

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Series:	Scripture Memory		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	120		Gary L.W. Johnson
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THE CURE FOR TROUBLED HEARTS (Part III)

Euphemism comes from the Greek word *euphēmos*, which refers to speaking the sound of well-meaning. A euphemism is a way of speaking so as not to offend or embarrass by substituting something that is less harsh or awkward. Politicians will *spin* the truth as opposed to *lying*. A person *passes away*, i.e., they died. The car is not used, it is *pre-owned*. A person was not fired, they were *let go* because the company was *downsizing*. The Bible actually has this as well. In Judges 3:24 and 1 Samuel 24:3 we read, “He covers his feet” (one’s garments fall around his feet when he stoops, i.e., goes to the bathroom.) There are some Biblical scholars who think the expression “and he was gathered to his people” (Genesis 25:8, 17, 35:29, 49:33; Numbers 27:12-13) is a euphemism for *he died*. Perhaps, but Boice makes a compelling case for understanding this phrase in a different light: “It is to be explained, so they say, by the thought that the individual was being placed in the same graveyard as those who had died before him. But this is hardly satisfactory in the case of the Bible stories involved. When Abraham died he was buried in a cave at Machpelah in the land that was to become Israel, but it was not the burial place of his ancestors. They had been buried back in Ur of the Chaldees, and his father had been buried at Haran. Moreover, in reading the account of his death, it is hard to overlook the fact that Abraham is said to have been gathered to his ancestors in verse 8 of Genesis 25, but to have been buried only in verse 9. Consequently, the phrase *gathered to his people* cannot refer to the burial but must refer to the death itself as a result of which Abraham joined those who had gone before him. The same thing is true of Moses, who died by himself in the mountain. The Book of Deuteronomy even tells us that *no one knows where his grave is* (Deut. 34:6). The comment of David upon being told of the death of Bathsheba’s child is also important, for it shows that David believed in a personal reunion with departed loved ones in the life to come. God struck the child so that it became sick and died. While it lay languishing, David, who understood that he was to blame, prayed for the child and fasted, lying all night upon the earth. So great was his grief and concern that when the child died, those who were close to David were afraid to tell him lest his grief should know no bounds. David detected the change in their attitude, however. He asked, *Is the child dead?* When they told him that the child had died, David surprised them by rising from his place of mourning, washing himself, dressing, and resuming his duties as leader of the nation. The servants asked about his change of attitude, since they could not understand it. David explained, *While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.’ But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me* (2 Sam. 12:22-23). This last comment does not mean merely that David would eventually die himself. For the point of the story is that David comforted himself (and Bathsheba) after the child’s death, and there would be no comfort unless David believed that, although he could not bring the child back, nevertheless, one day he would see the child again in heaven. If we turn to the New Testament, we find an additional indication of these same truths in the events that took place on the Mount of Transfiguration. On this occasion the Lord Jesus Christ took three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, with him into the mountain and was transformed into a form showing his celestial glory. Moreover, Moses and Elijah, two other glorified saints, appeared beside him.

Luke calls them *men*; that is, not disembodied spirits, and he reports that Peter and presumably also the others recognized them. Peter said, *Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah* (Luke 9:33). Here both Moses and Elijah had retained their identities and were recognized by the three disciples. Christ's story about the rich man and Lazarus makes a similar point, for the Lord told how the rich man went to hell and, being in torment, lifted up his eyes and saw *Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side* (Luke 16:23). Here is a case that involves recognition of the departed, not only as they appear in this life, but as they appear to each other in the life to come."¹

Our text in John likewise addresses the reality of the world to come.

I. **THE MISSION OF THE SON.** Had sin never entered our world, so far as admission to heaven is concerned, all things would at all times have been ready for the innocent holy children of men. Their Father's house would always have been ready for them, and they ready for their Father's house. But all – the elect as well as the rest of men – have sinned, and have been condemned. That sentence of condemnation must be removed, in order to their admission to heaven; and forgiveness and justification can proceed only on the ground of an atonement being made and accepted. There is – there can be – no place in heaven for men labouring under unexpiated guilt, unforgiven transgression. Nor is this all. Heaven must not only be opened to men, but men must be made fit for heaven. God's justice refused admission into heaven to the guilty – God's sanctity to the unholy. The preparation of a place for his people in heaven implies, I apprehend, the doing all that is necessary to secure them a welcome, a suitable, a permanent place there. Now, this was the design of our Lord's going to heaven, and going to heaven in the way he did. This was the design of what he did, to open up for himself, as the representative of his people – *our forerunner* – a way into heaven; and is the design of what he is doing there, whether at the altar of incense as a high priest, or on the throne as a king. His sufferings, his death, his burial, were all penal, vicarious, expiatory – not only for our benefit, but in our room. That we might be delivered from the curse, and from death and the grave, which otherwise would certainly have prevented us from ever having had a place in the house of God – in the heavenly Jerusalem, "Christ once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." We could not have been brought to God otherwise: "It became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." It would not have become Him to have admitted them to his house otherwise; and we may rest assured He never would have done anything unbecoming himself. "He cannot deny himself." That man's hope of heaven is "like the giving up the ghost," that rests on the expectation that God will violate his word, or dishonour his law. And as the sacrifice of Christ was necessary to open heaven to man, so it was sufficient: "Christ being come an high priest of good things to come," "not by the blood of goats and of calves, but by his own blood, entered into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promised eternal inheritance." "It was necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified" by animal sacrifices; "but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." Our Lord's going to his Father's house in the way he went – the way of expiation and atonement – was equally necessary to secure the transforming influence of the Holy Spirit, which, again, was indispensably requisite to prepare his people for the place secured for them.²

II. **A PLACE PREPARED.** "I go to prepare a place for you." The word translated *prepare* is *hetoimazō* (in the first aorist active voice. An infinitive used to express a purpose). Lit. "to make ready." There are other Greek words that have a similar meaning. *Kataritzō*, "to furnish, bring to completion," used in Hebrews 10:5 of Christ's incarnation, "a body thou has *prepared* for me." *Proetoimazō*, "to make ready in advance," used in Ephesians 2:10 in reference to good works that God has prepared for his people, and in Romans 9:23 of vessels of mercy *prepared* beforehand for glory.

A number of things are thus said to have been prepared beforehand.

1. A people *prepared* for the Lord's coming (Luke 1:17).
2. All people should be *prepared* to meet the living God (Amos 4:12).
3. There is a kingdom that God has *prepared* before the foundation of the world for the elect (Matthew 25:34).
4. The eye hath not seen and the ear hath not heard nor entered into the heart of man all that God has *prepared* for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).
5. Finally, we read these words from Christ himself: "Then He will also say to those on His left, *Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been **prepared** for the devil and his angels*" (Matthew 25:41).

CONCLUSION: All of us have had the experience of going through a lot of preparation only to be disappointed that things did not go as planned (preparing a seven-course meal for guests who had to take a raincheck!). This is not the case with what Jesus has promised. His language speaks of the certainty that the preparation will be fully accomplished.³ Jesus' words made this expectation a certainty. He never would have promised to prepare a place for the disciples if He were not sure that they would reach it. In spite of Peter's denial, and of the fears and failures which He foresaw for all of them, and which they felt for themselves, He was confident of their ultimate arrival at the Father's house because He was sure of Himself. His confidence appeared in His words: "I go to prepare a place for you . . . I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Faith in Him was their key to security, no matter how well-grounded their fears for themselves might be.⁴

ENDNOTES

¹J. M Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary IV* (Baker Books, 1985), p. 1069.

²See the extended treatment of our text in John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord*, III (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1990), pp. 20-28.

³cf. The discussion of the Greek words for preparation in Gustaf Dalman. The words of Jesus considered in *The Light of Post Biblical Jewish Writings and The Aramaic Language* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1981), p. 128.

⁴M. C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Eerdmans, 1948), p. 214.