

What Do We Do When Our Plans Fall Through?

5) When We Feel Isolated and Alone

John 14:15-21 • 2020-05-17 • Easter Series



Loneliness is an awfully hard thing to face. Yes, some people can handle it for a time and may even enjoy some quiet time alone. Others might even find it hard to handle crowds. Perhaps you are even be one of those people doesn't mind being alone for at least limited periods of time. But there's hardly anyone who likes to remain totally alone. There's a reason why malls, bars, and restaurants are being filled as stay-at-home directives subside in this pandemic. And I don't think it's just because people don't know how to eat or drink at home. They are going out and about to where the crowds are because people don't like to feel isolated and alone. When the pandemic first started, and people first started to quarantine messages read, "Stay home and stay safe." Now more often there are messages on the radio and commercials which that are adding, "Stay safe... and stay sane." Loneliness and isolation can take more than an emotional toll on people. It can take a toll on our mental and spiritual health. Today we continue our series looking at what happens when our plans fall through. And we see God's ultimate answer to the times we feel isolated and alone. God's plan for us includes forever shattering loneliness.

There's a reason for all the feeling of loneliness in this world. It is caused by something even bigger than world-wide disease. And God isn't be the one to blame. It's what happened when the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, ran from God. They ran because they felt guilt. Their feelings of guilt made them turn against one another too. The selfish and rebellious hearts of the first two people brought loneliness into this world. Every human heart born after them is born to selfishness and a loveless mindset. Couples argue and separate. Children and parents fight and lose the connection of love. This world is divided. After all, when you get angry or upset at someone, do you want to be close to them? Or do you want to shut them out of your presence and give them the cold shoulder? We call it sin. It ruins every plan and purpose we make. It divides us from each other. Whether it is our fault or someone else's it causes isolation from our neighbors, or family, and our friends.

And our guilty condition does more than separate us from other people. Just as it caused Adam and Eve to run and hide from God it separates us from him too. Our love for God grows cold and we face the worse kind of separation: isolation from our Creator. And why should God ever want to show us his face or spend time with anyone in this world? Don't misunderstand, not everyone's loneliness is because of some specific sin. But all of us have guilt before God which brings us a curse and separation from our holy God. Isaiah the prophet spoke of this separation "your guilt has separated you from your God, and your sins have hidden God's face from you." (Isaiah 59) Even the person who has a huge fan base, countless friends, and is surrounded by people is really isolated and alone if they are separated from their God.

The isolation and loneliness we experience now is only a small foreshadow of death and separation from God's presence forever in hell. Our plight because of sin is death and a terrible condition of isolation and loneliness. And there's no consolation in knowing that the path that leads to hell is broad and many are on it. There's no person you could ever think of who could bring comfort when shut out from the presence of God.

In John chapter we hear of God's plan for dealing with our problem of loneliness and isolation. Jesus no doubt sees the troubled look on his disciples' faces as they learn that he is going to be leaving them. He assures them that they won't be alone. His plan is to "prepare a place so that you may be where I am." As those who trust in God, we know that our loneliness cannot last. We will be with Jesus forever in our Father's house. We saw that truth last week.

But what about now? It is a great comfort to know that there is a place for us to be with God. But we need further assurance right now that we are not alone and will never be alone. So, Jesus tells us that the loveless separation between us and our God has ended. It is already over. That's the comforting truth we focus on today.

In love Jesus came to be with us and to take away the separation brought about by this world's selfish guilt. Jesus the Son of God came to face the loneliness and isolation that we deserved. He faced it like no other ever could. I'm not just talking about the way that he asked three of his closest friends to stay with him and pray but only found they were too tired to stay awake with him. And I'm not talking about the way that his friends betrayed and deserted him and fled into the dark night and left him alone with his enemies. I'm talking about the way he hung on the cross as the world turned dark. His Father turned his face away so that Jesus cried out in total isolation, "Father, why have you forsaken me?" When you feel alone try to imagine that level of loneliness. And then thank God that you will never have to. Jesus, the Son of God faced it for you.

And by doing so he shattered loneliness forever. Selfishness and rebellion brought loneliness and death into the world. God's Son came to bring selfless sacrifice and love to do away with loneliness and death. His love and sacrifice forever

ended the division of sin and death. At the moment of Jesus' death, the temple curtain was torn in two. God was indicating that the separation between himself and sinners was ended. Jesus forever did away with the division brought by sin and death by laying down his life in love. And by his resurrection we know that we will enjoy what he has promised.

The night before his death Jesus promised his disciples who trust in him that they are never going to be alone. "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Counselor, the Spirit of truth who will remain with you forever." The Holy Spirit is dwelling within you. And he will remain with you forever. The isolation and separation are now over. God is present with you and takes on the title "Counselor." This is a word for someone who calls out in aid of another. It is also sometimes translated as "Advocate." The Holy Spirit comes to every believer to offer comfort and aid. He opens our selfish hearts and minds to see the love of Christ. He leads us to trust in him and his promises. And he works in us the love of Christ for new life. We are not alone. We will never be alone. The words of Psalm 46 ring true for all God's Church, all believers "The Mighty Lord is with us!"

Jesus says that the world cannot receive the Counselor or know him. In unbelief the world has rejected the gift of Jesus and his Holy Spirit. But Jesus says to those who believe, "You know him, and he remains with you."

But God's plan doesn't end there. The Counselor, the Holy Spirit keeps us in faith so that we will see the fulfillment of God's plan for us. Isolation and loneliness will be shattered with he destroys death forever. Jesus says, "in a little while the world will see me no longer, but you will see me." He is speaking of his resurrection to life. He was planning to leave, but not to remain in death. Not even death can separate us from our God anymore. "Because I live" Jesus says, "You also will live." As sure as Jesus rose and left his grave, we too will come out of the darkness of our graves. Our bodies will be restored from the dust and we will be alive with Jesus.

And can you picture what will happen then? Jesus describes us sharing in the closeness that is now shared within the Trinity. We will be the very opposite of isolated and alone. We will experience harmony like none other. "In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you."

Right now, our plans to be together or to enjoy someone's company can fall through. Sin can come along and destroy the love and closeness that we crave. Sin divides and isolates us. And death causes a separation we are unable to handle. But what happens when our plans fall through? We need to look to God's plans. And his plan is to forever destroy the curse of sin and the sting of death. His plan is to send us his Holy Spirit so that we remain in faith and know we are never alone. His plan is to show that the temple curtain was torn, the separation has ended, and because he lives, we too will live.

Right now, there are places opening after a time of isolation due to the pandemic. I'm told that many businesses are so overwhelmed by the response they can't handle the influx of people. On the one hand that's exciting. On the other hand, there is the constant fear that disease can continue to spread, and the isolation will return. How much better won't it be when the separation is forever ended because things like disease, death, and the like are forever gone and in their place is only health, love, and life? And how much greater the crowd will be which is described as a number beyond count? And imagine our joy after a life of feeling so much separation to walk in the presence of our Triune God!

People are far happier when they know they are not alone. Studies have shown that people are happier at places where they feel there are many other people. That's why restaurants will often play music to kill any silence. It's why many sitcoms on TV have a laugh track to make it feel like others are watching with you and laughing along. There's even talk of NFL games this fall playing in empty stadiums with the sound of crowds artificially added to the games. We like to know that others are present and that we are not isolated and alone. Jesus says that although the world can't see or receive him, the Holy Spirit is with us and will remain with us forever. And he says that although we cannot see him now, we will rise from the silence of the grave and be with him forever. God's plan is to forever bring joy by forever destroying the separation brought about by sin. We have his presence and his Spirit right now. We will stand in the presence of our Triune God and enjoy companionship, love, and life forever. Because of his great plan loneliness is shattered and gone. Life and joy take its place.