

Sermon: "Feeling Orphaned When I Am Not"

Text: John 14:12-20; 16:17-18; 1:12-13; 1 John 3:1; Philippians 3:1-11

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- [You gotta listen hard to this one—it is inductive until the last]
- For the fun of it, I searched the word “ascension” with the search engine I use on one of my computers. I was expecting to see all the Bible verses that speak about the ascension of Jesus from earth back to the Father.
- Instead, the first few hits were about a healthcare company by that name, a career search company, an island in the South Atlantic Ocean, a movie about something called the “Chinese dream,” some definitions that included “rising” and moving to a higher level of consciousness and about an online game.
- I had to skip forward 3 pages of results to finally see Jesus’ name in any of the headings related to “ascension.”
- Maybe it is because I am early thinking about Jesus’ ascension for the official church calendar. It has not yet been the full 40 days since our celebration of the resurrection. Jesus showed himself to be alive with resurrection life remaining with his disciples for a full 40 days before *ascending* back to the Father.
- Somehow, I doubt if I waited the 40 days to search that I would then find the search-engine ranking any different. The ascension of Jesus is never at the forefront of the world’s thinking.
- It is probably not at the forefront of Christians who do not follow closely an official church calendar as part of the rhythm of church life. Too bad. It, along with Pentecost, offers another official “feast day”—another official time to celebrate.
- When Jesus comforted his disciples at that last supper they shared, he knew his going away involved not only the crucifixion and the resurrection but also his physical departure from this world.
- As part of his lesson that began “Let not your hearts be troubled...,” Jesus told his followers that they could trust him. He was not

deserting them even though, through the eyes of this world, it might seem that way.

- **In John 14:12ff., as the lesson continues. He says:** ¹² *I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.* ¹³ *And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father.* ¹⁴ *You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it.* ¹⁵ *"If you love me, you will obey what I command.* ¹⁶ *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—* ¹⁷ *the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.* ¹⁸ *I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.* ¹⁹ *Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.* ²⁰ *On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.*
- We probably would have responded to this teaching in much the same way as some of his disciples who first heard it. In **John 16:17-18** we hear their thoughts: ¹⁷ *Some of his disciples said to one another, "What does he mean by saying, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,' and 'Because I am going to the Father'?"* ¹⁸ *They kept asking, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We don't understand what he is saying."*
- Whether, Jesus just had in mind being hidden from their sight for 3 days in the tomb or he was also thinking in terms of his ascension here, he knew how these men might feel. He used the feeling of being "**orphaned**" to describe what they might experience.

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- There may be someone here or someone watching online that has known what it is like to be **orphaned**. Most of us have not. Likely if any of us have, the experience was over rather early in our life. New parents, who wanted to take care of us and were committed to meet our needs, adopted us.
- Of course, those of us who have believed Jesus for everlasting life, by the grace of God through faith have, already been adopted into God's family. We are not orphans. A Father who loves us and commits to meeting all our needs has made us his own beloved children.
- The same **Gospel of John** begins by telling us... ¹² **Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—** ¹³ **children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.**
- Later in his epistle we call 1st John, the apostle wrote... **3 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!**
- Still, sometimes in some ways, **we feel like orphans**. We might **feel** as if we have been left alone to figure out how to meet our own needs for living Godly in this broken world.
- Thinking about our needs and sometimes feeling like we are orphaned sent me first (of course!) to "**Annie**" that famous orphan story that started as a comic strip called "*Little Orphan Annie*" during the Great Depression and was brought back to our attention by a Broadway play, a movie and many musical stage adaptations.
- The years of the Great Depression were very lean years for many people even here in the prosperous USA. They were especially desperate years for orphans left to fend for themselves in order to have even their most basic needs met.

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- In one song, Orphan Annie sings: "***It's the hard-knock life for us. It's the hard-knock life for us. Instead of treated, we get tricked. Instead of kisses, we get kicked. It's the hard-knock life!***"
- Of course, originally having the broad-brush assumed energy and outlook of a freckled, red-haired little girl, Annie can also sing... "***The sun will come out tomorrow. You can bet your bottom dollar...***"
- An orphan just has to hang on until tomorrow—tomorrow—tomorrow—tomorrow—hang on—hang on—hang on!!
- Leaving the make-believe world of optimistic orphans who can hang on until tomorrow. I then considered this question: If Jesus tells us we are not orphans, yet sometimes some of us feel as if we are orphans, why is that? Does God meet our needs as our Father?
- There are only a few things I remember from university psychology classes. One is the Russian Psychologist Ivan Palov's dogs and what his experiments supposedly proved about *classical conditioning* in animals. Of course, it was assumed that such conditioning works the same way in us human "animals." Admittedly, hearing certain bells ding can cause me to salivate.
- The other thing I remember was the American psychologist Abraham Maslow's "***Hierarchy of Needs.***" Do any of you remember that one? Maslow built a five-level pyramid that organized human motivations based around human needs. He assumed felt-needs were true needs.
- As with most psychological theories that leave out the truth of a Creator God and the reality of human sin, I find his faulty. Still, secular psychologists can make some observations that ring true.
- Without, endorsing Maslow's conclusions in any way, I simply want to use his 5 layers of human needs to make a point about feeling

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orphaned and ask about biblical truth that addresses this feeling with its motivating felt-needs.

- I will over simplify because I am headed to the top of Maslow's pyramid. I don't care as much about the earlier levels and how Maslow at first argued these needs must be met in succession.
- The base of the pyramid is "**physical**," or later, it was expanded to "**physiological**" needs. These are needs such as food, water, air and others. An orphan has to eat and drink and breath to survive.
- What was it that Jesus said about these needs in the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 6?** ³¹ *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'* ³² *For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.* ³³ *But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.* ³⁴ *Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*
- Ok. Jesus says level 1 of needs—physical needs is taken care of. God will meet those needs. We don't have to feel like we have been left on our own like orphans to deal with them
- The 2nd level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is **safety or security**. We humans feel the need not just to eat but also to be able to eat in safety. The OT has more to say about God as a "mighty protective fortress" than the NT but we can probably conclude God has this need covered as well for his NT people.
- Paul told the **Thessalonians** that "**The Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one.**"
- He told the Ephesians that God had provide them with spiritual armor for their protection and safety in spiritual battles.

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- So, if anything, God's provision for the human felt-need of security, is expanded in the NT to include even protection in the spiritual realm.
- Level 3 of needs is the felt-need for "**belongingness and love.**" God again meets this felt-need in many ways at many levels. As I already pointed out, we **belong** to him as children. We also have one-another in the body of Christ. We may even have families with husbands and wives and children that can **love** us in Godly ways.
- **Levels 4 and 5** for Maslow are divided into needs for 1st **esteem** and then at the very peak the need for **self-actualization**. I tend to find these two intertwined beyond being able to separate them in most people.
- The reason this is so is because our culture now tells us that **to have self-esteem is the same as self-actualization**. What I mean is that our world teaches that **feeling good about myself is probably the highest end of my purpose for existence.**
- So, for the ease of thinking in my cluttered mind, I put these two together under the heading of "**significance.**" I have a felt-need to sense I am significant. Can God meet that need? Does he? Do I let him meet it his way? Do I have my own way of feeling significant and meeting that felt-need? Or am I on my own as an orphan to meet it?
- Maslow may not have divided and named all his need-levels in his pyramid of the hierarchy of needs perfectly. His original thinking that each level was discreet and one had to meet the needs of each lower level before their motivations would be focused on meeting the needs of the next may not have been exactly right. However, there was some reality in what he described.

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- People who are scratching the hard dirt to find some little bit to eat and to sustain physical life usually are not thinking all that much about self-actualization to their highest purpose for living at all.
- Without God's wisdom, they are usually not focused on things that might make them feel **personally significant**.
- On the other hand, people who find those earlier needs met—or at least relatively so—food and water, safety, belonging—don't have to focus on those, so they don't as much.
- Instead, for most of us who eat all too well, sleep in relative safety and have many belonging relationships—we tend to focus on the upper level needs of the pyramid which I have simplified to—we tend to focus on feeling our **personal significance**.
- In this inductive to beat all induction of a sermon where you don't know what I am getting at until the Ah! Ha! moment near the end when I attempt to reveal my whole point—the question is: **How do I get my significance—how is this felt need, which our prosperous lives allow us to focus on more and more—how is it met?**
- How would God say it can be met by him in a way that glorifies him rather than us operating as if we are orphans on our own?
- Even as believers we are not beyond finding ourselves trying to meet the felt-need for significance through money, power, image, and titles, etc. You can find texts throughout the NT telling you that these don't meet this need in a Godly way. These are the ways of an orphan rather than a child of God.
- But, what about more subtle ways of seeking significance—for example by working very hard for God in ways others will hopefully notice. Or, working hard to be liked by others no matter how we have to do that. Or knowing more spiritual stuff than others? Or arranging our spiritual lives in ways that above all else make us

comfortable? Or trying always to be the visibly gifted one in a church? Or have the station of being a leader? Can these be ways of an orphan seeking to have their need for significance met?

- How does God say he will meet our human need for significance as believers in a way that honors him?
- Here is a more specific question that some of you might not find very specific because it doesn't seem to apply to you much at all. Does the church—does FBC exist as a stage for us to act out a need for approval so we can meet our pinnacle felt-need for significance?
- Or do **we**, rather, exist for the sake of the body of FBC as much as that might seem to humble us and even make us **FEEL** less significant—at least at first?
- This lesson was, in some ways, brought on by reading those verses from Philippians 3 that were read twice last week—once by me and then again, on purpose, by Todd. We did it on purpose because the Apostle Paul said he repeated them on purpose. The truth they convey is that important!
- In closing this message let me read a little larger context for those same verses beginning at **Philippian 3:1... 3 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.** **2 Watch out for those dogs, those men who do evil, those mutilators of the flesh.** **3 For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh—** **4 though I myself have reasons for such confidence. If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more:** **5 circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee;** **6 as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness,**

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faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

- Paul recognized that felt need for significance in himself—which for him used to be met by his status as a religious Pharisee. He learned that need could be and had to be met by God in a different way if he wanted his life to honor God.
- This makes me ask myself again and ask you what ***SKUBALA***—what relative garbage might I be using to try to gain significance.
- Maybe it is relying on this ***skubala***—that can never provide true significance instead of on God who can—maybe this is why at the upper levels of the pyramid of needs I find myself sometimes feeling hurt, abandoned, injured, disregarded just as an orphan who must make their own way in a hard-knock world might feel.