

Reading: John 14:1-14

Theme: The cure for a troubled ‘heart’.

Experts tell us that many people of all ages are being affected by stress, both physically and psychologically, because of the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown. Many have troubled hearts and minds irrespective of their age, background or social standing and are not immune from experiencing such trouble of heart and mind. A troubled heart and mind can spring up from both inward and outward causes and their interactions of our bodies, minds, hearts, as well as from that which we love and or that which we fear. Our journey through life would usually have its ups and downs, but this current Covid-19 crisis has appeared to amplify that in the lives of so many.

Even if we are Christians, we may go through many experiences we would not want, be worried over and even fear things at this time. This can be made worse by our own imaginations and ‘what ifs’. We can fear that the darkness we are in or going into, will never end and there will be no joy or sunshine in our lives again. How then are we, even if we are Christians, to face such troubles of heart and sorrows that come upon us in our lives?

Thankfully God’s word teaches us much – to help us in, as well as prepare and equip us for times of troubles and there is no better place to look than in John 14, for its main theme and thought is **comfort and encouragement**. We see this immediately in v1, but this flows throughout the chapter and is emphasised and amplified as we go further on into the chapter. This is a chapter for life and encouragement in these testing days, any days - even though its opening verses are often read at funerals, but it is to encourage us in living life as those who know God in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus just does not say v1 and leave it there, but then gives to those

who are Christians 7 reasons why that is true – I’ll quickly highlight them:

- A. For Christians heaven is secure (v2-3).
- B. In Christ there is a certain way to heaven (v4-11).
- C. Christ’s work will not stop after His departure (v12-14).
- D. The Spirit’s presence is promised, even though Christ is absent (v15-17).
- E. Christ will come back to His own (v18-24).
- F. The Holy Spirit will teach that which is lacking in the disciples understanding (v25-26).
- G. We are left the legacy of Jesus’ peace even in His absence (v27).

What a passage to read, to look at and to note all it has in it; to realise it is the Lord Jesus’ own teaching of encouragement and comfort! Most symphonies have overtures – so does this passage and it is here in v1. Let’s begin to see something of the sweet comforts and encouragements which are distilled and condensed into this precious first verse. See 3 things:

1. The Timing of This Precious Statement.

Being the first verse of chapter 14, its timing seems so easy. It follows on from the previous chapter! Yet remember that Jesus didn’t speak in chapters and verses. The Bible’s text was divided up for convenience at a later time (*1227 - for its chapters & 1521 - for verses - with sometimes inappropriate divisions.*) This verse is part of Jesus’ ongoing teaching in the upper room.

Obviously what Jesus had done and said earlier that evening would have affected, shaken, rocked and confused the disciples - the washing of their feet, its example; news of a betrayer among them and Jesus’ departure; of Peter denying Him. Yet that is not our focus! I want us to consider the timing of these words from

the view of the Lord Jesus. He knew His hour to depart the world was come, that the cross was accelerating towards Him with all its shame and awful suffering, He had been troubled in heart only a few days earlier (12:27) and was troubled in spirit even a few moments earlier (13:21). The Lord Jesus knew all that, yet at that time, when it would have been most appropriate for His followers to try and give Him emotional and spiritual support, yet it was He, the Lord Jesus, who continued to care for and love them, so He gives **them** comfort and encouragement by His words.

He knew what He was going into - all the pain of His death by crucifixion, of suffering God's wrath and damnation in His own body there on the cross in the place of sinners, but the disciples were blissfully unaware of that! They, at that time, feared an unknown future and what it would hold without Him. To them, Jesus' going away looked like a catastrophe and so here the Lord Jesus brings words of timely comfort and encouragement for them, but also, He gives comfort and encouragement to us now in our lives and situations.

Our lives may be affected by fear, confusion and panic as we face the future with a multitude of fears and worries, but the Lord Jesus wants us to hear His voice, His assurances so that **our** hearts will not be troubled. The timing of Jesus in bringing such comfort and encouragement there in the upper room was, as we would expect, spot on, exactly right. Yet He is always spot on and exactly right in bringing **us** comfort and encouragement in our lives and situations. The words of comfort always come to us at the right time, but we may not always realise such, hear or understand such, but that is always the case of our Saviour's loving wise care of us who are His children. Now see:

2. The Poison Identified.

A troubled heart can be caused by the poisonous effect of fears, anxieties of all kinds, aggravated by various susceptibilities in our personal make-up - our constitution, our minds, our hearts, by our loves and fears, by circumstances in and around us. The particular poison which caused such in Jesus' close disciples and causes such in us, is that of fear for the future - which is a really drastic, painful and effective poison in the lives of so many.

The disciples could have been worried and concerned by the things they'd heard that night. They could wonder how they would cope, how they would go on, or wonder about their futures. The future could have looked so bleak, dark, uncertain and terrifying, but added to that, they would be on their own, alone and Jesus would not be with them.

Perhaps someone listening can identify with the effects of this poison in their lives. You know the symptoms all too well, may even know its cause - the fear of the future and its dreaded aftertaste of 'the what ifs'. Some of you listening may only have had a nodding acquaintance with such, then be glad. We are to understand that we are all individuals and therefore different. Yes, we may even be Christians, but there is much evidence to show that although we are new creatures in Christ, we are still individuals with different real physical and emotional constitutions, temperaments and characteristics. John was John, Peter was Peter etc. thankfully you are not me, nor me you!

As such, this poison of fear of the future will affect us all differently. The apostle John and Timothy seem to be timid men, shy even. Peter has a totally different temperament - usually opening his mouth and acting with no thought of the consequences! The fear of the future will affect us personally in

different ways as we consider our own futures, that of our family and friends, as well as the future of God's work here or elsewhere.

If we are a Christian, then we will be concerned for our own Christian life and development and we could be fearful - *"I will never be like so-and-so... I will never be able to do such-and-such... I would not be able to stand if that temptation came..."* So, we fear the future, that we may let down our Saviour, the church and not be as people want us to be. We worry, get concerned, fear and we can spiral downward with fears and worries as the toxin of 'what ifs' affect our lives more and more.

Sadly, such poison leads to trouble of heart, paralysis of present usefulness, service and growth. We see only our fears, doubts, uncertainties and we cannot do anything in the present as we become troubled for the future. We are to realise the existence of this poison, to identify it and see past the many confusing symptoms it produces, to identify what is the cause of such and realise it can be treated. There's no point treating pain without sorting out what is causing it e.g. appendicitis. With the poison identified we see:

3. The Antidote Given.

Various poisons often have specific antidotes that must be given and be given quickly to the individual to save their lives. This is what Jesus does here with the disciples as He knew the fear of the future poison was in them and would destroy them. He tells them straightaway not to be troubled in heart. This is not a sentimental phrase or trite saying. There are things we are to be rightly concerned over, to think about concerning the future, but we are not to have over-anxious, paralysing thoughts and fears for such. There is rightful thought and planning, but also a paralysing, all-consuming worrying of thought and trouble of heart. It is not

wrong to be concerned for the future, but it is not to cripple our life now, to paralyse us and leave us consumed with fear and worry for the future. We are not to be in the grip of a spirit of fear, to let its poison infect and inflame our whole being.

The antidote Jesus sets before His disciples, all since and us now, is faith and trust. Not a blind senseless faith, but an informed, growing, intelligent faith in God and the Lord Jesus. We are to think biblically and apply such to our lives, present situations and future situations. Here were the disciples and their hearts were troubled with many things and Jesus wisely and lovingly tells them not to have troubled hearts. The reason He gives them, a sound and solid reason and not a vague sentimental notion, was that they were to *“Trust in God, trust also in me”* (NIV); *“ye believe in God, believe also in me”* (AV)

The word used here in the Greek for ‘believe’ or ‘trust’ can be taken as either one of two tenses, each with a slightly different emphasis: one means that you are to continue to believe, keep on believing; the other is a command - you are to believe. Is Jesus saying *“Don’t let your hearts be troubled, because you keep believing in God and me.”* Or *“Don’t let your hearts be troubled, believe in God and in me!”* – commanding a greater, continuing trust and belief? Scholars and great minds don’t help on this point - one Greek expert calls this *“a deliberate ambiguity”*. (F W Grinrich quoted by William Hendriksen)

Whichever way we understand or translate it, it remains that continuing, continual faith, trusting God and the Lord Jesus is that which counteracts the poison’s paralysing effect of the fear of the future. Whether it is by our continuing trust and faith or the need to come to trust and faith in God and the Lord Jesus. The surest antidote for troubled hearts, for situations now and the future is

faith in the Lord Jesus. We are to believe more thoroughly, trust more entirely, rest more unreservedly, lay hold more firmly, lean back upon Him more completely. This is the prescription the Saviour gives for us all.

We are to remember there are degrees, stages, different levels in faith. The weakest faith in Christ is enough to save us for all eternity and it is not to be despised or overlooked, for it is wonderful and changes our eternal destiny and state. Yet, as God spares us, we are to grow, mature and develop in our faith. We are to have an ongoing, developing faith in the Lord Jesus as this will give us a greater assurance, comfort and confidence for when the future will try to intimidate and bully us, as the storms of life threaten and batter us.

It is an intelligent, informed faith in God and in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek puts “*also in me*” next to God - literally reading “*you believe in God, also in me you believe*”. We are to trust, believe in the divine Saviour, the Saviour of history, the Saviour the Bible reveals to us. If that’s the case, then what is He like? What are His principles of action? We find these out in the Bible - which is His word and we are to read, learn and apply what He says.

What is He going to do with our lives in the future? We are not told that, yet while we do not know what the future hold, but we know Who holds the future and trust Him - for He knows and His word shows us that He can be trusted with our futures as His dealings with us in the past has proved. So, we are not to let our hearts be troubled for our God and Saviour has not changed. In every change He faithful will remain and He will guide us, care for us, provide for us in the future as He has done in the past. He is not powerless in the light of Covid-19 and all the fears that it

brings, or any situation we fear and find ourselves or families in concerning our health, finances etc.

Remember the same Lord who spoke so lovingly, so unselfishly to His troubled 11 disciples there in the upper room, speaks into our situation today. His words are still true for us all and are still the antidote for our fear of our future, all it may bring and our troubled hearts. The question is are we going to listen? Will we apply His teaching and words to our own lives? It is not just “*nice words*” with no reality, but these words have been proved true by the people of God in far worse situations than we are in.

What an overture to listen to at this point and begin to pick up on the themes of comfort and encouragement that the Lord Jesus gives, which we will develop and look at in future weeks. My prayer and desire are that all of us would know such comfort and encouragement in whatever situations we are in at this moment, or in that which we are fearing to face with an uncertain future. If we are a Christian then our futures are taken care of because it is in the safe, caring, loving and wise hands of the Lord Jesus and He works all things together for good, to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose i.e. you and me if we are Christians. I pray we would all know the comfort and encouragement that the Saviour gives us and we continue to drawdown His love, care, joy, comfort and encouragement as we go on in our lives into whatever situations we find ourselves.