

‘My soul is troubled, and what shall I say?’

by Grant Thorpe

available at
www.corobaptist.org.au

The following article may be copied and distributed freely
if it is acknowledged and not used for profit.

How does any human being deal with a troubled soul? This is not the same as dealing with trouble. Everyone has to do that, but what if the person dealing with trouble is troubled? As a proverb says: ‘The spirit of man can endure his sickness, but as for a broken spirit who can bear it?’ (Prov. 18:14; also 17:22).

When Jesus was being sought by many people, and when he thought about what he was going to do to gather them to himself, he said that his soul was troubled. Here is the story.

Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say-- 'Father, save me from this hour? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.' Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again'.

The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to him.' Jesus answered, 'This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself. (John 12:27-32).

What does it mean that Jesus was so deeply troubled, and what did he do with himself when this happened? It is especially important to answer these questions because what he did then changes everything for us now.

God has made human beings as ‘a living soul’ by personally breathing into what he formed from the earth. What he formed in this way can only be sustained by his going on breathing into his creatures. David said: ‘The Lord is my Shepherd ... He restores my soul.’ He rested in the care of the Lord and was not ruled by his deficiencies or the threats around him or a dread of the future.

To be troubled in soul is to be shaken to the centre of one’s being. It is not a pain at the edge of life but at its centre. Depression is one form of being troubled in soul, and some are predicting that by the year 2020, the major form of disability in the world will be depression. Many do not fall into depression but give their whole life to avoid the pain of a troubled soul. What can a person do when this happens?

What did Jesus do? First, he addressed his troubled soul to ‘Father...’. The only home for a ‘living soul’ is God, the Father. In himself, Jesus was troubled, but he was not just ‘in himself’. He had come from the Father and the Father was with him and for him.

Second, he went directly to the heart of his situation and directly to the heart of God with his request: 'Father, glorify your name!' There can be no peace for a human being which is not first the peace of God. There can be no glory for a human being which is not first the glory of God being reflected in a human situation. Jesus knew that there was very real reason for human beings to be troubled. They did not know God as their Father. Worse than that, they knew that at any time, the true nature of their life could be exposed, and they would be ashamed.

Jesus had come to deal with the judgement of this world, to let humanity be seen in its raw state, to expose the powers of darkness and to throw them down. He had come to gather humanity to himself.

The Father said to his Son: I have glorified my Name [in you] and I will glorify it again. Jesus would go on from this troubled moment to the deeper trouble of Gethsemane, and then, the deepest of all, to the cross where he cried out, 'My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me?' Jesus has allowed his soul to be troubled for us so that the glory of his Father's grace and truth may be seen. More than this, he has said that the glory the Father gave to him would be given to us (John 17:22-23). We would know the Father as Jesus himself did.

No wonder Jesus said: 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me (John 14:1). He also said: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid' (John 14:27).

What shall we do when our souls are troubled?

First, remember Christ and his troubled soul and his cry to his Father. Was there any troubling like this? But he was troubled in his soul so we could be free of that trouble. Strangely, the Father glorified him to bear our shame. He glorified him by raising him from the dead and raising him to his right hand.

Second, remember that Christ was troubled for us and that the dark powers that ruled this world have been thrown down through his death and rising again.

Third, hear the command of Jesus: 'Let not your heart be troubled!' This means that there is no valid reason why they should be troubled. His humanity was poured out on the cross so that our humanity may be restored. You have the same Father as Jesus Christ and he will come when you call. Cry out to your Father that his Name will be glorified in you also. This is a prayer that God cannot refuse.

Troubles will come, and they may be greater than we, alone, can bear. But we are not alone. The Father who made us will restore our souls and lead us on to true glory.

© Grant Thorpe, January 2000