

# IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

John 14:1-3

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In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? (Jn. 14:2).

**C**hristians are, or at least should be, the world's great realists. Consider, in contrast, the attitude of today's secularism, as expressed by the popular song, "Don't worry, be happy." Since life is all that there is, we should just **keep** trying to have a good time. Or consider stoic philosophy. Stoics seek to remain calm during trials because they despair of the future. Life has no meaning and therefore problems are not faced but ignored. Christians, however, face their troubles, finding a great hope in our confidence for the future. Christians are the world's great realists, but also the world's great optimists: trusting God to uphold us, we can be honest about the world and life, since we look ahead to heaven where our hopes are held fast and secure.

Consider the matter of death. Christians are not reduced merely to saying that someone has "passed away," but we face the truth that he or she has died. To die is to suffer death, and we know that death is real. The same is true of life's other woes: sickness, poverty, injustice, loneliness and fear. Christians can be realists about all these ills because of the great hope that we have with the Lord.

## DO NOT BE TROUBLED

**I**t was from this perspective that Jesus sought to comfort his disciples after the Last Supper, saying "Let not your hearts be troubled" (Jn. 14:1). Jesus said this because it was obvious that the disciples' hearts *were* troubled. In fact, Jesus' own heart had been

troubled. In chapter 12, in light of his approaching cross, Jesus declared, “Now is my soul troubled” (Jn. 12:27). Earlier during this last meal, Jesus had foretold his betrayal and was “troubled in his spirit” (Jn. 13:21). After Judas departed, Jesus foretold Peter’s three denials, and we can only imagine how troubling this was to the Lord. Jesus was contemplating the atoning death by which he would suffer the full wrath of God for his peoples’ sin. He faced a bitter betrayal from one who shared his table, and one of his closest followers would deny him. Of course this troubled Jesus! Just as our hearts are troubled by fearful prospects, personal betrayals, and painful disappointments, Jesus in his true humanity was troubled in heart.

The disciples, too, were troubled, which is why Jesus spoke this way. They were still trying to grasp the revelation of Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denials. Moreover, in the midst of the dangerous and fearful situation in Jerusalem, Jesus now told them that he was departing and that they could not follow. Their lives had been so focused on Jesus for three years that the sudden prospect of his leaving must have been devastating.

Troubled hearts are so common today as to be nearly epidemic. Even in a society where food, shelter, and medical care are almost universally available, many people are yet deeply troubled in spirit. All around us, men and women are plagued by distress, loneliness, and fear, with no peace of mind and no comfort for their souls.

Like Jesus, we need to face the truth about our troubled hearts. If we find ourselves counseling a Christian friend, we should avoid the mistake of wrongfully minimizing their problems. Instead, we should listen and face the reality of their troubles, and when appropriate we should acknowledge their distress as understandable.

This does not mean, however, that all we can do is face the reality of troubles. Jesus’ point was that there are nonetheless overwhelming reasons not to remain troubled by them. “Let not your hearts be troubled,” he said, and then gave the reason: “Believe in God; believe also in me” (Jn. 14:1). According to Jesus, Christians are not only to be realists about our troubles but also about the power and goodness of God and his Son, Jesus Christ. Being realistic about our God and our Savior is the antidote to the troubles we honestly face.

According to Jesus, the cure for a troubled heart is belief. He refers not merely to belief itself: Christianity does not teach the mere “power of positive thinking.”<sup>1</sup> Rather, Jesus reminded his disciples that they have God to believe in. Arthur Pink elaborates that God “is possessed of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. He knows what is best for [you], and He makes all things work together for [your] good. He is on the Throne, ruling amid the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand.”<sup>2</sup> It was with such thoughts that David wrestled with his troubles: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?” he asked. In answer to his troubled soul, David argued: “Hope in God, for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God” (Ps. 42:11).

There is a question as to how we should translate verse 1, since the verb “believe” can be read in either the indicative or imperative moods (the Greek for both is the same). Did Jesus command the disciples, “Believe in God and believe in me?” Or did Jesus simply point out their faith: “You do believe in God and in me.” Or, is Jesus combining an indicative statement with an imperative command, “Since you believe in God, believe also in me”? Most commentators believe that at least the call to trust Jesus is an imperative, since Jesus’ point is that the disciples should trust him just as they trust God.

This statement provides a clear affirmation of Jesus’ deity, since he identifies God and himself equally as objects of the disciples’ faith. Jesus’ point is not merely that through faith we are saved, true though that is, but that by exercising our trust in God and his Son, believers gain comfort for their troubled hearts.

What is it about trusting Jesus that gives peace to troubled hearts? The answer is taught to children by means of a necklace with colored beads, each of which corresponds to a Scripture verse and its teaching. The first bead is colored black, representing the guilt of our sin (Romans 3:23). The second bead is red, for the blood of Christ that was shed for our forgiveness (John 3:16). The third bead is

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Vincent Peale, *The Power of Positive Thinking* (New York: Ballantine, reprint 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 755.

white, since Isaiah 1:18 tells us that our sins are washed and made “as white as snow.” Fourth is a gold bead (Jn. 14:2-3), which corresponds to the glory that awaits all whose sins are forgiven by Jesus. Along with the necklace goes a song with these comforting words:

Once my heart was black as sin, until the Savior came in.  
His precious blood I know has washed it whiter than snow;  
And in this world I'm told I'll walk the streets of gold.  
Oh, wonderful, wonderful day; He washed my sins away.<sup>3</sup>

## THE FATHER'S HOUSE PREPARED

**T**hat children's song, with its final golden bead, leads to the second source of comfort that Jesus brought before his troubled disciples. The first was their ability to trust in God and in himself. The second was the belief that a place has been prepared for them in heaven. Jesus added, “In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?” (Jn. 14:2).

If we know what he has taught about our future in heaven, Jesus states that this belief will overcome other troubles that beset us in life. This highlights a great problem today, that Christians think so seldom about heaven and in many cases do not understand the Bible's teaching about it. When we are moving to a new city or even vacationing somewhere new, most of us will do extensive research. We will pour over maps and books, studying the geography, history, and culture. If this is how we respond to places on earth where we will briefly live or visit, how much more interested should Christians be about heaven! How strange it is that so few believers seem to have interest in the place where they hope to live forever with Christ.

Some years ago, I knew a woman named Helen who had spent many decades as an overseas missionary. Now elderly, she worked as missions secretary in our church. Helen became ill with cancer and one day when I was praying with her, she told me that the doctors did not give her long to live. I asked, “How are you feeling about this?”

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<sup>3</sup> Cited from R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 1999), 336-337.

Helen beamed and answered, “Well, I am just getting so excited!” She had long been thinking about heaven and now was comforted through her anticipation. This the attitude that we will have if we know the Bible’s teaching on our hope in heaven.

We can glean four truths about heaven from Jesus’ teaching in this passage, truths that will replace the anxiety in our hearts with great joy. The first teaching is that heaven is *the beloved home for the family of God*. This is why Jesus refers to heaven as “my Father’s house” (Jn. 14:2). Home is a place, writes J. C. Ryle “where we are generally loved for our own sakes, and not for our gifts or possessions; the place where we are loved to the end, never forgotten, and always welcome... Believers are in a strange land and at school in this life. In the life to come they will be at home.”<sup>4</sup>

Most of us will admit that our hearts greatly long for home. We deeply desire a place where we fully belong, where we are safe and secure, where we are loved and that we love in return. In the hyper-mobility of our society today, how many people are troubled by the absence of anywhere that is truly home. Christian psychologist Paul Tournier spoke of this in his book, *A Place for You*. He wrote of a young man he was counseling who came from an unhappy home, developed a sense of failure in relationships, and never really could settle down. At one point, the man expressed his inner longing: “Basically, I’m always looking for a place – for somewhere to be.”<sup>5</sup>

This young man is not alone in that troubled feeling, for ours is an exiled race. The Bible’s story begins with our first parents, Adam and Eve, falling into sin against God the Creator. The result was that they were expelled from their home in the Garden of Eden, where formerly they had enjoyed the blessing of God’s presence (Gen. 3). When their son Cain fell further into sin by murdering his brother, God cursed him by making him “a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (Gen. 4:12). Later, his descendants sought to make a home and a name for themselves in rebellion against God. But God cast down the Tower of Babel and scattered rebellious mankind across the face of the earth (Gen. 11:1-9). So it has been throughout human history

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<sup>4</sup> J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: John*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 3:57.

<sup>5</sup> Cited from James Montgomery Boice, *The Gospel of John*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 4:1066.

that men and women feel a longing to be home. Augustine thus prayed that “thou hast created us for thyself and our heart cannot be quieted till it may find repose in thee.”<sup>6</sup> Jesus tells us that this longing for home will be met in his Father’s house in heaven.

Second, we should know that heaven is *our permanent and eternal dwelling*. This means that heaven is a real place. Too many Christians think of heaven as a wispy, ethereal state of being. But since Jesus ascended into heaven in his human body, heaven must be a material location. Jesus did not describe heaven’s physical details, but he said that “in my Father’s house are many rooms” (Jn. 14:2). Older versions render this as saying that heaven includes many “mansions.” This translation arises from the fact that Jerome used the Latin word *mansiones* in the Vulgate version, so that the King James translators used the closest English word: mansions. But both the Latin word and the Greek in John’s text simply mean “lodging places.” Heaven is the place where our eternal lodging will be.

C. S. Lewis wrote a book, *The Great Divorce*, about our wrong ideas of heaven. A group of English tourists are taken on an imaginary bus trip to heaven. Once there, the tourists get off the bus to realize that they appear as ghosts. They are stunned at how solid and real everything in heaven is compared to earth. The grass is so real that it hurts their feet to walk on it, and they learn that while people in heaven are “solid people,” it is those on earth who are ethereal.<sup>7</sup>

Heaven is filled with dwelling places that will endure for all eternity. This is what Abraham was looking forward to. As a sojourner in Canaan, Abraham longed for a real home. By faith, we are told that he was looking forward to heaven, described as “the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10).

Third, and Jesus’ main point here about heaven, is *the spacious provision made there for Christ’s people*. The Father’s house, Jesus said, has “many rooms.” In ancient Palestine, a patriarch would often live in a large villa, with wings and rooms constantly being added on for children, grandchildren, and their families. The image is that of “a

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<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions*, ed. G.P. Goold (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), I.I.

<sup>7</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

large compound centered around a communal courtyard.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, there is plenty of room in heaven for all of God’s family. Ryle comments that “there will be room for all believers and room for all sorts, for little saints as well as great ones, for the weakest believer as well as for the strongest. The feeblest child of God need not fear there will be no place for him. None will be shut out but impenitent sinners and obstinate unbelievers.”<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, heaven *is where Jesus went to prepare a place for us*. He told the disciples that he would depart for his Father’s house “to prepare a place for you” (Jn. 14:2). Chiefly, Jesus prepared a place for us in heaven by removing the obstacle of our sin. Jesus entered into heaven after shedding his blood on the cross for our purification. The Old Testament priests would sprinkle the altar in the temple with the sacrificial blood, and the book of Hebrews tells us that Jesus likewise “entered once for all into the holy places [that is, heaven],... by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12). The point is, as Charles Simeon said, “Heaven would have been defiled... by the admission of sinners into it; he therefore entered into heaven to sanctify it by his blood.”<sup>10</sup> Do you hope to enter into heaven? Then realize that only those for whom Christ has made this preparation may dwell in those holy halls, that is, those who have trusted in the blood he shed for the forgiveness of our sins.

How wonderful it is to find a room prepared after a long journey. All who believe and trust in Christ can know that heaven has been prepared for their arrival. Our Mediator and Savior has carried our names into heaven and made a reservation there for us. No Christian will ever appear in heaven either unknown or unexpected, for Jesus has prepared a place there for each and every one of his own. Knowing and trusting in our prepared home in the Father’s house is Jesus’ antidote to the troubles and anxieties of life.

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<sup>8</sup> Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 426.

<sup>9</sup> Ryle, *John*, 3:57.

<sup>10</sup> Cited by Gordon J. Keddie, *A Study Commentary on John*, 2 vols. (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2001), 2:79.

## CHRIST'S RETURN PROMISED

There is yet another reason why Jesus' disciples should not be troubled by fear and distress. Our third comfort is knowing that not only has Jesus gone ahead of us to prepare heaven, but he will return to receive us to himself. "If I go and prepare a place for you," he promised, "I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also" (Jn. 14:3).

The book of Hebrews says that "Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf" into heaven (Heb. 6:20), appearing before God the Father as "the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Right now, Jesus is preparing heaven for us and preparing us for heaven. But in a day to come, Jesus will return to this world. The Bible calls this day "our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ" (Tit. 2:13). This is our comfort amidst so many troubling threats in this present evil age. Bruce Milne comments: "History is not at the mercy of the whims or passions of politicians or tyrants. The reins are firmly in the hands of the Lord of history, and 'he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice'" (Acts 17:31).<sup>11</sup>

It is particularly wonderful that Jesus says, "I will come again... and will take you to myself" (Jn. 14:3). Jesus is returning to take us with him into heaven, but that is not how he says it. As Jesus sees our great future, he is coming to take us "to himself." William Hendriksen writes: "So wonderful is Christ's love for his own that he is not satisfied with the idea or merely bringing them to *heaven*. He must needs take them into his own embrace."<sup>12</sup> Hearing these words, we look forward to heaven not merely to escape our trials today, but to be with the Lord. We will be forever with Jesus. After Jesus returns, our salvation will come into its crowning glory, and those crowns will be given to us by his nail-scarred hands, and we will place them at his nail-scarred feet with praise and glory. John writes in his first epistle: "Beloved,... what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we

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<sup>11</sup> Bruce Milne, *The Message of John: Here Is Your King!* (Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity, 1993), 211.

<sup>12</sup> William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*, 2 vols., New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 2:266.



shall see him as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2). It is in anticipation of our great future with him that Jesus says to us now: “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me” (Jn. 14:1).

## LIVING IN LIGHT OF ETERNITY

To be a Christian is to be a realist about our present lives, but also to be realists about the promised future that we have in Christ. It is in the light of eternity that we gain our perspective on today, a perspective that should transform our lives. Let me conclude by noting some of the effects in our lives that should result from Christ’s promise about heaven and his soon return.

First, we have a strong incentive to *behave as followers of Christ*, obeying his teachings and living in love. Paul said, “The hour has come for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. The night is far gone; the day is at hand. So then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:11-12).

Second, we are greatly encouraged to *witness boldly to the gospel of Christ*. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt. 28:18-19). Jesus soon returns to judge the living and the dead, so just as now is the only time of salvation, now is also the time of urgent need for the spreading of the gospel.

Third, our hope of heaven encourages us to *labor for the building up of the church and the advancement of the kingdom of Christ*. Jesus urges us to “seek first the kingdom of God” (Mt. 6:33). Speaking of his return, Jesus said, “Blessed is that servant whom his master will find [serving] when he comes” (Lk. 12:43).

Fourth, we are called by Christ to *love one another as he has loved us*. Our fellow believers are our brothers and sisters with whom we will live in the Father’s house forever. The relationships we forge now in Christian worship, fellowship, and service will literally last forever. And the most valuable thing you and I will ever behold prior to seeing Jesus in glory is one another: precious saints purchased with the blood of Christ.

Lastly, Jesus' teaching provides an imperative to *come to Christ in saving faith*. The comfort of which Jesus spoke is only for those who have believed in him. Entry into the Father's house is only for those for whom Jesus has been preparing a room. Being a realist means admitting that just as Jesus said he must depart, every one of us must also depart this life and this world. Do you have a loving home where you are going? Receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior now, and he will prepare a place for you in the Father's house and, when he returns in his glory, he will receive you, together with all the saints, into his never-ending fellowship of love.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> These concluding points are paraphrased from Keddie, *John*, 2:90-91.