

QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry
for the Christian community*

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COPING WITH FEAR – JOHN 14

Fear is a very real and universal human emotion, and Christians are not immune. There are many situations we all pass through from time to time which may cause us to be fearful, and the Lord doesn't condemn us for being so. Indeed, He never promises to take away the circumstances that may lie at the root of our fears, but He shows us how to cope with those fears and overcome them. Jesus's comforting words in the Upper Room Discourse (John chapters 14, 15 and most of 16) is one of the best passages in scripture to illustrate this. Here we will just look at a few of the teachings He gave to the disciples on that occasion, although the whole discourse is designed to help the child of God find a way through the fear generated by difficult and uncertain times.

The disciples were overcome with great fear at that point. The opposition to Jesus had been building up for some time, and some of them didn't want to travel to Jerusalem just then at all. It wasn't just the fear of physical opposition and even violence, but their growing inward uncertainty about the status of Jesus and His talk about dying. They were well aware of the prophetic promise of a messiah arising in Israel, and shared the general feeling that the time for his appearing was imminent. For over three years they had centred their messianic hopes on Jesus as the fulfilment of that promise and had given up much of their previous lifestyles to follow Him. They were almost certainly aware of the recent messianic claims of others, as summarised by Gamaliel in the Sanhedrin, recorded in Acts 5 v 34 – 39. Despite all the miraculous signs, teaching, wisdom and charisma of Jesus, he was not showing any intention of bringing about the great messianic deliverance. Was He the true messiah, or had they also been deceived (Luke 24 v 19 - 21)? Judas Iscariot certainly seemed to think so. Similar fear and confusion will be evident at the time of the Lord's return. In Luke 21 v 26 the Lord said fear will be a major factor then, and He also said there will be many false reports of the Messiah's arrival. However, the Lord's teaching regarding fear covers much more than any fear arising over His status or timing of His coming, and it is the ways in which He wants us to cope with all fear in general that we consider here.

Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid (v 1 and v 27)

We can take this as a clear instruction from the Lord which, if we love Him, we listen to and seek to obey. But it can also be seen as an invitation from Him. "Do you really want to overcome the fears that trouble you? Then this is the way to do so".

Trust in God (v 1)

Just three words, but how foundational! The first step towards coping with our fears is to have a right relationship with God. The prevalence of fear today stems especially from the absence of this relationship in so many people's lives: "When people stop believing in God they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything" (Émile Cammaerts). Truly trusting in God is not merely a religious activity; it is enjoying a relationship with a much greater Being than any human being. Understanding the eternal existence, nature and power of God is the only basis of true human security, because that is the way the whole of creation has been put together. God the supreme creator, in His timeless eternity, provides the four basic building blocks for creation to happen and thrive – space, time, energy and matter – essential items that belief in materialistic evolution can never account for. This atheistic and materialistic world view cannot cope with fear because evolutionary theory is by definition completely without design, purpose, morals or reason. With this thinking, so predominant today, we are all subject to blind chance and, therefore, helplessness. Fear thus becomes our main default emotion – the pointless basis of all existence and experience.

Recognising the reality of a higher and eternal dimension, the spiritual and divine, enables a completely different set of emotions to work within our hearts – hope, purpose, rewards and justice. The relationship with God (who is Spirit) introduces the possibility of a benign and sovereign element in our lives that is greater than any fear we may face. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111 v 10); consequent fearlessness indeed! The sense of the eternal and spiritual, lying within every human heart (Ecclesiastes 3 v 11), is the wellspring of our trust in God and our ability to overcome fear.

Trust also in me (v 1)

Up to that point in human experience the description of God as Yahweh simply encompassed the whole understanding of the Godhead. Jesus in His teaching begins to introduce the idea of the fatherhood of God, especially from the opening words of the Lord's Prayer onwards. In no way was that meant to exclude His own deity, as He increasingly made clear in many references, such as John 10 v 30 and 14 v 6 – 24. John explains that his gospel account is written specifically to demonstrate that as Jesus completely fulfils the duty of the Christ (the Messiah) He inevitably shows His deity as God the Son, for the Christ would be divine (e.g. Isaiah 9 v 6). To this end John opens his account with the amazing Prologue (1 v 1 – 18). He wishes to show that as the Christ (i.e., the Lord Jesus Christ), Jesus deserves our full trust. Here, Jesus is pointing out that trust in His full divine and messianic status is part of the means available to us to deal with fear.

In John's Prologue he explains Jesus is the "Logos" ("Word" in English) that was with God, was God, was totally and intrinsically involved with the entire creation, and was the author of life which gave light (understanding) to humanity. He also explains that as the Logos Jesus entered human (fleshly) nature and made His dwelling among us. In doing this Jesus made the invisible God known to mankind (v 18). What does the Logos actually mean? In John's time Greek philosophy was well-established as the main source of the understanding of humanity and the meaning of life, and we recognise that much of that thinking is still a foundational part of philosophical thinking today. However, the Greeks could only go so far, realising that their broad area of knowledge was limited when it came to the reason for the cosmos and all the questions surrounding origins. They felt creation was so ordered that there must be a hidden knowledge behind it all – unknowable knowledge – and they called that the Logos. When John called Jesus the Logos, he was clearly showing the world that the "unknowable" mysteries of creation and meaning were in fact bound up in Jesus Himself. Paul gives the same understanding of Jesus when he writes to Colossae (Colossians 1 v 15 – 20), adding that Jesus is also the One who will completely restore everything to its original purity – the work of the Messiah. Paul also gave the Greeks in Athens a similar explanation, recorded by Luke in Acts 17 v 22 – 31.

All these New Testament writers show that the central element of trust in Jesus is personally recognising His death and resurrection as being at the very centre of His messianic duty on Earth, bringing about our own redemption. The abundant evidence of 2000 years of Christian testimony shows that anyone truly trusting Jesus on a personal basis as the Messiah, divine and human, opens the door to an amazing transformation in their life, including the ability to cope with whatever fears come their way – and there may well have been many.

In my Father's house.... (v 2 & 3)

Jesus next uses marriage as an illustration of His future relationship with His people. Paul also uses this picture in Ephesians 5 v 22 – 33. The disciples would fully understand the words of Jesus here, as He is using the common practice in their culture to describe where He is ultimately leading them. Usually marriages were arranged, sometimes many years in advance, and as the time for the marriage drew closer the bridegroom would start to prepare an annex to his parents' house as the home he would share with his bride. His preparation of this new "room" may take longer than the groom would wish, but his father made the final decision as to when it was complete and ready. Then the groom could go and fetch his bride, bringing her back to his parent's home when and where the marriage festivities would take place. The newly-wed couple would then return to the bride's home for further festivities there with her friends. Finally, they would return to their new home to commence their married life together.

The picture Jesus is painting is obvious. The Father's house (Heaven) is where Jesus the bridegroom is preparing a room (place) for His bride (the Church), and the Father decides when it will be ready (Matthew 24 v 36). When Father gives the word Jesus will come for all who have trusted Him, and we call that event the Rapture, followed by the marriage supper of the Lamb. Then we will be joint-heirs with Christ, and it does not yet appear how wonderful that will be. Thus, ultimately, we have nothing to fear!

Father will give you another Counsellor to be with you for ever (v 16 – 17, 25 – 27)

Here we are given the promise of the permanent presence of the Holy Spirit within us, bringing about vast changes in our lives – a process known as sanctification. This, of course, is a major theme of the New Testament and needs a separate study to fully explore His person and place in our lives, as along with all His other work He brings about the complete antidote to our fears. Through this promise, and elsewhere, the Lord completes His revelation that the Holy Spirit is the third and co-equal member of the Godhead, the understanding that we have embraced as The Trinity. Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who brings about all the other changes in our spiritual development, including our relationship with God the Father, the creator of every atom throughout the universe; our love for Jesus the Son, and our eternal future with Him; and our full respect, joy, and dependence on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit Himself. This includes dealing with our natural tendency to fearfulness, and enabling us to deal with all the circumstances that come our way with overcoming trust, peace, and knowledge that "In all things God works for the good of those who love Him" and that "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8 v 28 & 31).