



3) Chapters 14 & 16

A linguistic caution

Remember, everything we're looking at in these sessions is a matter of *nuance*. There are flavours in one language that are often hard to convey in another – paraphrases and amplifications are needed for that (and there are several of those published for the New Testament). The translations we're looking at aren't *wrong*, and I'm not (usually!) trying to correct them, so much as to bring out some of the deeper meaning.

So for example we placed a lot of emphasis in our last session on the contrast between two words for to 'love' (*agapān* and *philein*) in the conversation that Jesus had with Peter. But in today's chapters the two words are used with no apparent difference of meaning at all:

"Those who **love** me will be **loved** by my Father, and I will **love** them and reveal myself to them."
[14. 21]

"The Father himself **loves** you, because you have **loved** me and have believed that I came from God."
[16. 27]

The word for 'love' in the first verse is *agapān*, and in the second is *philein*. In the same way, not all commentators agree with my exploration of the conversation between Jesus and Peter in chapter twenty-one ... or indeed with some of the other nuances that we're exploring in these sessions.

An encouraging picture

The beginning of chapter 14 is often read at funeral services, but the most encouraging aspect of it is usually lost in translation.

The passage begins with what looks like a command:

Jesus said "Do not let your hearts be troubled. **Believe** in God, **believe** also in me .." [14. 1]

We've already seen the range of meaning of *pisteuō* ('believing' and 'trusting'), and the significance of the present and aorist tenses (it's a present tense here – a continuing trust, not a coming-to-faith). What we haven't noticed before is another common pitfall in translating from the original Greek: that imperatives and indicatives are often indistinguishable. This (*pisteuete*) could be a command, "Believe!", or a statement, "You believe". In my opinion the NRSV has it wrong: the first should be an indicative and the second an imperative – "You believe in God, now put your trust in me too!". Certainly, like the first disciples, many who hear this reading at funerals believe in God; but the Gospel-writer is encouraging them to go a step further and to trust what Jesus says next.

And what he says next is one of the most encouraging passages about death in the whole Bible.

"In my Father's house there are many **dwelling-places**. If it were not so, would I have told you that I **go** to prepare a place for you? And if I **go** and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." [14. 2,3]

What the NRSV translates as 'dwelling-places' is given as 'mansions' in the old King James version – a carrying-over into English of the Latin *mansiones*, which itself is a literal rendering of the original Greek word, *monai*. The image is that of a long journey: the verb translated 'go' in these verses is *poreuomai*, to 'go on a journey' – a different verb from to 'go' (*hypagō*) in verse 4. And in this context *monai* ('dwelling-places' in the NRSV) are not so much dwelling-places as staging-posts: the word actually means a wayside inn – in modern parlance a motel or, more cosily, a pub with bedrooms.

The image is that of Jesus as a servant, going ahead of a traveller to find a lodging for the night (no telephoning ahead, or using the internet, in those days) to make a booking, to arrange a bed and an evening meal – and then retracing his steps to guide the traveller safely there.

More of Jesus

The fourth Gospel has its own distinctive way of teaching about the Holy Spirit, in chapters 14 & 16:

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another Advocate**, to be with you for ever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides **with** you, and he will be **in** you. ‘I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.’ [14. 15-18]

“I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the **Advocate** will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” [16. 7]

Look at Jesus’ description of the Spirit – as ‘another Advocate’. Both words are important, and both have a meaning lost in translation.

English is one of the few languages to use ‘another’ to mean two different, almost opposite things – an extra one of something (in other words the same as the first one), or a different one instead. French, for example, has *encore* for the first meaning and *un(e) autre* for the second – and Greek likewise has two words, *allos* and *heteros*. The word here is *allos* – more of the same thing. Jesus is saying that the disciples are sad because he’s going to leave them; but they are to take heart because they will have *another* him – more of the same, not someone or something else.

And what is this other, replacement or extra, person? S/he’s an ‘Advocate’. Every translation struggles with this word, and the NRSV’s attempt is particularly austere-sounding. (Other versions have ‘Helper’, ‘Counsellor’ or ‘Comforter’, all of which sound less forensic.) The Greek word is *Paraklētos*, which literally means someone ‘called’ (*klētos*) alongside (*para*). [In Latin this is *ad-vocatus*, whence the NRSV’s translation, ‘Advocate’; some versions simply give up the attempt to translate and transliterate the word instead – ‘Paraclete’.]

The word is impossible to translate because it’s so very broad, and any one translation narrows its meaning. Everything that Jesus has been as he’s lived alongside the disciples, he will continue to be in the future – but with one big difference. Whereas up to now he has been ‘with’ (*para*) them, in future he will be ‘in’ (*en*) them.

[For further discussion if desired – the gender (and personhood) of the Spirit, Jesus as the Paraclete in John’s first epistle, the ‘double procession’ of the Holy Spirit ... whole libraries of books have been written!]

Next time

We’re looking at chapters three and four. Bring your questions and comments to the meeting!