

A Study in John 14:1–3 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

The Father's House and the Coming of the Lord

We are reading from John chapter 14, beginning at verse 1, and from 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, beginning at verse 13.

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." — John 14:1–3

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." — 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness." — 1 Thessalonians 5:2–5

The Context — Troubled Hearts

These verses in John 14 were spoken by the Lord Jesus in a very particular situation. They form part of the great discourse of chapters 13–17, His last words to the disciples before they went to the garden and Judas came with the band of soldiers. The Lord, being God, knew exactly what lay immediately before Him. And He knew that the hearts of the disciples were troubled — troubled by what He had been

saying about His going away, and troubled by what Peter had just heard: the cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice.

So He says: Let not your heart be troubled. You believe in God — believe also in Me. Did they not believe in Him? Of course they did. The point is that God had always been an unseen object of their faith. Now the Lord was telling them He was going to the Father — and He too would become an unseen object of their faith. They must believe on Him as one who has gone away into the glory, just as they had always believed on the God they could not see. That is the force of the comparison.

Many Mansions — The Father's House

In my Father's house are many mansions. The word mansions has accumulated associations in English that are not intended. The thought is simply of many dwelling places — many abodes in the Father's house. We do not want to think of geography. We want to think of spiritual nearness to the Father's heart. The Father's house is where His love reigns and where the objects of His affection are gathered — supremely, His own Son.

The Lord Jesus has gone there, and by His personal presence there as the victorious, risen Savior, that place is ready for us. We are fellow heirs with Him, as Scripture teaches elsewhere. The place was prepared by His entering it — not by 1,900 years of construction. He is the eternal Son of God. He changes water to wine at the command of His Word; He opens blind eyes and restores withered hands at a word. The idea that He is somewhere occupied in building dwellings, and that it has taken Him nearly two millennia, is not what is being taught here. His entry as the risen, glorified man — having accomplished the Father's glory, shed His blood, and saved His people — that entry prepared the place. We are fit to be there because His blood has cleansed us.

If It Were Not So, I Would Have Told You

This phrase has caused some difficulty. What does the Lord mean? The Jewish disciples had a right expectation: the prophets of Israel had plainly taught that there was a coming Messiah-King who would reign. That expectation was entirely correct. But because of the Lord's rejection, it was to be deferred, and God was going to do another work in the meantime — forming a bride for Christ, composed of all believers, which is also called the assembly. Their minds were still occupied with the expected kingdom.

The Lord is saying: if this new thing — the Father's house, the place being prepared for you — were not something I was going to bring you into, I would have told you. But I am going to go and prepare that place. He was introducing an expectation entirely new to them. And then, when the heavenly work is

complete, we are taken home. After that, God will take up and fulfill the ancient covenants with Israel and the promises given through the prophets, for He must make good on them.

I Will Come Again — A Personal Coming

If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. Down through the centuries many Christians have been told that this verse refers to death — that the coming of the Lord to receive us is the coming of death. It was with the arising of dispensational truth in the early nineteenth century that this error was finally dealt a serious blow. This is not death. This is the personal coming of the Lord Jesus Himself.

How did He go? Bodily — Acts 1 records the ascension. He says, if I go. He will come in the same way He went. Bodily. He will take us up to be with Him — not merely take our spirits at death, but receive us bodily. That is what the entire passage is about. And of course, a great change in our bodies will be required: this mortal must put on immortality; this corruptible must put on incorruption. When He comes, His mighty power will instantaneously transform our bodies to be like unto His own body of glory, as we read at the end of Philippians 3.

Notice, too, how the verse is phrased: not I will come again and take you to the Father's house, but I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. It is not about a place — it is about a Person. He is looking for our companionship. He wants us where He is. Such is the Savior: not only has He cleansed us and made us fit, He is going to come personally to get us.

The phrase where I am appears several times in John's Gospel, and it is always pointing forward to this. Where I am, He says to the unbeliever, you cannot come. Where I am, there shall My servant be. It is a characteristic expression pointing to His being there in the Father's house.

The Posture of Waiting and Watching

The New Testament consistently puts us in a posture of waiting and expectancy. In the parables, the harvest comes in the same year as the sowing; when the Lord delivers talents to the servants, He returns in their lifetime. Everything is expressed so as not to foster the expectation of a long delay. In Luke 12, the servants are pictured with hands on the doorknob, so that the moment the Master knocks they open immediately. The Lord condemns the servant who says in his heart, my Lord delays His coming, and begins to eat and drink with the drunken.

In 1 Thessalonians 1, we read that the Thessalonians turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to await His Son from heaven. We were saved to wait. There is a difference between waiting and watching. When you are waiting for someone you love — at a train station, say, with your

eyes on the entrance — that is both waiting and watching. That is the expectancy the Lord calls for: looking for Him to come at any time, in our lifetime, perhaps this very hour.

1 Thessalonians 4 — The Dead in Christ

The Thessalonians had been so expecting the Lord to come that when some of the brethren died they were worried: are those who have fallen asleep going to miss something at His coming? The Apostle Paul, writing by the word of the Lord, addresses this directly. He does not call them dead — he calls them those who are asleep. That is how the Lord looks at them: they are asleep in Jesus. Death, for the believer, is the Lord putting them to rest.

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again — and we do — just as surely as He rose, God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. When the Lord comes from glory, He will bring them with Him. But how? This is explained by the two-stage character of His coming. He comes first for His saints — raising the dead and transforming the living, catching them all up to the Father's house. Then, afterward, He comes in power and great glory as the rider on the white horse of Revelation 19, with His saints in that great train following Him. Those who have been sleeping will be there because they were previously raised. Not one will be missing.

The Shout, the Voice, the Trump — and Caught Up

The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout — a shout of command, like a military assembly call — with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God. His commanding power goes forth and the dead in Christ rise first. Then the living are caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.

The word caught up is used three times in the New Testament. In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul says he knew a man in Christ who was caught up to the third heaven. In Revelation 12, the man-child who shall rule the nations with a rod of iron was caught up to God and His throne — that is the Lord Jesus in His ascension, the only one of whom it is described this way. And here, we shall be caught up. He was caught up; the model Apostle was caught up; and every one of us will be caught up. Whether we have died and been buried, or whether we are alive when He comes, we shall every one be caught up to be with Him where He is. And so shall we ever be with the Lord. It is an eternal portion.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words. May our hearts be so occupied with Christ that when He comes we shall not have to turn very far — looking for Him already, waiting for His Son from heaven.