

Heaven and the Promise of the Lord's Return

John 14:1-3

John 14:1-3 - *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.² In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.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."*

Background Notes

In John 14 the Lord was speaking with His disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. Why did He tell the disciples, *"Let not your heart be troubled"*? Well, at this point the disciples were bewildered and discouraged. Why?

- In chapter 12 the Lord had told the disciples that He was going to be crucified. *"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself."* This He said, signifying by what death He would die (12:32-33).

- In chapter 13 the Lord had revealed to them that one of them would be a traitor. John 13:21: *"When Jesus had said these things, He was troubled in spirit, and testified and said, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me.'"*

- Moving on, He told the disciples that He was going to leave them. John 13:33, *"Little children, I shall be with you a little while longer. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, 'Where I am going, you cannot come,' so now I say to you."*

- At the end of chapter 13, the Lord told Peter that he would deny Him three times. John 13:38, *"Jesus answered him, 'Will you lay down your life for My sake? Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.'"*

So I think it's easy to understand why the disciples were discouraged and bewildered - and I think we would feel the same way. It was in this context, then, that the Lord said to them, *"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."* Trust Me.

In verses 2-3 the Lord told the disciples that He was not going to leave them permanently. He explained that He was going away to prepare a place for them. And then He promised He would come again for them – and they would be with Him forever! Was the Lord speaking of the death of a believer? No, it is a reference to the **return of the Lord**. So here in John 14:1-3, we not only have a description of Heaven, but we also have the promise of the Lord's return.

Now let's ask a theological question. The Lord said, *"I will come again."* This "return" to which the Lord referred: was He speaking of the Rapture of the Church, or was He speaking about His return to the earth to set up His kingdom? We

believe He had the Rapture of believers in view here. What is the difference between the Rapture of the Church, and the Lord's return to set up his kingdom?

First let's discuss the return of the Lord to this earth to set up His kingdom. In the Olivet Discourse, in which our Lord taught about the future, He spoke of His return in power, glory, and judgment to this earth. He was speaking about His return to the earth to set up His kingdom. The Olivet Discourse is found in Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Let's read two verses from Matthew 24:29-30: *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."*

This passage describes the return of the Lord to this earth to set up His kingdom. Furthermore, all the Old Testament passages dealing with the coming of the Messiah to set up His kingdom here on earth appear to refer to this same return – the return of which our Lord spoke in the Olivet Discourse.

However, in the Epistles - letters that were specifically written to the Church - we find a "return of the Lord" that appears to be very different. In the return of the Lord mentioned in the Epistles, He does not return to this earth in power, glory, and judgment. No cosmic signs are associated with this return. All the earth does not see Him. This return does not occur after the particular time of tribulation on the earth that is mentioned in the Olivet Discourse.

No, the "coming" mentioned in the Epistles appears to occur *before* the end-time Tribulation period mentioned in the Olivet Discourse. The coming or return that is mentioned in the Epistles is particularly for the *Church*. At this return the Lord does not come to the earth. The Lord will come in the air, and Christians will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. That's why this "coming" is sometimes called the "Rapture" - a word with the root meaning, "caught up."

There are two specific passages that deal with this return for the Church – 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. Let's read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, that speaks of the event we call the Rapture of the Church. *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*

So there are many differences, then, between the return of the Lord to this earth to set up His kingdom, and the return of the Lord for believers, or the "Rapture" of the Church. Two great passages in the epistles, 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, deal with the Rapture of the Church.

All the other passages that refer to the return of the Lord (in the Old Testament and in the Gospels) look ahead to the return of the Lord to this earth to set up His kingdom - *with one exception!* There is one passage in the Gospels that appears to refer to the Rapture, and this passage is John 14:2-3. Notice verse 3 once again, *"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."* We believe this verse refers to the Rapture of the Church.

Doctrinal / Teaching Point

Heaven is a place where “it doesn’t get any better than this!”

“It doesn’t get any better than this!” I’m sure you have heard that expression used before, right? We use it all the time! Imagine sitting on the beach in the Caribbean during the winter season. Warm sunshine, turquoise-blue water, sipping iced tea – “It doesn’t get any better than this!”

Well, it **does** get better than this! Much better! **Heaven** is the only place where “it doesn’t get any better than this!” Let’s briefly look at three reasons from verses 2-3 that tell us why Heaven is the place where “it doesn’t get any better than this!”

- First, **Heaven is a place called home.** *“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”* “My Father’s house,” or Heaven, is a place called home. That’s really the idea of *“in My Father’s house are many mansions...”*

From this verse we might get the idea that when we get to Heaven, we’ll each have our own big private mansion. No, that is **not** the idea! The thought is that there are many rooms in the Father’s house. In other words, there’s room for everyone, and we will all be together as one big happy family! God’s family!

Heaven is **home!** Maybe the best way we could capture the idea here is to think of the expression, “going home for the holidays.” Now if that expression gives you a warm happy feeling because you’re thinking of the whole family happily gathered together for Thanksgiving or Christmas - sitting around the fireplace, laughing and sharing family memories, jokes and secrets. If you’re thinking of something like that, you’re getting close to the concept expressed here.

Heaven is home! And the great thing is, it doesn’t end after the holidays. It’s eternal!

- Second, **Heaven is a place that’s prepared for us.** *“I go to prepare a place for you”(v2).* Heaven is a place that’s especially prepared for us! The Lord knows all about us – after all, He created us. Certainly He knows what’s going to be best for us. I’m sure some of you are hoping that there’s golf in heaven, or skiing in heaven, or great entertainment in heaven, or maybe even delicious calorie-free food so you can enjoy feasting without worrying about your weight!

Well, all joking aside, Heaven will be the **greatest**, because the Lord has prepared it for us! And if you’re believer, you will be there! It’s our eternal home and it’s specifically prepared for us.

- Third, Heaven is a place where the Lord Jesus is! And He wants us to be there, too! Notice 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.”* The Lord wants us to be with Him forever! It’s going to be great!

Did you ever take a trip, looking forward to seeing someone special, but when you arrived that special person wasn't there? A very disappointing experience! Well, you don't have to worry about anything like that happening in Heaven, because our Lord Jesus will be there - for sure! In fact, we see here that the Lord Jesus Himself is coming to get us to take us there! He says He'll *"receive us unto Himself."* He wants us to be with Him! And we'll be with Him forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 says, *"And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*

Heaven is a place where "it doesn't get any better than this!"

Practical Application

Think about heaven when you're discouraged!

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me."

In essence, in these verses the Lord was saying to the disciples, "Right now you're feeling discouraged. But think of this: you believe in God, even though you can't see Him. Now believe in Me the same way. Even though I'm going away and you won't see Me physically here on this earth, cheer up! Don't worry! You can be sure that even though you can't see Me, I am always thinking of you, and I'll be preparing a special place for you. And then I'll be coming back for you to take you to be with Me forever!"

To cheer His disciples up, the Lord told them about Heaven! In the same way, when we as disciples are discouraged, let's think about Heaven. When you're discouraged with your job, or your circumstances, or even your ministry, remember: this is not a permanent situation. It's temporary! Let's think about Heaven when we're discouraged.

We're all vulnerable to discouragement. I get discouraged when new things get damaged. For example, my car: a little more than a year ago it was brand new, but within a month there were two "dings" on the trunk! They were little dings, nothing really big, but I thought, "Why did that damage have to happen to an expensive item like a car?" That really bothered me, and I was discouraged!

Well, how did I cheer myself up? I remembered Heaven! I said to myself, "A hundred years from now, what difference will those two little dings on the car make? In view of eternity, they're no big deal!"

My example is a very minor discouragement, but this is very practical. We can turn our thoughts to Heaven in any circumstance that makes us vulnerable to discouragement. And in times of major trouble or tragedy, think about Heaven!

Think about Heaven when you're discouraged!