Me alone.*] In this sentence our Lord reveals to his confident hearers the amazing fact that they, even they, would in a very short time forsake Him, desert Him, run away, and fail in faith altogether. "Behold!" He begins (to denote how wonderful it was), "the hour comes, yes, is now come. This very night, before the sun rises, the thing is immediately going to take place. Ye shall be scattered, like sheep fleeing from a wolf, one running one way and one another, every man going off to his own things, his own friends, or his own house, or his own place of refuge. Ye shall leave Me alone. You will actually allow Me to be taken off by myself as a prisoner to the high priests and to Pontius Pilate, and not so much as one of you will stand by Me."

How little the best of believers know their own hearts, or understand how they may behave in times of trial! If any men were ever fully and fairly warned of their coming failure, the disciples were. We can only suppose that they did not understand our Lord, or did not realize the magnitude of the trial coming on them, or fancied that He would work some miracle at the last moment for His deliverance.

The Greek phrase rendered "His own" means literally "His own things." It may either be "His own business" or, as the margin renders it, "His own home."

[*And yet...Father is with Me.*] In this teaching and touching sentence, our Lord reminds His disciples that their desertion would not deprive Him of all comfort. "And yet, when you are scattered and have left Me, I am not entirely alone, because the Father is always with Me."

We need not doubt that one great need of the sentence was to teach the disciples where they must look themselves in their own future trials. They must never forget that God the Father would always be near them and with them, even in the darkest times. A sense of God's presence is one great source of the comfort of believers. The last promise in Matthew, before the ascension, was, "I am with you always, even to the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

John Huss, the famous martyr who was burned at Constance, is said to have drawn special comfort from this passage during the lonely imprisonment that preceded his death.

33.--[*These things...peace.*] In this concluding verse our Lord sums up the reasons why He has spoken the things contained in this whole discourse. "All these things I have spoken for this one great end--that you may have inward peace by resting your souls on Me and keeping up close communion with Me." It is one great secret in our religion to draw all our consolation from Christ, and live in Him. "He is our peace" (Eph. 2:14).

[*In the world...tribulation.*] Here our Lord tells the eleven, plainly and honestly, that they must expect trouble and persecution from the world. He does not conceal that the way to heaven is not smooth and strewn with flowers. On the contrary, "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). To keep back from young beginners in

religion the cross and the battle is not teaching as Christ taught.

[*But be of good cheer...world.*] Here our Lord winds up all by bidding the disciples to take courage, cheer up, be confident, and go forward without fear. The world in which they lived was a vanquished enemy. He, their Master, had "overcome the world." This means, I believe, not merely that He had given them an example of successful fighting by overcoming the fear of the world and the flattery of the world, but something far more important. He had overcome the Prince of this world, and was just about to win His final victory over him on the cross. Hence His disciples must remember that they were contending with an enemy already sorely beaten. "Ye need not fear the world, because I am just leading captive its king, and about to triumph over him on the cross."

Luther, quoted by Besser, here remarks: "Thus is the 'goodnight' said, and the hand shaken. But very forcibly does He conclude with that very thing around which His whole discourse has turned. Let not your heart be troubled. Be of good cheer."

No devout commentator, I think, can leave this wonderful chapter without deeply feeling how little we understand the depths of Scripture. There are many words and sentences in it about which we can only give conjectures, and must admit our inability to speak positively. Nowhere in Scripture, I must honestly confess, do commentators appear to me to contribute so little light to the text as in their interpretation of this chapter.