



IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

SERIES: THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

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John 13: 31-14:11

31st Message

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We are going to talk about heaven this morning. For many Christians, the thought of heaven seems remote and distant. One has to die to get there, they say, and who wants to think about that? But we are supposed to think about it. C. S. Lewis once said, "Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but He will not encourage us to mistake them for home." The trouble is, we do mistake them for home.

As we grow older, however, we find that getting what we always wanted is not as fulfilling as we thought it would be. We are like a child opening a pile of presents on Christmas morning: each gift only amplifies our needs. We ask, "Is this all there is?" Friendships fail to touch the deeper currents of life and love for which we long. Parents, especially fathers, don't quite come through for us. For some, even mention of the word "father" awakens blighted memories. Education yields only temporary satisfaction. Recently, we had to put our Tim, our four-year-old, in kindergarten because he longs to be like his older brothers and go to school. Now he's disappointed because he doesn't get any homework! Joel, our high school freshman, just shakes his head. Even success never seems final. Ray Kroc, the founder of McDonald's, said, "Nothing recedes like success." Money talks, but mostly it lies, deceiving us into thinking that lots of it will bring us satisfaction and security. Fame is fleeting. Our 15 minutes of fame promised us by Andy Warhol comes and goes. Marriage is not quite as fulfilling as we had hoped. Retirement merely brings destination sickness.

In the end we find there no such thing as lasting earthly joy, nothing that can meet the deep longings we feel inside. All of our pain is meant to drive us to the only thing in life that truly satisfies, and that is knowing God. So we want to talk about heaven this morning, and the assurance that we as Christians can have that we are going there.

We pick up our studies once more in the gospel of John, chapter 13, and verse 31:

When therefore he had gone out [this is referring to Judas, who had turned his back on the Light and gone out into the darkness], Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified [With the departure of Judas the betrayal was under way; the Passover plot had been set in motion.], and God is glorified in Him; if God is glorified in Him, God will also glorify Him in Himself, and will glorify Him immediately.

Now that Judas had departed, the cross had become a certainty for Jesus. In fact, he refers to the cross as if it had already happened. I think he is revealing to his disciples the certainties that will keep him steady as he faces his death.

The first certainty is that the cross would be the Son's glory. There his true worth was made manifest, for it was there that he died for us. Origen, one of the early Church Fathers, called the cross Jesus' "humble glory."

The second certainty is that God would be glorified in him. We see the worth of the Father in the cross of Christ; his death revealed God's glory as well. As we look around in the world we have difficulty seeing God's love, but when we see the cross, we know for certain that he loves us. There is a strange idea among some Christians that Jesus was an innocent sufferer, that in the cross he was placating the wrath of an angry God who was about to smite humanity. But that is wrong. The Bible says, "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." The cross reveals the love and mercy and grace of the Father.

The final certainty in Jesus' mind was that God would glorify him immediately. There would be no delay; within a few hours he would be arrested, tried and crucified.

It is at this point that Jesus launches into the Upper Room Discourse proper. In his washing of the disciples' feet he exemplified something very powerful, but now begins to teach them.

"Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You shall seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, I now say to you also, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

In a recent study we mentioned that our Lord's concern in these hours was to instruct his disciples about the future and how to live in troublesome times. The way to survive, according to Jesus, is to love one another. The commandment is not really new. Actually it's an old commandment (found in Leviticus 19:18), but here Jesus renews it (that is the meaning of "new").

We can't expect the world to demonstrate much love. In fact, the Lord predicted that the world would become more loveless and cold. Christians should be realists. We should do what we can to change the world, but realistically, our world is not going to change very much until our Lord comes back to permanently change it. Jesus said that there would always be war and rumors of war until the end of time. Bumper stickers that say things like "Make Love Not War," and "Arms are for Embracing," sound good, and they are expressions of legitimate desires, but they avail nothing. In this world there will be hatred. But Christians can love each other. And we must do so. Love, in fact, is that rare element that will attract people's attention and draw them to Jesus. As the hymn puts it, "They will know we are Christians by our love."

I think Jesus had more to say about love at this point (he will return to this topic later), but he is interrupted by Peter, so he digresses. This was typical of Jesus. He was always sensitive to people because he cared about their needs. The discourse is hard to outline from here on, because it is more

a dialogue than a discourse. The Lord would say something, the apostles would interrupt him, and he would digress to respond to their questions. I think that when Peter heard him say, "I am going away," that was all he heard. He didn't hear a word that Jesus said about loving one another.

Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?"

These men had left their vocations to follow Jesus and now he says he is leaving. "Wait a minute," they are saying, in effect, "what's this about leaving? Where are you going?"

It is significant that Jesus calls them "little children." Peter's question, and Jesus' response, bring to mind a picture of a diplomat who is deeply involved in shuttle diplomacy, trying to reconcile nations. The diplomat is trying to explain to his little boy what he is doing, but the boy can't comprehend the enormity of his father's undertaking. He just knows that his father is going away and that he already misses him. So he asks, "Where are you going, Daddy?" Jesus is talking about issues of cosmic import, but all Peter wants to know is, where was he going? Our Lord has to deal with this, so he delays his discussion about love; he will pick it up later.

Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you shall follow later." [And that happened. Tradition holds that Peter was crucified, upside-down, in Rome; he did follow the Lord in death.] Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." [And he was willing. Later he was ready to take on a squad of soldiers to protect his Lord.] Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a cock shall not crow, until you deny Me three times.

Peter had a lot to learn before he could follow Jesus. He had miles to go before he slept. He had to learn how to fail, how inadequate he was. He had to learn more about the Lord's sufficiency. Augustine said, "Every man is immortal until his work is done." We could add, every person is immortal until God's work in him is done. Peter says, "Lord, I want to follow you," but Jesus replies, "You can't go with me now, but you will follow later. You first have to learn what a failure you are and how to recover from failure. You have to learn how to feed my sheep. There are things to learn before you can go home." How this must have shattered Peter. In fact, it so devastated him we don't hear from again until chapter 18. I am sure all of the disciples were emotionally crushed by our Lord's leaving. One of them had already departed to betray him; Peter is now told he is going to deny him. All of them had burned their bridges to follow him, and now it appears their dream is dying. They are so stunned they don't know what to say.

Jesus knew this, so he comforts them, picking up their troubled hearts. Chapter 14:

"Let not your heart be troubled [literally, "Stop being troubled in heart."]; believe in God, believe also in Me.

Faith is the cure for a troubled heart. That was what Jesus told them in the boat when the storm struck. "Believe in Me": This is his invariable response when we are anxious and upset. But he does not leave it there, because we need something more to believe in, something to count on. We must have some facts to believe. Thus what follows now are the things we should believe in order to keep our hearts from being troubled.

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan describes the Pilgrim, Christian, who is making his way to Celestial City. In one scene Christian comes to a very steep hill, and he gets down on his hands and knees and begins crawling up the hill. Sighing, he takes out his scroll and reads about the joys that are ahead, and he continues scrambling up the hill. Then he comes to an arbor, planted by the Lord of the hill, a place where pilgrims can rest. He crawls into the shade, and begins to read the scroll. Suddenly his attention is caught by the beauty of the robes that have been given to him, and in his contemplation, he falls asleep. While he is asleep, the scroll falls out of his hand and rolls down the hill. It is dark when he awakens. He realizes he has stayed too long in the arbor, and he starts crawling up the mountain again. He is almost to the top when two men meet him. The men tell him that there are lions on the other side of the hill, and that they are going back because they are afraid. Christian reaches into his tunic for the scroll to find out what to do about the lions. (He always turns to the scroll when he is unsure and afraid.) But he finds that it is missing and he has to go all the way back down to look for it. When he finds it, he unrolls it only to discover that the lions are chained. So he knows that he is safe. His heart is no longer troubled. In spite of the roar of the lions, he knows they are chained.

That is what the Word does for us. It gives us the truth to believe. And that is what Jesus does for his disciples.

Here, then, are the principles he shared that night that we can count on when our hearts are troubled.

"In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

That is the first thing to remember: *Heaven is a reality.* There is a Father's house. We can know for sure that there is a heaven, that there is life after death. Heaven is not a fantasy. At the end of our lives we do not enter into oblivion. We do not cease to exist. At the end of our lives is not reincarnation. We are not going to come back as a crocodile, or even as another human being. After I die, I am not going to get another chance to play in the NBA. At the end of our life is the Father's house. What a wonderful, helpful metaphor. It pictures much for us. Heaven is like going home. It is what home was meant to be like. There there is warmth, security, safety, and belonging — exactly what we have been looking for all our lives.

Paul Tournier, in his classic book, *A Place For You*, deals with the need we all feel for "a place." At the beginning of the book he talks about a young man he counseled who was born into an unhappy home. The man developed a sense of failure and carried that instability into adulthood, with the result that he never was able to settle down into any one area of life. Once as they were working through these issues, the young man tried to put into words what he felt. "Basically," he said, "I'm always looking for a place somewhere to be."

That place is heaven. Every longing of our nature, all our desires, aspirations, hungers and thirsts, are nothing more than manifestations of our desire for God.

Heaven is a reality.

Here is the second thing to remember: *Heaven is a place of rest and realization.* Jesus says that it is a very spacious place with many rooms, many "dwelling places." The idea be-

hind that word is one of rest. As the old spiritual puts it, "I'm gonna' lay down my burdens down by the riverside." The slaves when they were brought over had no place to lay down their burdens. They didn't have the week-ends off; they didn't have a vacation in the summertime; they didn't look forward to retirement. That is why a place to lay their burdens down was so important to them.

That is true for us as well. One of these days we are going to step into the Father's house, and we are going to lay down all our burdens, all the stress, all the pain that has taken such toll on our bodies.

Here is how Richard Baxter, a 17th century Puritan, describes this laying down of burdens:

There is no such thing as grief and sorrow there, nor is there any such thing as a pale face, a listless body, feeble joints, decrepit age, painful sickness, gripping fears, consuming cares, nor whatsoever deserves the name of evil. Indeed, a gale of groans and sighs, a stream of tears accompany us to the very gates, and then bid us farewell forever.

I was thinking about this last night as I watched the Baseball World Series on television. The network played the tape, as they do every year, of the 1986 series game when Bill Buckner, the Boston Red Sox first baseman, booted a ground ball in the bottom of the ninth inning. If he had caught it and just stepped on the base, the Red Sox would have won. Forever he will be remembered as the man who kicked away the World Series.

Many of us have things like that in our lives, things we kicked away, and we can't forget.

All of our feelings of sadness, our heaviness of heart, our despair over broken relationships, our depression over painful circumstances, our memories of past sin, we will lay down all of them.

Heaven is a place of rest and realization .

Here is how John describes it in these words from the book of Revelation:

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; neither shall the sun beat down on them, nor any heat; for the Lamb in the center of the throne shall be their shepherd, and shall guide them to springs of the water of life; and God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.

Here is the third truth that is revealed in these verses: *Heaven is living with Jesus forever.* Verse 3:

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, {there} you may be also.

Whether he comes for us in the second coming, or whether he comes to us in death, like he did for Stephen who saw the Lord by the right hand of the Father just before he died, he is coming back for us. Helmut Thielke, the German theologian, used to say, "When I see the Lord, I'm going to say, 'I knew you meant it.'" Jesus is coming back, and we are going to be with him forever.

That is what makes heaven so heavenly: Our Lord is there. And what makes hell so hellish is that he is not there. Not one of us has ever experienced the complete absence of God in our lives. And neither have we experienced his complete presence. Heaven is the complete presence of Christ, hell, his total absence. Remember the children's song we

used to sing: "Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace; I'm gonna see my Savior's face, Heaven is a wonderful place." That's what makes heaven so heavenly: Our Lord is there.

And all of this is due to what our Lord did, not anything we have done. It is not because God regards us as worthy or deserving. My friend Ted Wise, who was a pastor at PBC for a number of years, came to Christ during the Jesus Movement in the '60's. He used to say that when he gets to heaven, some of his old cronies who have gotten there also are going to say to him, "Ted, how did you get here?" Ted would say, "I'm going to point to Jesus and say, 'I'm with him!'" That is how we get there: We align ourselves with Jesus.

When David Roper was College Pastor at PBC, he had a friend named Bob, who was gay. Bob became a Christian, and he struggled and fought with his homosexuality. He wanted to be rid of it, but he kept failing. Dave met him for lunch one day, and as they were driving through the Stanford University campus, he asked Bob, "How is it going? Bob buried his face in his hands and started to cry. "It's the pits!" he said. A second later, a moving van ran a red light and struck Dave's VW broadside. Bob died instantly. At one moment, Bob was looking at Dave, feeling shame and embarrassment, and the very next face he saw was that of Jesus, saying, "It's all right Bob. I called you home."

Ruth Graham's poem seems appropriate here:

*Perhaps he landed on that shore
Not in full sail, but rather a bit of broken wreckage for him to
gather.
He [Jesus] walks those shores seeking such who have believed a
little, suffered much; and so been washed ashore.
Perhaps of all the souls redeemed
They most adore.*

I am glad we do not have to work for our salvation. We don't get to heaven because we have done something right. We will get there because Jesus has prepared the way for us through his death and resurrection. One of these days he is going to come back, and we will be with him forever.

Heaven is living with Jesus forever.

Here is the last certainty that Jesus shares with us: *We can know for certain that we are going to heaven.* That may seem like an audacious thing to say, but a Christian is one who believes what Jesus says. And if he says we can know, than it is true. We don't need to be afraid.

But look at what Thomas, the resident agnostic, says:

"And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.

Thomas questions whether anyone can know the way. Must we struggle through life, wondering if there is a heaven, and if there is, are we going there? No. Jesus said we can do better than that. We can know. He is the way to God, the one will grant us the very life of God. There is only one way.

If you want to get to the Father's house, than you must enter through Jesus. There is only one way to heaven, and that is through him. He is *the* way. He is the truth. He tells us the truth about life and death and heaven. And he is the

life. He is the only one who can impart the life of God to us. I didn't say that, Jesus did. Therefore we can know.

"If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him."

Jesus' primary task was to reveal the Father. God is invisible, but in Jesus we can "see" what he is like.

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us."

That is the hunger that is in all of us: to see God. Jesus is the one who came to reveal him. If you want to know what God is like, then look at Jesus. And you don't need a picture, because what he looks like is not important. What is important is what he did and what he said. When you listen to Jesus' words and when you look at his life, then you are listening to God and watching him work.

Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you [plural, i.e. apostles], and {yet} you [singular] have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on account of the works themselves."

In other words, if you want to know God, you have to know Jesus. If you want to hear the words of God, you only have to listen to the words of Jesus. There isn't any other way. If you have listened to the words of Jesus and you have put your trust into him as the way and the truth and the life, then you know the Father.

We can know for certain that we are going to heaven.

One of these days we are going to be in the Father's house. That is our certain destiny. We are going to be together forever. We are going to see in their redeemed bodies those that we love and have sent on before us. We are going to see Jack Bradley, Art David, Timmy Lindholm, and Jack Perkins. I'm going to meet those two little Morgans I never knew here on earth. One day we are going to step into eternity, like Enoch did, passing from this life to the next. Death, the thing that we dread so much, will merely be a transition. The Lord is going to be there to greet us and gather us into the Father's house where there is warmth and security, where there is no evil, and nothing to fear.

C. S. Lewis, in his final children's book, *The Last Battle*, has this to say of heaven:

"There was a railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are - as you used to call it in the shadowlands - dead. The term is over; the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning." And as he spoke he no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia have only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter one of the Great story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.

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