

John 14:1–3

The Heavenly Hope

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The Introduction of the Heavenly Hope

There is another aspect in which scripture presents the coming of the Lord. It is part of that immense change intimated in the Gospel of John, when the public testimony was closed, and the Lord unbosoms Himself to the family of God, before He gave Himself up to the band led by the traitor for His apprehension and death. He had already and publicly announced His crucifixion (John 12:32). The time was come to leave the world.

John 13 introduces the new subject. It is a distinct transfer from earth to heaven. Messianic hopes are wholly eclipsed. The chosen nation are no more in evidence than the city or the sanctuary. It is not the Lord correcting the earthly expectations of the disciples as they drew His attention to the buildings of the temple, or predicting that not one stone should be left upon another, but be broken down. Nor is it the chief disciples coming privately to Him on Olivet and asking, When shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of Thy presence, and of the consummation of the age? Here we breathe a wholly different atmosphere; and the Lord by deed and word leads on His own to unprecedented dealings of grace soon to dawn on them, in proper Christian privilege and responsibility, for which the cross as seen in the light of God laid the basis.

If He thus left this world, He would demonstrate His love to His own that were in it, after a sort beyond all thought even of those who had been learning it in every form they then needed and could bear. Associating them while here with Himself for that glory into which He was going, He must and would counteract every defilement of their way inconsistent with that association. Such stains were incompatible with heaven, whither He was going as their forerunner. Of the kingdom they had learned not a little from the O.T., and yet more from Him who added so much that was new to the old things. But the Lord here provides for them a fellowship with Him on high, transcending all previous thoughts, when He should ascend where He was before; and His love would carry them through

every need, obstacle, and danger.

"Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled"

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}.

These words of the Lord Jesus to His disciples on the night of His betrayal contain the foundation and substance of the Christian's hope. They speak of the Father's house -- not of the kingdom, not of the reign of Christ on earth, not of Israel's restoration, but of that heavenly dwelling-place where Christ is now at the right hand of God. They speak of Christ's going to prepare a place -- a work He is engaged in now, in the interval between His first and second coming. They speak of His coming again -- His personal, actual, bodily return for His own. And they speak of the result: "that where I am, there ye may be also" -- not merely where He is going, but where He is.

It is the coming again of Him Whose love we know, Who suffered once for all for our sins, Who will then consummate in heaven the love He proved for us on earth. Our hope is much higher, whether for our hearts now, or when it is fulfilled at His coming. It is not associated with judgment on adversaries, but founded on His own bearing our judgment on the cross, and taking us to heaven to be with Himself, apart from all thought of the earth or of man upon it.

The disciples were troubled. They were about to lose the visible presence of their Lord. They did not understand where He was going, or why. They could not follow Him then. But the Lord's word was more than sufficient for their trouble: "Let not your heart be troubled." Not a command merely, but an assurance that there is ground for the heart's rest and peace, whatever the circumstances. The

ground is personal faith in God and in Christ: "Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

The Father's House: Its Distinction from the Kingdom

"In my Father's house are many mansions." The Father's house is not the kingdom. This is the distinctively Christian hope, the hope of the church -- to be with Christ in the Father's house, not to reign with Him on earth. The kingdom is the subject of Old Testament prophecy; it is Christ's reign over the earth, the restoration of Israel, the blessing of all nations. But the Father's house is the distinctively New Testament hope, revealed by Christ Himself on the eve of His death.

"If it were not so, I would have told you." There is a tender and solemn assurance here. The Lord would not have allowed His disciples to cherish a hope that was not real. He would not have spoken thus if the Father's house with its many mansions were not a reality. The very form of the assurance guarantees the reality of the hope.

"I go to prepare a place for you." This is the present occupation of the Lord Jesus in heaven. He is not idle at the right hand of God. He is engaged in a work of love for His own -- the preparation of that place in the Father's house which is to be their eternal home. What that preparation involves we cannot fully understand; but it is enough to know that He is doing it, and that His love is its motive.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself." This is the promise of His second coming -- not for judgment, not for the establishment of the kingdom, but for the reception of His own. The object of His coming is stated in the most personal terms: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself." It is not a sending of angels, not a providential change, but a personal coming of the Lord Himself, for the personal reception of His own

people. And the result is fellowship with Himself: "that where I am, there ye may be also."

The Morning Star Distinguished from the Day

But the still more intimate and proper hope of the Christian is His coming for those that love Him and watch during the night with eyes undimmed by hope deferred, for Him the Morning Star, before the day. And as the apostle corrected the errors of the Thessalonian saints, yet confirmed the constant waiting for Him, carefully joining himself with them and all saints in the same attitude, so here does the Lord guard us all from confounding His Coming with that day, and God's necessary antecedent dealings of infliction or of mercy on Israel or the nations.

There is a difference -- a great and important difference -- between Christ as the Morning Star and Christ as the Sun of Righteousness. As the Morning Star, He comes for His church before the tribulation, before the day of the Lord, before the judgments fall on the world. As the Sun of Righteousness, He rises with healing in His wings for Israel and the earth, after the darkness of the tribulation is past. The Morning Star appears before the dawn; the Sun rises with the dawn. The church's hope is the Morning Star, not the rising Sun. "I am the bright and morning star" {Rev. 22:16}. "And the morning star He will give to him that overcometh" {Rev. 2:28}.

This is why John 14 is so carefully distinguished from Matt. 24 and 25. Matthew deals with the coming of the Son of Man in judgment, with the great tribulation, with the signs that precede His appearing. John 14 deals with the coming of the Lord Jesus as the Morning Star, for His own, to take them to the Father's house. There are no signs given in John 14; there is no mention of tribulation or judgment; there is nothing but the promise of His personal coming to receive His own to Himself.

The chastisement, as revealed from the seals of Rev. 6 to the last vials of God's wrath in Rev. 16, of which the judgment of Babylon in the descriptive appendix of Rev. 17, 18 is a concluding part and explanation, all this is the dealings of God with the world in the absence of the church. Then follows the day of the Lord in Rev. 19, when the glorified follow Him out of heaven to the destruction of His enemies, the binding of Satan, and the thousand years' reign of Christ and the risen saints over the earth, as in Rev. 20. All this is as clear as God's word makes it, whatever be the doubts and difficulties of the learned, or the unbelief of worldly-minded men.

But the still more intimate and proper hope of the Christian is His coming for those that love Him and watch during the night with eyes undimmed by hope deferred. Meanwhile may "the grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen."

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