

HEAVEN: ROOM FOR ALL | JOHN 14:1-7 | November 10, 2019

We often throw thoughts and ideas around about heaven as if we've been there or experienced it ourselves. And in our own minds we think we know what we would like heaven to be like, so it must be like that.

Have you ever traveled somewhere that was just wonderful? Was it wonderful because it was just like you imagined it, or was it wonderful because there were some things about it that exceeded your expectations?

I remember a missions trip that Christina and I took to Prague now more than 20 years ago. We were amazed by the architecture, the historicity, the culture, the people... it was beyond our expectations. Even though we read up on it and even learned a little bit of the language before we left, nothing could have prepared us for the wonderful experience we had! And if I were to try to transport you to where we were, including our frame of mind as we were there, I wouldn't do a very good job.

We humans can do lots of things, but we have never figured out how to grow our own wings and fly. So we have never had the experience of eagles as they soar over mountaintops. Sure, we can fly over mountains in airplanes and we can fly on hand-gliders and in hot air balloons, but the exhilaration of being able to flap your own wings and go up, up, and away; the serenity of being up above mountaintops ... we will never feel those things. And if an eagle tried to describe it to us... well... it wouldn't make a lot of sense to us, would it?

Heaven is way way way beyond all of our expectations, explanations, or imaginations. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, the things that God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Corinthians 2:9)

Today we are going to explore a very familiar passage. Besides John 3:16 & 17 this is probably the best known passage in John's gospel. It's a passage that brings us great comfort, and we have a bazillion songs based on the wording of this passage. Please turn in your Bibles to John 14. John 14, verses 1-7. [Explain, YouVersion and call up Dottie / Jo Anne / Carol to read John 14:1-7 – let us hear the word of the Lord (**opt: ask everyone to stand.**)]

SCRIPTURE READING HERE

Today we are going to talk about who gets to heaven, and we are going to see Jesus in three different ways He relates to Heaven: Jesus, the Builder of Heaven; Jesus, the Bringer of us to Heaven; and Jesus, the Bridge for all to Heaven. All this in a message titled, "Heaven: Room For All." [Pray.] (**opt: seat everyone.**)

JESUS CHRIST, BUILDER OF HEAVEN

Picture with me the scene that was the backdrop for these words of Jesus Christ. Do you remember – this is a question for anyone – where Jesus and the disciples were when He said all this? [Upper Room / Last Supper / Jesus had just washed the disciples' feet, predicted Judas's betrayal of Him, and Peter's denial of Him.]

What kind of mood do you think Jesus was in? [allow for response] Jesus knew that His greatest testing was immediately in front of Him. He also knew what kind of effect this would likely have on these 12, now 11, guys in front of Him, plus the women who followed Him everywhere. He called these disciples because He saw faith and faithfulness in each one, but these qualities were still developing. He knew that what He was about to go through would shake **Him** to the core, let alone these guys. So He says to them, in our language, **DO NOT STRESS**. Do not stress. "Let not your heart be troubled." Almost like it was a choice for the disciples. **Jesus knew what was coming**. He knew that the false accusations, kangaroo court trials and crucifixion He would endure would be too much for them to bear alone. So He says DON'T LET THIS THROW YOU (that's in the Message). JUST AS YOU BELIEVE IN GOD, BELIEVE IN ME. **Faith will keep you in times of shaking**. But not just faith.

Now what I'm going to say will make some of you mad, but (that's never stopped me before)... and, well, I hope you'll think deeply about this because it pervades our culture. I grew up with the Wonderful World of Disney. I had the books before they became movies. I love me a good fairy tale. Do you remember when goodness and virtue were rewarded with good things in the fairy tales? Have you noticed though that these days, Disney instructs our children to believe in themselves? We should all want our children to be confident and have good self-image, but Scripture teaches us that believing in ourselves to the exclusion of allowing God to guide us leads to ruin. What if Jesus all of a sudden said, "I'm just going to believe in Myself..." well, maybe He could do that because He was Jesus, but He didn't. He put His trust in God (1 Peter 2:23), and here He is telling His followers – including us – to believe in Him just as they believe in God. So *just faith* is not enough. **It's not just faith, but faith in Jesus Christ.**

But even as He says this He knows that He is about to shatter their world as He leaves them through death. He knows He will be resurrected in three days and reunited with them, but then He will be gone from them again for a much longer time. He wanted them to be prepared for these separations, so He told them why He was going: He would be gone from them, and from us, so He could prepare a place for us to live with Him. Jesus told His disciples, and all who would listen, that **there is room with Me for you**.

"My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:2)

In Christ, we have belonging. We belong, together, in the Father's house. What does this mean? Well, first it means you have a place in the Father's family. And, secondly (not in priority, but in chronology), you have a place in the Father's presence: you have a place to live after this life is over, in heaven.ⁱ

I believe that **the promise of heaven gives us assurance and hope of eternity**. **My eternity ultimately doesn't depend on me, it depends on God!**

JESUS CHRIST, BRINGER OF US TO HEAVEN (JOHN 14:3)

Jesus told His disciples, let's read it together, **"And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am."** (John 14:3) I love the New Living Translation right here, "When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with Me where I am."

Jesus has a plan and a purpose for everything! And that plan and purpose includes what's good for you and me... WHEN EVERYTHING IS READY, I WILL COME AND GET YOU. You're going to face a lot of trouble, much of it because you've chosen to believe in Me in the midst of a hostile world. It's going to shake you up but keep the faith! Believe in Me just as you have believed in My Father! I'm making special arrangements for you to be with Me for eternity. When it's all set, I'll be coming to pick you up... you can't even imagine the ride, let alone the destination!

What will that destination be like? It's going to blow your mind!!!

As I began to study this passage – generally as I did – I realized right away that there is no small discussion about what "In My Father's house there are many rooms" means. And I'm not sure I liked all of it, because it certainly challenged some cherished imagery that I've had since childhood. But I can assure you of one thing: **heaven is real**. It's not just a made up concept. It's a real place that will be experienced. Also, **heaven is dynamic**. If you think all you're going to be doing in eternity is sitting on a cloud and strumming a harp, I PROMISE YOU'RE WRONG. And if you can't think of anything more boring than a never-ending worship service of the kind we experience, or if you're worried about being stuck in the same space for all of eternity, THEN I HAVE GOOD NEWS FOR YOU! Heaven won't be like that!

The book of Revelation gives us some glimpses of heaven. The most detailed look at heaven is actually the New Jerusalem, in Revelation 21. Decorated in semiprecious stones, with streets and walls of purest gold, and with gates made of gigantic solid pearls, we see the New Jerusalem descend from heaven and we are told that only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life get to enter and live there.

There is an earlier description of heaven in Revelation 4. It's an immense, majestic scene and the Apostle John who witnessed the visions in the book of Revelation could only say, "It was like... it was like... it was like..."

And here the most vivid description of heaven describes God: the burning presence of God the Father; the Son Jesus Christ, Word of God and Warrior-King; and the Spirit of God moving among the lampstands of the churches. The Light of the Presence of God cancels need of the sun and the moon! From His throne come what appears to be arcing rainbows of dazzling brilliance and His voice sounds like thunder as He reigns on His throne on top of a crystal sea!

JESUS is preparing this place called Heaven so He can bring us to it. He is better than Antoni Gaudi, Frank Lloyd Wright, Chip and Joanna Gaines, or the Property Brothers, and once He's finished with the construction it will be our Forever Home.

Descriptions of heaven are given to us so we can know heaven is a real place that can be seen and experienced. However, the descriptions are vague or are comparisons because it's not about the trappings of heaven! It's not about the amenities! It's not about us or our comfort! Forever and always, it's about Jesus! In His presence is fullness of joy!

We speak a lot about heaven being in the presence of God in full expression for all of eternity. You know Jesus talked about another place, too. A place where the fullness of God's presence is absent.

When I think about eternal life, I often think of the story Jesus told about the beggar Lazarus and the unnamed rich man. (Luke 16:19-31)

Nowhere does Jesus say this account is a parable. It is not a fable. There is heaven and there is hell, or in this case Abraham's Bosom and Hades.

The rich man was not in Hades because he was wealthy during his life on earth. Lazarus was not in Abraham's Bosom because he was poor. The reason the rich man was in Hades was because he did not believe Moses and the prophets. His **unbelief** landed him in a place of torture. And on the other side, it was the **belief** of Lazarus the beggar and God's grace available to all, that brought him to a place of eternal comfort. We see in this story a contrast between people who die believing in the promises of God and people who die having rejected them.

In the presence of God, there was comfort for Lazarus, the beggar. In the absence of God's presence, there was torment for the rich man. I want to explore this a little bit more with you – about what we know God's presence brings and what an absence of His presence must be like. (Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 14:10 both support the verbiage of "absent from the presence of God.")

In God's *presence* there is

Holiness
Righteousness
Freedom
Peace
Pardon
Joy
Love
Healing

In the *absence of God's presence* there is

Unholiness
Unrighteousness
Bondage
Anxiety, stress, strife
Judgment
Misery
Fear
Pain

I'm not trying to sell fire insurance today, but we often ignore the reality of a place of eternal judgment, and in doing so we lose the excitement of heaven, and take the edge off of the joy of our salvation.

[And, you know, the blessings of God's presence can be a real thing in our lives and even in our church. We know that there is peace, love, pardon and healing in His presence and yet we so often are content not to lean in, not to seek His presence, not to push through the cold callous feelings in our hearts when we approach worship. But holiness, freedom, and joy can be borne in our hearts and spirits and lives right here and now, as well as in the great eternity God has in store for all those who love Him. But now, back to heaven and hell.]

Why would a loving God send people to hell or someplace where His presence is not fully expressed? A loving God doesn't send people there... people are quite capable of sending themselves to hell! A loving God made the way so that no one need to be in a place of eternal judgment and separation from God.

And so, finally today, we are going to talk about

JESUS CHRIST, BRIDGE FOR ALL TO HEAVEN (14:4-7)

Let's read again Jesus' words in v. 4: **"And you know the way to where I am going."**

For Jesus, The way was the cross. For Him to go to the Father He had to do the Father's will. And even though He prayed, "Father if there's any other way, let this cup pass from Me," there was no other way to accomplish salvation except for Him, the Lamb of God, to lay down His life for humanity to satisfy the justice and holiness of God.

For the rest of us, the Way is Jesus. I am so glad that Thomas asked the question he asked in v. 5 – "Jesus, we have NO IDEA WHAT YOU'RE SAYING! WHAT IS THIS WAY TO THE FATHER YOU SPEAK OF?"

Again, let's read together what Jesus says in verses 6 and 7, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you really know Me, you will know My Father as well. From now on, you do know Him and have seen Him."

John Wesley said, "To the question concerning the way, He answers, I am the way. To the question concerning knowledge, He answers, I am the truth. To the question whither, I am the life."ⁱⁱ

As the Way, Jesus is the only means of access to the Father.

We must believe in and receive Him. (John 1:12)

"But that seems so exclusive," come the protests. Does it? Really, the most inclusive Figure in history – the one who sought out the poor, the infirmed, the outcast, the marginalized, the neglected? The One who said, "I have come to seek and save the lost?" The One who is the Son of God but emptied Himself and took the form of a servant for you? The One who came among humanity not to destroy, but to bring us to God? Believing in Jesus seems *exclusive*? God, forgive us.

As the truth, He is the true reflection of God.

We have seen His glory, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

As the life, He is the Source and Giver of life physically (1:3-4) and from above (3:5-8).

If we know Christ, then we do know God (14:7). And we hear God's voice through His Son, say this to ALL who will believe on His Name:

In My house there is a place for you. In My home there is space for you. When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so you can be with Me always. Amen.

Supplemental material:

God created everything through Him, and nothing was created except through Him. ⁴ The Word gave life to everything that was created, and His life brought light to everyone.” (John 1:3-4, NLT)

⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit they cannot enter into the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit.” (John 3:5-8)

BONUS INFO:

"In My Father's house are many *rooms*," in the King James Bible said, "In My Father's house are many *mansions*." To us today, we think of mansions as huge, opulent homes surrounded by perfectly kept grounds that you'd never want or need to leave. But originally, it simply meant, "a place to stop and rest."

The word "mansions" comes from the Latin word *mansio* (Jesus never spoke in Latin, but the Roman Catholic Church translated the Scriptures into Latin, and then the Protestants translated it into other languages. Eventually after the first English, German, etc., translations from Latin, Protestant scholars as well as Roman Catholic scholars began to have access to earlier original manuscripts and copies, in Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew. whew! Stay with me...) Influenced by the Latin translation, the great Bible translator William Tyndale first put the English word "mansions" in John 14:6 shortly after Christopher Columbus "discovered" the "New World". Later, we changed the word "mansions" to mean what it means to us today and inserted that meaning in this verse in the King James Bible.

In his German translation of the Bible, Martin Luther used the word "Wohnungen." Surprisingly, that word didn't change as much as our word "mansions," and "Wohnungen" still means "apartments." This might seem distressing at first (like, a downgrade from "mansions"), but keep in mind: GOD STILL OWNS HEAVEN. He is building it and maintaining it and keeping it secure until the appointed time when we'll get the keys to our new place. And after we start to live there, it will still be rebuilt, maintained, and kept secure by Him. That's why we can say that eternity ultimately doesn't depend on us, it depends on God!

Does knowing anything about heaven encourage you? Does it help you stay motivated to stay close to Christ in difficult times? Why or why not? Feel free to email Andrew your thoughts at andrew.irvin@fumcbakersfield.org.

ⁱ Much of the theological underpinning of this message is found in this exegetical guide to John 14: <https://bible.org/seriespage/17-exegetical-commentary-john-14>

ⁱⁱ John Wesley. <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=wes&b=43&c=14>