

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	56		Gary L.W. Johnson
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I AM THE WAY AND THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE (Part II)

Journeys to heaven and back are becoming fairly routine. Hardly a month goes by without someone declaring that they died, went to heaven, and have returned to tell the rest of us all about it (usually as a preview to publishing a book).¹ There have been a number of movies and television shows that have played this theme so much that an increasingly large number of people gullibly accept at face value such claims no matter how outlandish they might sound. This is not something that is restricted to the so-called New Age movement. This is also a reoccurring theme in many Christian circles and is given high exposure on Christian television. Many in certain high-profile media ministries actually cater to these absurdities. And, of course, anyone daring to suggest that something is off-track here is branded as being censorious, guilty of quenching the Spirit, and therefore summarily dismissed. Once we start allowing for extra-Biblical revelation, once we lose sight of the Reformation emphasis on *Sola Scriptura*, we open the floodgates to all kinds of error. Scripture ceases to be sufficient – something else is needed.² All we need to know about life after death is revealed to us in the pages of Holy Scripture – and nowhere else. “What Scripture teaches us about heaven, angels, and the afterlife is sufficient and accurate. God has already given us all we need to know to equip us fully for every good work (2 Timothy 3:17). There is nothing an eyewitness testimony could reliably add.”³ We do not need to consult the likes of Betty Eadie or any of the other quacks about heaven. Let us turn instead and listen to the words of Jesus in John 14. What did He say about heaven? He describes it as a heavenly home. What does this mean?

- I. **THAT HOME NEEDED.** The Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:1 declared: “For we know that if our earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an external house in heaven, not built by human hands.” “Every man,” wrote Charles Hodge, “has enough to dissatisfy him with the present, to make him look forward with desire, and that he is not called to look on blank vacuity or utter darkness, but on the bright prospect of eternal blessedness, is an infinitely precious but unappreciated support and comfort.”⁴ Every true child of God longs to be in the presence of the Lord. The older we grow the more the world fades, the more we become dissatisfied with the things of this present world. We all have *heart trouble*. Trouble is what this fallen world brings us. We are often *sad* because of the sorrow that eventually comes our way. We are often *perplexed* with the way things are. We are often *feeble* and *wavering* in our faith, and we are often *ashamed* of our conduct and behavior. Sometimes we find ourselves settling down and being comfortable in this world, only to become disillusioned. Like the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-31), we finally come to our senses and realize that this world is not our home. “The world’s joys fade,” wrote Kirkpatrick, “God’s joys are eternal.”⁵ The disciples that gathered with Jesus in the upper room were like the rest of us, very prone to *heart trouble*. So our Saviour addresses them, “Let not your hearts be troubled.”⁶ He is not simply telling them to “cheer up, don’t worry,

things will get better.” He is calling them to exercise faith not only in the Father but in Himself.

II. THAT HOME DESCRIBED. “In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places.” Here is where the children of God long to be – in the Father’s house. What is so distinctive about this? First of all, Jesus says it is “my Father’s house.” Second, we learn that it is a very spacious place (heaven is a very real place); there are *many* dwelling places⁷ in the Father’s house. Third, it is a place that Christ has prepared for His own. Finally, it is a place where Christ is – and He is the one who will take us there. The late William Hendriksen makes an interesting observation: “One point, however, is very touching. One might have expected Jesus to say, ‘And when I go and prepare a place for you, I come again and will take you to *that place*.’ But our Lord actually says something which is far more comforting, namely, ‘I will take you *to myself*.’ Christ’s loving presence will be that which makes the Father’s house a real home and a real heaven for the children of God.”⁸

III. THE WAY HOME. In answering Thomas’ question, Jesus declared that He and He *alone* is the Way to the Father. He is the Way to the Father’s house where He is preparing a room for us (John 14:3). Jesus is not the only person who used the expression *the way*. Shortly after Jesus ascended into heaven it was used to identify the early church. Saul, before he became Paul, went to Damascus to persecute embers of *the Way* (Acts 9:2). And later at Ephesus there arose a great disturbance about *the Way*, when Demetrius stirred up the silversmiths (Acts 19:23). Before the governor Felix, Paul admitted he was a *follower of the Way*, which the Jews *call a sect* (Acts 24:14). In the Old Testament the idea of *the Way* appears often. The Exodus, for instance, is the way out from the slavery of Egypt to the Promised Land. At that time, the Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, is he who *made a way* through the sea, a path through the mighty waters (Is. 43:14, 16). The Psalms emphasize this as well:

(Ps. 27:11) Teach me *your way*, O LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.

(Ps. 32:8) I will instruct you and teach you *in the way* you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

(Ps. 119:9) How can a young man keep *his way* pure? By living according to your word.

(Ps. 119:30) I have chosen *the way of truth*; I have set my heart on your laws.

(cf. Ps. 1:1, 6; Ps. 2:12; Ps. 5:8; Ps. 18:32; Ps. 25:9; Ps. 25:12; Ps. 27:11; Ps. 37:5; Ps. 37:23; Ps. 37:34; Ps. 86:11; Ps. 119:9; Ps. 119:30; Ps. 139:24; Ps. 143:8.

And (Isa. 40:3) A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare *the way* for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.”

CONCLUSION: Charles Hodge long ago wrote that “the design of the revelation of heaven as immediately consequent on death is not merely to support believers under their afflictions or to comfort them on the loss of dear friends, but to wean them from the world. God has opened to them the prospect of a state of existence in which holiness shall be attended with glory and blessedness, in order that they should not be worldly-minded. As the desire and pursuit of things of the world is degrading and leads the soul away from God, so the desire of heaven has the opposite tendency. To be heavenly-minded includes two things which are inseparably connected.”⁹

ENDNOTES

¹The most successful (so far) has been Betty Eadie's *Embraced by the Light* (Bantam, 1992).

²Richard Gaffin, one of my former professors at Westminster, writes, "According to a sound formulation of orthodox Protestant theology, there are four major attributes of Scripture: authority, clarity (perspicuity), necessity, and sufficiency. These 'perfections' (as they have sometimes been called) are inseparable and mutually conditioning; they stand or fall together." See his contribution to *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. W. A. Grudem (Zondervan, 1996), p. 337.

³John MacArthur, Jr., *The Glory of Heaven: The Truth About Heaven, Angels and Eternal Life* (Crossway, 1996), p. 41.

⁴Charles Hodge, *Conference Papers* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), p. 355.

⁵A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (rpt. Baker, 1982), p. 77.

⁶Kenneth Wuest has adequately captured the literal meaning of the Greek here with his rendering, "Let not your hearts continue to be agitated." *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation* (Eerdmans, 1970), p. 249.

⁷Some of the older translations have *mansions*. This is traceable to the Latin Vulgate's *mansions*. The Greek word *monē* means a resting station or abiding place.

⁸W. Hendriksen, *The Bible On the Life Hereafter* (Baker, 1959), p. 211.

⁹Hodge, *op. cit.*, p. 355.