

Not Why, But Who?

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Well, if you saw the email that we sent out today, you know that this is a very difficult day for our church family. This morning Greyson Lee Cook who was born January 21, 2017, went into the arms of Jesus on February 27, 2018. I really haven't had much time to process all of that. I was with the family this morning, a little bit this afternoon, and wanted to take tonight to not really preach, I had something else prepared but just to kind of maybe have a little bit of a family fireside chat, in the words of our fellow elder, Andrew Snelling. I told him I was going to use that phrase without giving him credit but I gave him credit all the same.

At a time like this, we are reminded of the truth of Scripture, that we live in a fallen and broken world, don't we? Just speaking in human terms, this is so very unnatural. This is so very hard and difficult. You know, it is children who are supposed to lay their parents to rest, not vice versa. And I know that some of you have laid children to rest. My mother has laid two of her kids to rest, and so there is a great sense of sympathy that we all feel at this time. So I just put together a few thoughts that I wanted to share with everyone here today that hopefully will be a comfort to our church family as a whole. I know that many of our church family is watching over the live stream, and also things that will perhaps be a comfort to you in the midst of some of your sorrows, that this isn't simply in Greyson's honor and memory, although there is an element to that. That's the prompt for it. The things of which we are going to speak here this evening have a very broad application and the cry of every heart, quite naturally during a time like this is, why? Why, God? Why the baby? Why not me? Why didn't you do something? Why didn't you intervene? Why did this happen? What is your purpose? And there is no sense whatsoever in telling a grieving heart not to ask the question why. The force of that question just comes out and I learned a long time ago not to try to tell people, "Don't ask that question." But the very nature of the question is unanswerable, isn't it? The why question is unanswerable at a time like this.

Who can understand the eternal purpose of God in a moment like this? We have no perspective whatsoever with which to be able to view this and to rightly judge it. We take comfort in the fact of knowing that our God is a righteous God and surely the God of all creation will do what is right. We trust him for that even though we don't understand, but I want to suggest to you a different question to ask. The way that you frame the question determines the outcome and I want to suggest a different question. And if you were going to take notes tonight, this isn't really a night for note taking. Remember, this is a family

fireside chat, not a message. But if you were going to, I would title tonight's fireside chat in this way, "Not Why, But Who?" Not why, but who? To ask a different question. Why is unanswerable in the ultimate sense. You know, we know that our Lord works everything together for good. We know that he has purposes in it, but we can't discern them when they are right this close in our mind and in our thinking, and so I want to suggest a different question tonight and the question is who. Who do we turn to at a time like this when our hearts are heavy, when our hearts are breaking? We have a hymn that we sing, don't we, "Even when my heart is breaking, He, my Pilot, hears my cry." Who do we trust? Who can help us? Who can comfort us is the question that we ask and the question "who" takes us to a person whom we know and who has been revealed to us. When we ask the question in terms of who, suddenly we have something that we can build our lives on and that we can find our way forward in, because the question "who," especially in this place, leads us to our Lord Jesus Christ, and that is where we need to go. He is the one to whom we need to go because if ever there is a time where we find that the best of men cannot help us, if ever there is a time like that, it's when we are laying a little one to rest.

Andrew said very well. I should have had Andrew preach tonight since I'm quoting him so often. Andrew, come on up. Andrew made a point as he and I were talking this afternoon, you know, it's the nature of our church, it's the nature of our church ministry that we welcome the little ones into our service, don't we? We invite the children to be with us. We don't separate them out. We don't send them away. We want them with us. We see them Sunday after Sunday running at our feet, nearly tripping us as they do banging into us, and we love them and we care about them. So to lose one of our little ones is to lose a part of us, not simply the sorrow that we share with the parents and with the grandparents and with the great-grandmother, but we've lost a part of ourselves here today, at least that's how I feel about it.

So the question "who" helps remind us that the best of men cannot answer, give us any help to the questions and the throb of our heart at a time like this. Human wisdom comes up empty when your arms are empty and bereft of a little one, but when we ask the question "who" and it turns our focus to our Lord Jesus Christ, then we have come to the fountain where we can drink from. When we come to Christ, we find the God of all comfort ready to address us, ready to speak to and address and answer the deepest questions of our heart. And we may not find the answer to the question "why," God doesn't answer the question "why" all the time and certainly not so quickly as we are gathering here today, but what God does is something better. What God does is he answers the man, he answers the woman, he answers the grieving heart at a level that nothing else can, and that's what we want to do here this evening.

God answers the man. He didn't answer Job's question "why" but he answered Job. He addressed the man at the most significant level, and here with the benefit of New Testament revelation, we want to take an effort to frame some thoughts here this evening. I don't expect this to go very long but, then, I've said that many times in the past and have never delivered when I did. Let's ask this first question. I'm going to ask and answer five

questions. Who will sympathize with us in our sorrow? Who will sympathize with us in our sorrow? The answer to that question is supremely our Lord Jesus Christ.

Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 4. In verse 14 we read,

14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Who will sympathize in our sorrow? Jesus Christ will. Jesus Christ shares our flesh. Jesus Christ has shared our pain. Jesus Christ has stood and wept at the grave of his friend, Lazarus. So he knows by direct personal experience, it was part of the reason of the Incarnation, was to know by direct personal human experience the nature of the lot of his people. And in light of that, we can look to Scripture, we can look to Christ and we can know that he sees, he knows, he cares. It's the nature of our gracious Lord that he is like that. What a wonderful Savior he is.

So we have that in mind. We turn also at this time of death to Hebrews 2:14. Turn back a couple of chapters, if you will. We see again that he has entered into our condition and he has shared in it with us. Hebrews 2:14,

14 Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. 16 For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham. 17 Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. 18 For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

You know, it's so natural in times like this for us to wonder. Job in the midst of his suffering said, "Have I sinned? Is that the explanation of the sorrow and the grief that I am going through of this horrible wave of sorrow?" And the answer to that question in Job's case was no. He was a righteous and a blameless man. But beloved, there is a streak going all the way back to the Garden of Eden in us, in our humanity, in our connection with Adam, in which we tend to question God. We tend to doubt him. We doubt his goodness. And Eve was tempted by Satan and brought into the question in thinking that God was somehow being unfair, was somehow withholding something from her, and somewhere in her heart and spirit said, "I'll show him," and she bit of the fruit. And ever since then, our human race has been plunged into this wrong and mistaken idea that God is out to get us; that God is out to punish us; that if something bad happens, God must be

inflicting something upon us in order to teach us a lesson. Well, it's very difficult to get that out of your spiritual blood system, but what I want you to see, especially for those of us that are in Christ here this evening, is that what Scripture describes as a significant part of the purpose of the Incarnation of our Lord is that he might be shown to be one who has shared with us and therefore sympathizes; that therefore he is one who is faithful; that therefore he is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted; that he might free those who through fear of death are subject to slavery all their lives. Do you see it, beloved? Do you see how Scripture points to the Incarnation of our Lord and presents him to us as his people as one of unbounding sympathy, care, concern, love and mercy for help in time of need?

Who will sympathize in our sorrow? There is supremely one and that is our Lord Jesus Christ. So we can come to him in our sorrow knowing that he receives us well; that he receives us in mercy; he receives us in sympathy. Not to rebuke, not to chastise, but to come as one who sees our tears, measures them and keeps them in his bottle, so to speak, as the Psalms say, as one who cares for us in our time of sorrow. He sympathizes and we can trust him and we can go to him.

There's a second question that occurs to me; all of these questions somewhat interrelated, of course. But we ask this question: who will love us in our sorrow? Who will love us in our sorrow? The answer to that question again supremely is our Lord Jesus Christ. Who will love us in our sorrow? It's our Lord Jesus, our wonderful Savior, a wonderful Savior as Jesus my Lord, a wonderful Savior to me.

Look over at the book of Romans 5, if you will. Scripture lays these things out for us in ways that are so compelling, so clear, so crucial to us, and it is to these things that we flee in our time of distress. Romans 5, beginning in verse 6 says,

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

This passage, of course, reminding us of the Lord's substitutionary death on behalf of his people; that he went to the cross in order to bear our sins, to turn away the wrath of God from us that we might be forgiven and fully reconciled to a holy God; brought into union with his Son to have the hope of eternal life; to have his righteousness credited to our account; to have the Spirit placed within us as a pledge of our future inheritance. All this bound up in the wonderful work of our Lord at the cross. Well, beloved, don't miss something really critical in the passage. Paul is making a great great point here that it was not in our strength that Christ died for us, it was not in our godliness that Christ died for us, it was not after we had proven ourselves righteous that Christ died for us. No, quite to the contrary. Scripture tells us that he died for us while we were weak. That he died for us while we were ungodly. That he loved us while we were yet sinners. Scripture tells us he

saves everyone who comes to him in humble faith, and that his blood cleanses us from all of our sin, 1 John 1:7.

Now beloved, think with Scripture. Think along with me as I try in my meager way to unfold these things for you here today. Scripture uses this kind of logic elsewhere. It's compelling. It's conclusive. It is a refuge, a fortress into which we can run and know that we are safe and kept. Beloved, if he loved us in our sin, will he surely not love us in our sorrow? If he loved us while we were ungodly, now that we belong to him will he not love us more? Would he withdraw, he who extended his love in our sin and weakness and ungodliness in order to secure our salvation, having secured our salvation, will we not know that love even more as his people? Will we not know it even more in our sorrow? Will we not know it even more as we experience the weakness that is intrinsic to this life?

Oh beloved, don't you see? When we ask the question "who," we say, "Who will love us in our sorrow," we run, as it were, to the cross of Jesus Christ. We see him, as it were, dying for us. When I say "as it were, seeing him," I'm just talking metaphorically as we remember these things and recall what he did on our behalf. Isn't it obvious that if he loved us while we were sinners, that his love will be even more faithful to us now that we belong to him? Now that he has claimed us as his own sheep? Now that he has adopted us into his family? Isn't it obvious that his love is above us, below us, around us, ahead of us, and behind us? At every point we are enveloped in this great love of our Lord Jesus Christ? It could be no other way. So we ask the question, "Who will love us in our sorrow? Who will love us with a perfect love? Is there such a love to be had?" And the answer is yes. We find it in our Lord Jesus Christ. We find it when we approach him by faith.

So we believe in his love, we trust in his love, we know that his love is established for all time and that his love is immutable, it is unchanging. So the fact that a human circumstance has come that has broken our heart is not an indication that his love has been withdrawn, that it has changed or that somehow his disposition of grace and love to us has been altered. His love is steadfast, it is sure, it is trustworthy, and at a time like this, we can most run and flee to that love and find our hope, find our comfort, find that which answers the cry of our heart. Who will sympathize in our sorrow? Jesus Christ. Who will love us in our sorrow? Jesus Christ.

You know, friends, it would be fitting for me to say at this point, if you think about it, the X number of hundred of people that somehow in one manner or another identify with our church, that Greyson Lee Cook was one of the youngest, younger than almost, I'd say younger than 95% of the people that's in this room, maybe 98%. Do you see, beloved, those of you that aren't in Christ, do you see why the Gospel is urgent? Do you see why we plead with you time and time and time again to put your faith in Christ, not to presume on tomorrow? You young people, do I need to call you out by name to have you hear me this time? Do I have to do that in order to press it upon you? We don't know our days. We don't know our days. If we could say goodbye to a 13 month old infant toddler, don't you see that we could say goodbye to you tomorrow just as easily? That there is

nothing about time that is promised to us? Do you see why the Gospel is urgent and why this testimony of Romans 5 that Christ died for the ungodly, Christ died for sinners just like you, cries out for you to respond to him in repentance and faith? Do you see it?

He'll love us in our sorrow. He calls you to come. Well, thirdly, let me ask another question. Like I said, I realize these are overlapping matters but that's how it came out tonight. Thirdly: who can help us in our sorrow? Who can help us in our sorrow? And we've all had friends like this who feel very sympathetic with us as we are going through a trial but there is really nothing that they can do to help us. You know, we appreciate the sympathy, we appreciate the expressions of support that our friends and loved ones and fellow believers give to us, but there are limits to that. You know, they are not able to necessarily actually help in a way that alters the situation for us. You know what I mean as I say that. So simply having said that Jesus can sympathize, that he does sympathize, and that he does love us in our sorrows is wonderful to know but it's even more wonderful to know that there is something more when we answer the question who can help us in our sorrow.

Turn over to the Gospel of John 16. Who can help us in our sorrow? Jesus Christ can. He said in John 16:33,

33 These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace.
In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.

Notice how he points to himself in this passage. Notice how he says "in me; I have overcome the world; I have spoken to you." This would be sheer lunacy for anyone else to say but Christ can say these words because they are true, because he is the way, the truth and the life. Christ has the authority not only to say these things, he has the authority and the power to deliver upon them. And one of the things that we see in this passage is that sorrows and trials are inevitable. They are, in a sense, promised to us, aren't they? He said in the world you have tribulation. It is a reality of life. But do you see as we look at the totality of Christ and at the totality of what he says just in this verse, that as he lays out these obstacles before us, he declares that he himself has overcome them? That he has the power to overcome them? And not only does he have the power, he has proven it. He has manifested it. He has demonstrated it, especially on this side of the cross.

Beloved, again I ask it in the form of a question for you: is it not true that Christ himself entered into death? Isn't it true that he died and that he was buried? In one sense, there is the ultimate victory for the prince of darkness. There is the ultimate victory for this fallen world. Death claims us and we in our human strength are powerless to overcome it, but think about our Lord Jesus Christ. He has overcome it. He did enter into death and what did he do but come out on the other side. Come out of the tomb. Death no longer has hold on him and he who entered death and came out safe on the other side is the one who is able to help us in our time of sorrow. He who sympathizes, he who loves us, is the one who is raised from the dead. Surely then, surely this one who sympathizes, surely this one

who loves us, surely with that manifest power, will use it on our behalf to help us. That's why he calls us to look to him. "I have overcome the world," he says and the point of that is that as we look to him, we ourselves become overcomers. Those of us that are in Christ are identified with his death, burial and resurrection in a way that we share in the victory.

1 John 5, I'm reminded of. 1 John 5:4 says,

4 ... whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.

Our faith in Christ has joined us with Christ in a way that the outcome is sure. So as we ask the question who, who can help us in sorrow, we find once again that the answer supremely is our Lord Jesus Christ. Proven ability, manifest power shown in the empty tomb, that this Christ is able to help us even when we see no possibility of help for ourselves. Jesus Christ, once again, answers the question and brings us into that realm that we most need in our deepest darkest hours: sympathy and love and help.

He's a wonderful Savior but there's more. There's another question that we can ask and answer at a time like this: who offers future hope in our sorrow? Who offers hope in our sorrow? In other words, who offers us a certain expectation of better days ahead? Who offers us hope of joy in the midst of the deepest grief? Jesus Christ does.

Go back to the Gospel of John 14. The first 3 verses say this,

1 Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. 3 If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.

Jesus says that there is a day still coming, future to us as we stand here today, there is a day still coming when he will return to earth. There is a day still coming when he will uniquely receive us to himself and that in some great and glorious way, he will usher us into that place, into that locality where he dwells, and we will be with him forever. And as we were saying I believe this past Sunday, leaving the sorrows of this world behind and entering into the rest and the glory and the peace and the perfection of presence that he has prepared for us. Beloved, Jesus Christ is so great and he is so good and he is so gracious, so merciful, loving and kind, and his work in us now and his work for us now, in sympathy, in love and in help, is just a down payment on something far greater to come. Christ as we come to him, we find not only a present dimension to his assistance to us, but we find that he has untold riches to pour upon us that will be completely disproportionate to the light and momentary affliction that we feel here in this life.

You know, at the risk of repeating myself, if any mere human being, friend, stranger, came up to us in the midst of our heartaches and said, "Don't let your heart be troubled," we might think them a madman, we might react rather violently against that, "Who are

you to talk to me like that? You don't understand. You don't know the pain. How can you trivialize it like that with your easy cheap words? You Job's comforters, depart from me," you might well say. Oh, I've wanted to say it in the past. The older I get the more likely I am to say it in the right context. But not with Jesus Christ. Not with Jesus Christ. When this one of great power, of great love and great sympathy, proven beyond all doubt, residing in our hearts by faith, when he comes and says, "Let not your heart be troubled for I have gone to prepare a place for you and I'm going to come back and I'm going to come back and I'm going to get you. I'm going to receive you so that you would see me in my glory and that you would know the fullness of the greatness of my being, and I'll share it all freely with you." He said, "Father, I pray that they would see me in my glory," in John 17. Well, when Christ speaks those words to us, we have something that we can rely on, that we can find rest in, that we can enter into and say, "That satisfies my heart," because these are no mere empty words that come from him, these are the words of assured and certain promise that belong to everyone who knows him that this will be our final destination. Our final destination ends up with him in such a great way that it allows us to look over the mountain of current sorrow. We see beyond the mountain of current sorrow to see the vast plain of the goodness of God spread out before us in a way that goes to an infinite horizon full of beauty and provision.

For a man to tell us, "Let not your heart be troubled," we'd think him a madman. From Jesus Christ, we say, "These are the certain words of the eternal Son of God. This is no figment of my imagination. This is not pie-in-the-sky. This is not an illusory promise that is just going to disappoint me like everything else in this life has eventually disappointed me." No, in Christ we have the one who will never disappoint us and he has said, "Let not your heart be troubled, I'm going to prepare a place for you." And this one who loves us and sympathizes with us and has power, is able to deliver on that promise and, beloved, we know based on the sure testimony of his own word that he will deliver for us in the end. And as I have pointed out to you again and again and again, Scripture says, "He who believes in him will not be disappointed."

So we have a certain future hope but we have to live in the day, don't we? We are still left with gaping holes in our hearts for the time being and what do we do with that? Well, that brings us to our fifth and final question: who promises present rest in our sorrow? Who promises present rest in our sorrow? Who can help us right now because the urgency of the moment calls for help right now. Not simply in the future, although that is a comfort and a strength and a help, but where do we find help in the present, in the now, in the moment of the crushing loss? You know the answer by now, don't you? The same answer to five different questions. Jesus Christ.

Matthew 11. Turn there with me, won't you? Matthew 11. Again we see the infinite depths of the grace and the love and the mercy and the sympathy of our Lord Jesus. Out with this notion that our God is somehow stingy and difficult to please. Out with this notion that somehow we have to earn his favor. Out in a time of sorrow with the sense that we somehow have to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps before he will receive us in kindness and in sympathy. No. No, it's not like that. It's not like that. It's not like that. In those times of profound loss where all that we can manage are heaving sobs of

disconsolation and in between breaths, barely able to cry out, "God, help me," we find that our God at a time like that hears that cry and receives it well. Hears that cry and receives it in grace. Hears that cry and willingly receives, gladly receives the one who made it.

Matthew 11:28, Jesus says,

28 "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Jesus tells us no one knows his own heart like Christ does and Jesus tells us that his heart is gentle, his heart is kind, his heart is humble. It's not severe. It does not chastise us in our difficulties. He receives us well and he invites all who would hear, he invites all to come. Is your heart heavy? Is your heart laden down in sorrow? He says, "Come to me and I'll give you rest." There is an open, unqualified, unconditional invitation to every broken heart to come to Christ and find in him rest and peace and comfort and help.

Beloved, wouldn't it be obvious that this Christ who fashioned our hearts, who formed us in our mother's womb, whose providential direction has appointed our circumstances and brought us into them, this one who has shared our flesh, who himself has wept not only at the tomb of Lazarus but wept over Jerusalem. We have a Savior who knows what tears are like because they have run down his own cheeks. His own tears have wet his own skin. Beloved, when we go to him in our tears, we find him gentle, sympathetic, humble and ready to receive us. And because he is who he is, because he has done what he has done, because he knows us so well, beloved, don't you think, don't you think that as we go to this one, that he knows how to give us the rest that we need and when to supply the mercy at just exactly the right time?

You see, beloved, even at a time like this as we look at this life and career and death and resurrection and ascension of our Lord, what we see is this: is that his tender promises to us in our sorrow can be trusted. We can give to him the fullness of our heart with all of its sin, with all of its weakness, with all of its questions, all of its uncertainties, in the weakness of faith offering up even the doubts the plague us, and know that he sees, that he cares, that he understands and he will receive us well. It's why he came. He didn't come, in one sense, for his sake, he came for our sake. He came to save us. He came to help us. He came because he loves us and his love is perfectly consistent with the love of the Father who sent him. Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, the Father loved us and sent his Son into the world, and now the Spirit of love indwells us as well. There is a Triune God surrounding and enveloping us in grace and love who is good to his people.

So tonight here in the room, to you over the live stream, Christ says to all who will hear, to the bruised and broken Christian he says, "Come to me and I will give you rest." To the sinner outside looking in, Christ says the same thing, he says, "Come to me and I will

give you rest." And so by faith, we encourage you one and all to believe in him. By faith, to trust him. By faith, to receive him. By faith, to rest in him.

So as I see it, the question that helps us is not why do these things happen but rather blessed be his name, blessed be the name of the Lord, the question instead is: who is my friend when they do?

Let's bow together in prayer.

O Christ, Christ who sympathizes, Christ who loves us, Christ who helps us, Christ our hope, Christ our rest, by faith we trust you and look to you and confess with your word that you are sufficient even for such mournful times and, therefore, we look to you and to you alone. Be the Good Shepherd to your people, the Shepherd who knows the sheep so intimately; who loves the sheep and laid his life down for them; who is ever concerned to move the sheep from field to field to find the food and water they need; who causes us to lie down in green pastures; who prepares for us a table in the presence of our enemies so that in light of who you are, our dear Lord, we can say, "Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." So Father, we ask you to help us. We ask for a special measure of grace upon all of the family affected by the loss of Greyson Lee Cook. We pray for your great comfort upon them, your help, your mercy, that you would bring good out of this, that you would somehow sanctify to the good of their souls the depth of this awful affliction. Help us as we come around them. Help us with one another that we might comfort one another with these good words from your word, which is good, which is true, which is trustworthy. We pray these things in the name of Christ. Amen.

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