

THE RISEN, RETURNING SAVIOR
John 14:1-3

What do you offer a man who is discouraged and hopeless?

What do you offer someone whose world is shattered?

What do you offer someone who has captured a glimpse into the future, and the fear of it is not startling, but terrifying in its deadliness? I am not talking about Covid-19. I am talking about Jesus and the disciples the night before He went to the cross.

What did Jesus offer the disciples? On Thursday night of the week of Christ's passion, their world was unexpectedly being upended. On Sunday of that week they had walked into Jerusalem alongside Jesus who rode the donkey of victory — the Messiah coming to take His throne. But the adulation of the crowd was transformed into the hatred of the religious leadership and a week that began with promise suddenly was exhibiting signs of ominous actions. And Jesus' warnings on this night weren't helping them think calmly.

First was that whole interaction with Judas. What was He saying about a traitor? That obviously wasn't Judas, but just where did Judas go? And then His words to Peter — could Peter really deny Jesus? They might have been tempted to think: "Is Peter a traitor? I've always wondered about him..."

And if Jesus was being betrayed, where was He going? And why couldn't they go with Him? Couldn't they help Him? And what would happen to them when He left them and they were *alone*?

You get the picture. They undoubtedly would soon be on the verge of a full panic if Jesus didn't intercede. So what did He do? What did He say to calm their fears and their anticipated loneliness?

He spoke of Heaven. We give lip service to Heaven. We know that's where we are going someday, but it doesn't have much impact on us today — we think. But it does. One antidote to our fears is to meditate on Heaven. Are you disillusioned (who isn't these days)? Are you discouraged? Are you afraid for the future? Is your heart in panic mode? Then come with me; come hear the words of comfort from God Himself; come catch a glimpse of Glory. This Easter morning let us not only hear the words of comfort from the resurrection of Christ, but let us also hear the words of comfort about the return of the ascended Christ.

How should thoughts of Heaven be our encouragement? Listen to Puritan Pastor Richard Baxter:

"It is but fitting that our hearts should be on God, when the heart of God is so much on us. If the Lord of glory can stoop so low as to set His heart on sinful dust, methinks we should easily be persuaded to set our hearts on Christ and glory, and ascend to him in our daily affections, who so much condescends to us." [Richard Baxter, 1650.]

In our Covid-19 suffering — in all our suffering and loneliness — we will be strengthened by thoughts and meditations on our security in Heaven. That's one place where Jesus pointed the disciples when they were tempted to despair, and that's where we need to give our attention.

So let's look together at the opening verses of John 14. We might summarize the passage this way:

THE RESURRECTED AND ASCENDED SAVIOR IS RETURNING TO TAKE HIS PEOPLE HOME.

As we come to this passage, it is notable that Jesus is not just addressing their fears, but He is addressing their particular temptation to be afraid of loneliness (isn't that an appropriate topic during Covid-19?). And He addresses that fear by looking past His resurrection and ascension to look forward to His return.

These verses compel us to trust God in our temptations to fear and loneliness because of ***four realities about Christ and His return***. These aren't just hopes and desires. They are a reality about Christ and they are a reality about our relationship with Him.

1. Trust God, Because He Has Come **NEAR** in Christ (v. 1)
2. Trust God, Because He is Building a Heavenly **HOME** (v. 2a)
3. Trust God, Because He is Building a Heavenly **HOME** for **YOU** (v. 2b)
4. Trust God, Because He is Coming to Take **YOU HOME** (v. 3)

1. Trust God, Because He Has Come NEAR in Christ (v. 1)

- In response to the disciples' fears, Jesus commands, ***do not let your heart be troubled***. That is, "Stop letting yourselves be anxious!" (He isn't warning them about coming temptation but telling them to stop the fearful and anxious thinking that they have already been doing.)
 - ✓ The word ***troubled*** = stirred up, shake, and agitate, like water churning in washing machine. This is inward turmoil — the kinds of things that stimulate us to awaken in the middle of the night and keep us awake. These are the things that give us dread first thing in the morning. These are the "what if's" of life — what if I get Covid-19, what if I lose my job, what if my wife leaves me, what if I get sick...?
 - ✓ Notice that this is also an inward condition — it's in their ***heart***. Their problem is not potential persecution or their aloneness when Jesus leaves. Their problem is in their inner man — their hearts — and how they are thinking about their circumstances. They have failed to control their emotions. This is a reminder that our emotional responses can be controlled; our emotions reflect how we are thinking about a given circumstance, and Jesus compels the disciples to discipline their minds/hearts.
 - ✓ Why would they be tempted to be troubled and anxious?
 - They would be tempted to anxiety because of His talk of cross (3:14; 8:28; 12:32-33; Lk. 18:31-33)
 - They would be tempted to anxiety because of His promise of persecution (15:18-20; 16:32-33a)
 - They would be tempted to anxiety because He told them He's leaving (13:33, 36; 14:4, 12; 16:28)
 - In short, Jesus prophesied of His death, their persecution, their aloneness, and their grief (16:20).
 - Anxiety and fear almost seem to be a rational thing to do at that point. (Not unlike many think that anxiety is reasonable today, during Covid-19 fears of health, life, and finances.)
 - ✓ If their circumstances are potentially so serious, then how could Jesus make this command — ***stop being troubled?*** Because He is trustworthy, as the next words indicate.
- How could they stop being anxious and ***troubled***? Immediately after commanding them to stop worrying, Jesus commands, ***believe in God...Me***. That is, have the same faith in Son as they should in the Father, for Jesus and the Father are One (10:14-15, 30; 14:7)
 - ✓ Jesus uses the same command twice — ***believe***. The word is a present tense, which means that they are to continually believe. This should be the habit of their lives. In every circumstance that tempts them (and us) to worry, they are to fight that temptation with belief.
 - ✓ It's notable that John's gospel is focused on the theme of belief. The word "believe" is used 98x in the book; the book begins with belief (1:7) and ends with belief (20:31; 21:24). This teaching in the Upper Room begins with belief (14:1) and ends with belief (16:31). The antidote to fear is trust.
 - ★ ✓ As one writer has said, "the only efficacious remedy against anxiety and distress is a confident faith."

- ✓ Notice also that they are not to believe that their circumstances will improve. They are not to have faith that they will avoid persecution or death or suffering. Their faith is not in a circumstance, but in a Person. And specifically, Jesus says that their faith should be directed towards two People.
- ✓ They were to believe in God. They would have understood that command from the OT. They were to trust God because He is sovereign, loving, and omnipotent — e.g., **Ps 36:5**; **Lam 3:22-25**.
- ✓ Secondly, they are to also believe in Jesus in the same way they believe in God the Father. Why should they believe in Jesus as well as the Father? Because Jesus came near, as the explanation of the Father and the presence of the Father with them (**1:14, 18**). He is Immanuel, God with us (**Mt. 1:23**). He set aside the glory of Heaven to be with us, to die for us, to be resurrected for us (Phil. 2:5ff).
- ✓ The OT taught them to trust and believe in the Father; Christ's advent demonstrated that they could trust Jesus in the same way. He is with them; they are not alone.
- ✓ God is trustworthy, and Christ is just as trustworthy. His advent reminds us that we don't need to have our circumstances changed; we do need to have our object of trust and hope changed.
- ★ ✓ We need to believe that the Father is God, Christ is God, and that they are good and doing good.
- ✓ Christ's presence on earth and nearness to us is an affirmation that we can trust Him.

- Jesus then offers further testimony that He is trustworthy...

2. Trust God, Because He is Building a Heavenly HOME (v. 2a)

- Jesus now provides reasons the disciples should believe in Him even as they believe in the Father:
 - ✓ There are many homes in Heaven
 - ✓ He is leaving to prepare their home
 - ✓ He is going to return for them
 - ✓ They will be with Him in heaven eternally.
 - ✓ To point disciples to Heaven is to say they can trust that God will provide for them eternally.
- Where is this place? It's **My Father's house** — the place where the Father and Son live, and they now invite the "adopted family" (Gal. 4:4ff) into that home. It is Heaven.
- What kind of place is this house? It's a permanent home (not temporary shelter). However it's not a "mansion," as some translations have it. It's not a palatial house we have for ourselves.
 - ✓ It is "in My Father's house..." That is, within the house of God, there are many places to live. And under that one "roof" (house) that belongs to God the Father, the entire family of God will live. So we might think of these as "apartments" where we reside as one massive family. How big will that be? There are **many dwelling places** there — as many as are needed (cf. **Rev. 21:15-16**).

- ✓ The point is that every believer will be “at home” and sheltered in one place, under the authority of the Father and head of the home, God. We will be safe and kept — secure (cf. 1 Pt. 1:3-5).
- ★ ✓ This is then a reminder that whatever we have or whatever we lose on earth is not ultimate.
- ✓ We should not think of our home (or possessions or life) on earth as final. This is merely the shortest stopping place until we get to our ultimate destination — our home in *Glory in the Father’s home*.
- ✓ What do you think of as home? Some of our homes on earth are not places of refuge or safety. Some of our homes were full of trouble, abuse, strife, and absence of love.
- ✓ Jesus would have us think of our heavenly home as the place where there is fullness of perfect love, there is infinite grace, complete perfection of all the residents, and where sorrows and pain are removed. And that should give us hope. There is a saying in Africa: “Only mention home to the weary traveler, and his legs become bars of iron.” That is what the mention of the believer’s heavenly home does for him. It emboldens us to trust in Christ.

3. Trust God, Because He is Building a Heavenly HOME for YOU (v. 2b)

- In the last phrase of the verse, Jesus promises, *I go to prepare a place for you*.
 - ✓ What does it mean that Jesus goes to **prepare** a place?
 - It means that part of the reason for His departure is for the particular purpose of getting the home ready. He’s leaving us now (briefly) to prepare an eternal gift and home for us. His actions are like a Bridegroom making a home for His bride: the Bridegroom goes to His Father’s home to build an addition for His bride to reside under that one roof. When the house is ready and when the bride is ready, He sends for her and comes for her to take her to that home. This separation is only temporary, until the Home is finished and the bride is ready (Rev. 19:6-9).
 - This home that prepares is also a home beyond our comprehension (1 Cor. 2:9).
 - This home is a “better country” — “a heavenly one,” prepared by God just for those who believe (have faith and remain faithful) in and to Him (Heb. 11:16).
 - ✓ We tend to focus our thoughts on the words **to prepare**; but the emphasis is the object of preparation — **for YOU!** He has done this *for* the Twelve and for every believer that would follow after them.
- Not only does Jesus prepare a place for the believer, but through His death and resurrection, He is also preparing the believer for that home. Listen to what the Puritan, Thomas Boston, wrote:

“Never was there so much to do to fit the inhabitants for a house. The saints were, by nature, utterly unfit for this house, and human art and industry could not make them meet for it. But the Father gives the designed inhabitants to the Son, to be by Him redeemed. The Son pays the price of their redemption, even His own precious blood. Justice gives them access to the house. And the Holy Spirit sanctifies them by His grace; that they may be meet to come in thither, where no unclean thing can enter.” [“The Kingdom of Heaven”]

- Jesus makes an eternal residence for us, and then makes us for that residence as well. What grace.
- Can we believe this? Notice what Jesus says: ***if it were not so, I would have told you...*** Jesus, the One who cannot lie, has made the promise. It can be trusted and believed. We are home and we are safe.
- The disciples were tempted to be lonely because of their aloneness. They might think of their solitude and the departure of Christ in unrighteous ways, focusing in a self-absorbed way on their loneliness. Yes, Jesus warned them, they would be alone for a time, but that solitude was not permanent. There is coming a time when every believer will be gathered together in one eternal home of God to enjoy eternal and infinite fellowship. Their solitude is temporary. The heavenly dwelling that is being prepared for them (and us) is permanent. That is an encouragement in our aloneness in Covid-19.

4. Trust God, Because He is Coming to Take YOU HOME (v. 3)

- Jesus would “leave” the disciples, but would also come again. Notice that this verse is a conditional sentence, ***if...then***. The sense of it is not so much “if” Jesus goes, but “*When I go...I will come again*.”
- Jesus would go, but His going was not permanent. His absence was temporary and His coming and our restoration to Him will be permanent.
- Notice also that the emphasis in this verse is the restoration of the believer to Christ:
 - ✓ “I will come again” — a promise of return and completion of His salvation.
 - ✓ *And* “receive you to Myself” — a promise of acceptance.
 - ✓ *That* “where I am you may be also” — a promise of intimacy and fellowship.
- Why is this so significant? Because the purpose of the creation of man was for fellowship. Then sin intruded and broke the fellowship, but Christ restored it (Mt. 1:23; 5:8; Rev. 22:3-4; Ps. 17:15)
 - ✓ He came to earth to be “with us” (**Mt. 1:23**), He called His disciples so they would be with Him (Mk. 3:14), and He calls the disciples and every believer to Heaven to be with Him (**v. 3**). He is not just taking us to a place, but He is taking us to Himself so that we might enjoy His fellowship.
 - ✓ More than going to live in a place, we are going to live with a Person.
 - ✓ Our salvation is not ultimately about forgiving us and removing our sins and sanctifying us. Salvation is about forgiving our sins and removing our sins and sanctifying us so that we can be with Him. The goal of our salvation is to get us to God. He is not just a resurrected Savior who has provided us with resurrection power over sin (which He has). He is also a returning Savior to bring us to Him.
 - ✓ The goal of our salvation is fellowship — a kind of fellowship that is enjoyed by the Father and Son (Jn.17:21).

- This promise is a reminder to the disciples on that night before the cross that their troubles were not ultimate and their coming solitude was not final. Christ had made every provision for them both now and in eternity. They could trust Him.
- At the beginning of this section He says, “believe in Me” (v. 1); at the end, they will say they do believe (16:30), so He will ask them, **do you believe?** (16:31). That’s a fitting question for us. **Do you believe?**
 - ✓ Do you believe Christ has made provision for you for your sins through His death and resurrection?
 - ✓ Do you believe that Christ is providing for you through His preparation of your heavenly home?
 - ✓ Do you believe that Christ is coming back to take you home?
 - ✓ Do you believe that your eternal home and Christ’s return are enough to see you through your fears, loneliness, and temporary losses on this earth?
 - ✓ Do you believe? You must believe. It is your only hope. It is our only hope.
 - ✓ If you are not trusting in Christ for your salvation from sin today and for your salvation to Him for eternity, then I invite, encourage, and compel you to believe in Him today, right now. Believe that you are a sinner, that only He could pay that debt (and did) and that He died and was resurrected to bring you to Himself — to change your life now and to have you live with Him eternally.
 - ✓ Do you believe? You must believe.

CONCLUSION: R. G. Lee was a pastor in Memphis two generations ago; he told this story from his childhood —

One day he found himself at home on the farm with his mother. She was rocking on the front porch, knitting, as young Robert sat at her feet. He cupped his chin in his hands, stuck his heels up in the air, and looked up at his mama.

“Mama,” he asked, “what was the happiest day in your life?” ...

“Son, there was a horrible war between the states, the North against the South, brother against brother. Your granddaddy — my daddy — went to war. There were no men around. My mother worked alongside the other women in the field. We didn’t have the things we have today. The only salt we had was what we could scrape off the smokehouse floor. The only coffee we had was dried ground corn. It was a hard time.

“The news came that my daddy had been killed in the war. I cannot tell you how dark that day was. When they told my mother, she wept. We didn’t see her weep openly very much during the day, but all night long, I could hear her sobbing — all night long. We did the best we could to get along without daddy, but it was tough to be so alone.

“Then, one day we were sitting on the porch, and my mother looked down the old river road. And she said to me, ‘Elizabeth, that man walking down the road so far away...he looks like your daddy.’ She was snapping beans as she stared across the horizon.

“After a while, as the figure got closer, she said, ‘I declare! That man sure does remind me of your daddy.’

“I said to her, ‘Now, mama, you know Daddy’s dead. Don’t get thoughts like that in your head and in your heart.’

“But then that man turned and cut across the cotton patch and started toward our house. My mother suddenly threw the beans in the air, gathered up her skirt, and began to run!

“She flew across the front yard as fast as she could. She’d recognized that the man was my daddy! He had one arm missing — a sleeve pinned up. He embraced my mother with the other arm. They wept and they laughed and they danced.

“I ran as fast as my legs would let me. When I got to them, I put my arms around my daddy’s knees and I hugged him and rejoiced that my daddy was home.

“Son, I do believe that was the happiest day of my life.”

But, happy as that day was, it will pale into insignificance one day when compared with the glorious moment when we will enter Heaven and come face to face with our Lord Jesus Christ. What joy will be ours! [Lawson, *Heaven Help Us!* 195-7.]

This passage tells us that Jesus has gone to the cross, been resurrected, and He has built a place in Heaven for you. He will come back for you.

Easter morning tells us that Jesus is a crucified Savior. He is a resurrected Savior. And He is a returning Savior. Believe in the Father who sent Him. Believe He is returning. Believe and trust Him to care for you.

BENEDICTION: John 20:30-31

Remember Zoom Room 1, and someone will be at GBC from 1-2 p.m. today if you want to drop off checks.