



Looking Inwards (15 mins)
Caring For Each Other

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins)
Concern For Others

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

emmanuelchurchbillericay

P 01277 632120

E emmanueloffice@billericaychurches.org

W www.emmanuel-church.info

T @EmmanuelCM12



The Last Words Of Jesus
HG122: The Way, The Truth And The Life

John 14:1-14

Home Group Study Notes

8 May 2016 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION BEFORE THE MEETING!

Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

What were your childhood images of heaven? Have they changed much over the years? What, or who, would you want to see in heaven?



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



The Last Words Of Jesus HG122: The Way, The Truth And The Life

John 14:1-14

Home Group Sermon Notes

8 May 2016 - Revd Paul A. Carr

Introduction

Jesus' words in 14:1; '*Do not let your hearts be troubled*' is a direct answer to Peter's question at the end of 13. And that's because Peter and the others disciples, needed to trust in God after all Jesus had told them about being betrayed. *Trust in God, trust also in me.* It's interesting, isn't it, to note that Jesus' response to the troubled hearts of the disciples in the Upper Room is to talk to them about heaven. Jesus went onto say, vs2: *In my Father's house are many rooms ... I am going there to prepare a place for you ...* For many of us, the hope of heaven is what keeps our faith alive isn't it? It's very interesting what Jesus has to say about heaven in these verses:

Heaven is a *real* place

I always get slightly upset when I see heaven portrayed as a place where people float around on clouds, dressed in white robes playing harps or, sitting around playing chess and eating Philadelphia cheese sandwiches! Jesus says: 'heaven is a real place, it is my Father's house.' It's difficult, in the 'fast food' 'instant access' world in which we live today, a world, which is concerned with the here and now, to focus on a heavenly reality. But I think we need to have a perspective on heaven if we are to get through the challenges and the problems of Christian living here on earth. Jesus says, 'Here is a house, here is a home, here is a reality, here is a place I am familiar with. How? Because it is my Father's house.' But Jesus says there is more: '*In my Father's house are many rooms*' (14:2).

So what does Jesus mean when he says that his Father's house has many rooms? He is saying to the disciples who are troubled, who are wondering what the future holds for them: 'Look, I want to tell you that your future is heaven. Your future is with me in my Father's house. I want you to know there is room for all of you. Peter, even though you are going to disown me; there is room for you. The rest of you, troubled and distressed, confused and bewildered, there is room for you too, for in my Father's house are many rooms.' '*If it were not so, I would have told you*' (14:2). 'If I wasn't going back to the Father, with whom I spent eternity before, would I not have told you? I am going there to prepare a place for you to come too.

Heaven is a *prepared* place

'*I am going there to prepare a place for you*' (14:2c). This is a promise, not to all and sundry, but to the disciples of Jesus, and exclusively to them - remember what I said a couple of weeks ago about being a follower of Jesus or a believer? Nobody drifts into heaven. Heaven is a prepared place for those who have become disciples of Jesus. God, in his mercy, offers the possibility of sharing eternity with him. I thought, at one time, that vs2 was suggesting that somehow, after his Resurrection and Ascension, Jesus was getting heaven ready for the arrival of all his disciples. But that's not what Jesus was saying at all. As if heaven needed the rearrangement of the curtains, and the constant spring-cleaning of the rooms!

4: Jesus said that 'no-one goes to the father except by me' (14:6). How do you understand these words in the light of John 1:9 and other world religions? Do all roads lead to God? Why, why not?

5: Do you see something of yourself in 'Doubting Thomas?' What doubts have you had, or still have, about the Christian faith?

6: What important things does Jesus say about himself in vs11-14? What do you think Jesus meant by 'greater things' in vs12?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1: How would you describe the significance of Jesus' teaching on heaven in this passage?

2: If heaven is a 'prepared place', what must be done in order to receive the place Jesus has prepared?

3: What perspective do you need in order to face the challenges of life, vs1-2?

Jesus was saying that it was his *going* from the disciples that prepared for them a place in heaven. It is the pain and suffering of Jesus, it is the cross; it is the death, resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus that prepares a place for the disciples in heaven.

Bishop J.C. Ryle commented: *'Heaven is a holy place. Its inhabitants are holy. To be happy in heaven, it stands to reason we must be prepared for it. Our hearts must be somewhat in tune, somewhat ready for it.'* Heaven, the real place, is a prepared place for prepared people. There are many people whose faith is not strong enough to get them to church, yet they expect that it will be strong enough to get them to heaven.

Heaven is a *meeting* place

What questions do you ask about heaven? Are the streets paved with gold? What will the river of life look like? What kind of bodies will we have? Will we recognise anyone? But, in many ways, that shouldn't be our concern, only the fact that it is the place where Jesus is and where his disciples are. Jesus said: *'If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am'* (vs3).

Isn't that all we need to know about heaven? It's a place where our Saviour is, where we will see him face to face - how wonderful that will be. Heaven is a place where we will worship the Lord Almighty with the angels and saints of thousands of years. How wonderful to be in the presence of all those who have come to know, follow and love Jesus, who for the first time in all eternity are together! How good to see loved ones who have gone before! What an amazing, awe-inspiring experience that will be! Joni Eareckson Tada wrote: *'Of all the things that will surprise us when we see Jesus face to face, this, I believe, will surprise us most: that we did not love Jesus more before we died.'*

As we think about Jesus' answer to Peter's question we see that *Peter needed to understand the uniqueness of the sacrificial death of Jesus*. Jesus said to Peter (13:36). 'You cannot follow me now, Peter, because you cannot take part in what I am doing for you. Nobody can take part in my unique sacrificial sin-bearing work on the cross. It is only me, the righteous for the unrighteous, who can do that. It is only me as perfect Man, and fully God, that can die as the Mediator to bring God and man together. But you can follow me later. You come my Father's house, which my going will prepare for you and for all my disciples. We need to keep our minds on heaven. We are resident aliens in this world. We do not belong here; our home is our Father's house in heaven.

That is where we really belong; that's where we are going to; that is our destiny, and unless we keep our eyes fixed on that, we will lose the right perspective on the troubles of life. We are to *store up our treasures in heaven, not on earth* (Matthew 6:19-21). An old 'negro spiritual' hymn I remember from my youth goes something like: *This world is not my home I'm just passing through, if heaven's not my home, then Lord what will I do, the Saviour beckons me from heaven's open door, and I don't feel at home in this world anymore.*

Doubting Thomas

Many people don't understand what Jesus was saying, just like the disciple often referred to as 'Doubting Thomas.' How many times have we felt like him? If Judas, as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, is a name to describe a treacherous and deceitful person, then Thomas is a name synonymous with people of little faith. We've all called someone a doubting Thomas at some time in our lives haven't we? We don't know much about Thomas, and most of what we can know is found in John's Gospel. But I just want to quickly look a bit closer at the kind of person Thomas was.

A sceptical person (John 20:24-28): In this most well-known passage, Thomas was absent from the disciples when Jesus first appeared to them after the resurrection. When they told Thomas that they had seen the Lord, he was sceptical: *'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it'* (20:25). Thomas had a somewhat sceptical disposition, he wasn't one to be convinced easily! Yet he is convinced by the appearance of Jesus, and from his lips comes one of the most forthright statements of faith in the whole of the New Testament: *'My Lord and my God'* (20:28).

A confused person (John 14:5f): In this passage the occasion for Thomas asking his question is the comment of Jesus in the previous verse: 'You know the way to the place where I am going.' Thomas replied that he is not at all clear what Jesus is talking about. What does he mean by 'the Father's house' and how would the disciples get there? Thomas is a confused disciple who has deep questions to ask.

A gloomy person (John 11:16) This reference is not so well-known, but it is helpful in building a portrait of Thomas. Jesus had just been told that Lazarus had died. He knew that God had a purpose to strengthen the disciples' faith as they would see what he would do. So Jesus told them: 'Let us go to him' (11:15). Thomas' reply is interesting: 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.' There is realism there, for Jerusalem was becoming a dangerous place for Jesus and the disciples. However, there is also courage and loyalty expressed to Jesus despite the danger, Thomas will go.

Have you ever met Christians who have a tendency to look on the glum and negative side of anything and everything? When I first came here I remember talking with the churchwardens before a service. One said, 'Praise the Lord, the church half full this morning.' Shortly afterwards the other warden walked over to me and said, 'The church is half-empty this morning!' But Thomas is a loyal, even courageous disciple, who is pessimistic and who had a tendency to see the dark side in all its starkness and voices his misapprehensions and doubts. But thank God for Thomas' honesty and his willingness to be convinced, because he solicited a brilliant answer from Jesus, 14:6: *'I am the way and the truth and the life. No-one comes to the Father except through me.'*

Jesus is the Way: Giving us Direction in a Lost World

Have you ever been in a maze? (Hampton Court has a famous one). I haven't been in one for years, but I have vivid memories of getting lost in one when I was a child. One moment there are long, straight paths that seem to be leading in the right direction; but then suddenly there is a bend, and then another, and then you come to a dead end, then you have to retrace your steps and the same thing happens again. It's so easy to lose one's way. I can remember feeling that I would never get out alive and started to panic, crying and shouting: *Help, mummy, I'm lost. Help!*

It's an awful feeling to think that you are on the right road only to find that you've reached a dead end. It's an awful feeling to think that you've made the right decision only to find that you've reached a dead end. It's an awful feeling to think you've finally escaped the maze only to be sucked deeper into the centre. Many people's lives are a bit like travelling through a maze. There are the pleasant and exciting times when it all seems to be going right. And some live just for those pleasant times, such as the birth of a baby, a rise in salary, a continental summer holiday, or a new car. But the unexpected turns and twists of life must be faced too!

Many people live with no real sense of direction in their life and no real hope of anything beyond it. Deep down, if they stopped to admit it, they feel lost. They don't give much thought to this life or to life beyond this maze. Others know that they need spiritual answers to the deep questions about life, but they reason something like this: 'What's really important is sincerity. If we are sincere in what we believe, we will get there in the end.'

All roads that are followed in sincerity lead to God.' However, when you examine the great faiths of the world you see that each of these faiths has a very different view of God and the way to a relationship with him.

Jesus is the Truth: Giving us Reality in a Confused World

There are so many conflicting voices in our world today, both political and religious, that sometimes we just don't know where to turn for the answers to the questions we have about life and about death. Why was I born? What happens when I die? Is there a God?

Jesus is the one who tells us the truth about God and shows us what he is like because the Bible tells us that God became flesh and lived amongst us in the form of Jesus. At the beginning of his Gospel John wrote: *'No-one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known'* (John 1:18). Jesus is the one that comes as the Light of the world to shine into people's lives and show them the truth about themselves: that they are sinners in need of God's mercy and forgiveness. There is no real truth about God, the world, or ourselves, apart from Jesus, for he is the truth.

Jesus is the Life: Giving us Light in a Dark World

John also wrote that *'In him was life, and the life was the light of men'* (John 1:4). Jesus is the way to God and the way to heaven because there is no life apart from him. He has given life; the very breath people breathe is given to them by him. Jesus was God's agent in creation and he continually sustains it. There can be no natural life apart from him, and there can be no eternal life without being in relationship with him by faith. Notice what Jesus doesn't say. He doesn't say that he knows the way, but rather he is the way. Jesus' answer to the perplexity and confusion that Thomas finds in life, is a personal relationship with himself. In a very real sense, his answer to Thomas is the same as the answer to Peter earlier, 'Trust me and follow me.'

Nor does Jesus say that he is a way, a means of knowing truth, and a means of discovering what life is all about. It is not that Jesus is one of a number of alternatives. It is not that he is the best of the alternatives either. He is the way, because no-one can know the Father and be in his heaven except by coming first to his Son. That is the truth of it. To the uncertain, perplexed and doubtful about life and life's problems - Jesus is the way.

Conclusion

In closing, I must ask all of you to think for a moment about your own relationship with God. Because, if Jesus is *'the way, the truth and the life'* and *'the only way to the Father'* (John 14:6), there's an enormous amount of responsibility on our shoulders to respond in the right way. In a week that the country went to the polls to make their choices for government, what choice will you be making for Jesus? What is your faith based on? The choice is simple:

Being a Christian isn't a label we wear for convenience. Being a Christian isn't what church we attend or what country we were born into or being baptised as a child. Being a Christian is having a relationship with Jesus. When we've deliberately recognised that Jesus is the Son of God who came to die for all our wrong doing, when we recognise Jesus as Lord and Saviour and are willing to commit our whole lives to him by confessing the fact that we've done wrong things and ask him to forgive us. A Christian is someone, according to Mark 8:35-38, who is willing to change their life and die! J. John once said: *If you want to get to heaven, then you have to travel via King's Cross.* However, becoming a Christian is the start of that most exciting relationship with Jesus and is the start of a whole new life. As the apostle Paul wrote, *'Those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same any more for the old is gone. A new life has begun'* (2 Corinthians 5:17, The New Living Bible).