

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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Number:	51		Gary L.W. Johnson
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AND THE LIFE OF THE AGE TO COME, AMEN

Phillip Carey, who I have cited frequently in this series, helpfully remarks, “The New Testament frequently contrasts *the age to come* with *this age*, which can be called *this present evil age* (Galatians 1:4), because it is the age of sin and death. *The sons of this age* (Luke 20:34) must marry and be married, for the age of death is also the age of births, as human beings need to raise families to reproduce themselves and replace the dead. But Jesus says *those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead* are different, for *they cannot die any more* (Luke 20:35-36). This is why he goes on to say that *they are equal to angels* (Luke 20:36). They are still human flesh, but they are like angels in being immortal; they are *sons of the resurrection* (Luke 20:36) and have the everlasting life of the age to come.”¹ There are two distant aspects of the Life of the Age to Come. There is the promise of eternal life to the people of God, and there is the promise of eternal judgment for the ungodly.

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).² 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 is 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.³ 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.”⁴ 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. **THE SETTING.** Merrill Tenney provides a helpful background to the context of our text. “With 14:1 Jesus reverted to the original teaching which He had begun before Peter interrupted Him, and at the same time gave a fuller answer to Peter’s question. The change from a singular address, *thou*, in verse 38, to a plural address, *you*, in 14:2, marked the transition. Jesus first had answered Peter individually and now was including him in the reply which was addressed to the general group. The counsel of 14:1 was doubtless the outcome of the attitude of the ten as they listened to Jesus’ words of warning to Peter, and of the dismay that all of them felt when Jesus announced that He was about to leave them. If their leader and spokesman were soon to

deny Jesus, how could they trust themselves? If Jesus were leaving them, would they not be helpless and friendless in the midst of a hostile city? Terror must have gripped them, and have appeared on their pale faces and in their frightened eyes.”⁵ Charles Ross highlights this well: “The words of Jesus seem to have produced a deep impression on the minds of the disciples, and they are in consequence very sad and dejected. We may well suppose a brief pause to have intervened, during which his words have been sinking deep into their hearts, and now they are greatly perplexed and troubled on account of the sad things of which they have just been hearing – Judas’ treachery, Peter’s denial, and, far above all, the Lord’s own departure from them.”⁶

II. THE CONDITION OF THE DISCIPLES. “Their hearts were troubled,” writes John Brown, “The language is figurative. The word rendered *troubled*, literally means, *agitated as the water in a pool is by a tempest*. Strong, especially painful feeling, such as anxiety, fear, sorrow, produces violent movement of the heart, -- and thus the agitation or troubling of the heart comes naturally to signify *the restless painful emotions which the mind experiences when evil is experienced or anticipated*. The disciples, at this time, were powerfully influenced by such emotions. They were anxious, sorrowful, fearful.”⁷ The late James Boice wrote that the disciples had good reason to be deeply troubled. “There are two important things about this text, and the first, quite paradoxical in view of what I have just said, is that frequently we have cause to be troubled. It would not be necessary to make so much of this point if it were not that there is a kind of Pollyanna Christianity in our day that seeks to deny it. It is the kind of Christianity that pretends that there are no troubles for any truly surrendered child of God. This view of life takes Romans 8:28 to mean that only good things come into the life of one who truly loves God (*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him*), rather than seeing that the verse actually says that evil will indeed come but that God will nevertheless accomplish his own good purposes in spite of it. This view is unrealistic and uninformed, for evil does exist. Troubles do come. Death is an enemy. So, rather than denying these things, we must begin by a realistic recognition of them. Obviously, it was this that prompted Christ’s saying, for it was clear to him that from a human viewpoint the disciples, to whom he was speaking, had cause for deep agitation.”⁸

III. HEAVEN IS A PLACE. 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.”⁹ 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 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 alone are eternal.”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹ 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.

IV. HEAVEN IS A HOME. “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 places¹² in the Father’s house. Third, it is a place that Christ has prepared for His own. “Jesus says that in his Father’s house there are many dwelling places. Of all descriptions he might have used, he chose *home* as the most appropriate. What really constitutes a home? Not the building – but the loved ones who dwell there. Someday in heaven we shall resume the relationships death severed and once again perfectly fellowship with those of kindred spirit. No earthly family reunion can even begin to compare to that great family gathering of the redeemed. *Many dwelling places* (NRSV) suggests spaciousness. There is no lack of accommodations. Heaven will contain immense throngs, without being crowded. *Many mansions* (NKJV) further suggests great variety, not just one great hall or dormitory building. He knows us, each one. He has planned our dwelling place accordingly. He will keep our place for our arrival. It will not suit another and will not be given to another. If it were not so, he would have told us!”¹³

V. **HEAVEN: WHERE CHRIST IS.** Heaven is the 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.”¹⁴

NOTE: Bruce Milne points out the importance Jesus places on the role of faith. “Jesus addresses these *troubled hearts* by urging them, first of all, to have faith (1). The answer to trouble is *trust*. The NIV, following earlier translations, uses *trust* here, which is defensible, though the Greek word is the basic verb for *believing* (*pistueō*). While the manuscripts indicate some support for a reading such as *You already believe in God, now have the same faith in me*, a double imperative is probably correct: *Have faith in God; have faith in me.* On any reading this reflects a high Christology. Jesus presents himself unambiguously as the object of faith. *For John there is only one faith and that is in Jesus and God at the same time.* Faith needs adequate grounding, however, if it is to experience serenity and to overcome the *troubled hearts* of the disciples. The effectiveness and strength of faith are bound up with the greatness and dependability of the God in whom the faith reposes. *Have faith in God* means *hold God’s faithfulness* (Hudson Taylor).”¹⁵ To this Ross adds: “Ye believe in God, or rather, *Believe in God, believe also in me* – both clauses being an exhortation or command. And it is very remarkable that, whereas in the first member of the sentence, the word *believe* is placed before the object – believe in God; in the latter clause, the *object* is placed before believe – *in me also believe* – as if to bring out more distinctly and prominently himself as an object of faith. But what a demand was this to make by one sitting with them at the same table! When our Lord thus associates himself with the Father, as an object of worship, does it not amount to making himself equal with God? (chapter 5:18); and would not the thought rise up anew to their minds, Then thou art God? Indeed, it is not the transfer of our trust *from* one object to another, but rather the *concentration of it* upon the incarnate Son as the Daysman, the Mediator between God and sinners.”¹⁶

CONCLUSION: Charles Spurgeon, in a sermon on Revelation 21:27, made this telling observation: “Well may we be aroused when we remember what defiled and defiling creatures we have been in the days of our regeneracy. Brethren, let us not shrink from the humbling contemplation. Come down from your high places and see the horrible pit in which you lie by nature. Think of your past lives, I pray, of those days in which you found pleasure in walking after the flesh. I call on you to remember the sins of your youth, and your former transgressions, of thought, word, and deed. If they are shut out who defile, and are defiled, where are you? Where are you? For these sins of ours, though they were committed years ago, are nonetheless sinful today; they are as fresh to God as if we perpetrated them this very moment. You are still red-handed, O sinful man, though your crime was worked some twenty years ago. You are black, O sinner, still, though it be fifty years ago that your chief sin was committed; for time has no bleaching power upon a crimson sin. The guilt of an old offense is as fresh as though it were wrought but

yesterday. Our sins in themselves make us unclean and unfit for holy company, and, alas, they are many. Our sins have left a second defilement on us, by creating the tendency to do the like again. Is there one among us that has sinned who does not know that he is all the more likely to sin again? Since after once being drawn aside by sin there are stronger draggings in the same way, sin once committed becomes a fountain of defilement. The stream in which the fish has sported will be sought by it again in its season, and the swallow will return to its old nest; even so will the mind return to its folly. Ay, so it is; and if everything that defiles is shut out from the holy city, my God, my God, am not I shut out too?"¹⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ J. P. Carey, *The Nicene Creed: An Introduction* (Lexham Press, 2023), p. 208.

² The most successful (so far) has been Betty Eadie's *Embraced by the Light* (Bantam, 1992). For analysis, see my *Pastor's Perspective* Vol. 1, No. 4, June 1994, "Going to Heaven with the Devil."

³ Richard 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 contributions to *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today? Four Views*, ed. W. A. Grudem (Zondervan, 1996), p. 337.

⁴ John MacArthur, Jr., *The Glory of Heaven: The Truth About Heaven, Angels and Eternal Life* (Crossway, 1996), p. 41.

⁵ M. C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief* (Eerdmans, 1948), p. 212.

⁶ C. Ross, *The Inner Sanctuary* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1967), p. 63.

⁷ John Brown, *Discourses and Sayings of Our Lord III* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1990), p. 5.

⁸ J. M. Boice, *The Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary IV* (Baker, 1985), p. 1058.

⁹ Charles Hodge, *Conference Papers* (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), p. 355.

¹⁰ A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (rpt. Baker, 1982), p. 77.

¹¹ Kenneth 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.

¹² Some 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.

¹³ P. W. Comfort and W. C. Hawley, *Opening The Gospel of John* (Tyndale, 1995), p. 224.

¹⁴ W. Hendriksen, *The Bible On the Life Hereafter* (Baker, 1959), p. 211.

¹⁵ B. Milne, *The Message of John* (IVP, 1993), p. 209.

¹⁶ Ross, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, Vol. 27, preached March 27, 1881.