

Introduction:

- A. Earlier this week I was getting to know another pastor over breakfast and I told him I'd be speaking about heaven. "Oh, do you have a lot of older people?" he asked. For some reason, people seem to think that this is an age-related doctrine. I told my new friend that at Village Church it is part of our identity as *home* to talk often about heaven. If we don't think often and well about heaven we won't be a very healthy church. We won't persevere as we must. We'll get too attached to this corrupted world. We won't face sorrow with hope. That's why I say, "One of my favorite pastoral duties is to make people homesick."
- B. Allow me to read something I've written:
- I imagine a pastor being like an elderly uncle of refugee children. He often gathers them to himself and tells them stories of the homeland they have never seen. He tells them that the day they go home they will be a beautiful bride coming down the aisle of the skies to meet her Bridegroom. The homeless children listen wide-eyed as he tells them that their homeland is a kingdom bright and righteous, where Life runs in the rivers and grows on trees. "Our king is the king of all kings," says the uncle. "He rides a mighty charger and the armies of heaven follow Him. He knows your name and He Himself is waiting to be with you." The uncle tells these stories again and again because if he doesn't the children will forget who they are and put down their stakes in Babylon. The challenge isn't how to get them home. The King will take care of that. The uncle's challenge is that he cannot let the King's children forget their home. [*Pastoral Graces*, p.147]
- C. The passage in the Bible that best captures the sense of heaven as our home is **John 14**. Turn there. John 13 describes a disciple's nightmare. It was the night before Jesus was crucified. First, they found out that instead of ruling with Jesus they're supposed to be foot-washing

servants. No glory in that! Then he tells them that there is a traitor among them; that one of the will betray him. And that, of course, put them all in grave danger. Then Jesus told them that he was going away and where he was going they could not come. They were about to be left alone. And if that all wasn't bad enough, he told Peter that before morning he would deny Jesus three times. And if Peter—the Rock—was to deny Jesus what would happen to the rest of them?

- D. These were all devastating blows. And they are all things we can relate to. Weakness, betrayal, denial—all without Jesus being right here with us. Following Jesus would be so much easier if he were *here* where we could see him.
- E. And the next thing Jesus says in 14:1 is, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me.” They did trust God, of course, or they wouldn't have been with Jesus. But they had run up against troubles that shook their faith. Just as we do. On that dark and distressing night Jesus was saying, *Things are not as they seem. God is working even through these heart-troubling situations. Trust him and trust me.* In the verses that follow he spells out two great Christian hopes—the promise of heaven and the presence of the Holy Spirit. We're going to look at the promise of heaven in **vv.1-6. Heaven is the hope of believers who are disheartened by weakness and are hanging on by the fingernails of faith.**

V.2, *“My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?” Or “If it were not so, I would have told you.”*

I. NEVER FORGET THAT JESUS HAS PREPARED OUR HOME (14:2)

- A. This is not a verse about heavenly architecture. Nor is it about everlasting opulence. The KJV's “*many mansions*” is not at all what Jesus was saying. *Mansions* meant something different in the 1600s than it means now. The

Gr. word here for *rooms* simply means a place to settle, to dwell. The same word is used later in **v.23**, *Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our **home** with them."* The Gr. word there translated *home* is the same word used in v.2. In other words, here and now Jesus and our heavenly Father make their home with us through the Holy Spirit. And then one day Jesus' disciples will all go to our home in the Father's house where we will be with him forever.

- B. Jesus had just said that Peter would deny him three times and now Jesus says that there will be a home for Peter and the others in the Father's house. Wouldn't you think Peter would be ostracized, if he made it to heaven at all? But instead he's promised a home in the Father's house. We all know that feeling of being such a spiritual failure we hardly dare whisper a prayer. *But "do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Jesus."* Our place, our home, will not just be in God's neighborhood or somewhere in the suburbs of his vast kingdom. We have a home awaiting us *in the Father's house*. **We will spend eternity "near to the heart of God."**
- C. Jesus has gone to prepare that place for us. I really puzzled over this phrase. What's to prepare, I wondered. Does he need to change the sheets? Put chocolates on the pillows? Or is there construction in heaven, so that we must wait here for the angelic contractors to finish the drywall? Of course not. So what's to prepare?
- I don't think Jesus is saying, *"I'm going, and when I get there, I'll prepare a place for you."* He is saying, "By going—by the journey I'm about to take—I will prepare a place for you." Peter had just spoken of his willingness to follow Jesus even to the death, but Jesus took a journey that none of us can take ourselves. Jesus' incarnation, his death, his resurrection and

glorification, his sending of his Holy Spirit—all that was his *going* that prepared a place for us. *By his journey* he prepared a safe passage for us over the vast gulf separating man from God, through the fierce fires of judgment, through the black obsidian mountain of death and out into the light of life. [from D. A. Carson]

- There's another aspect of his preparation to consider. Jesus was the first human being to set foot in heaven. He is our pioneer in that land. He returned to heaven as his home in one sense, but as a man, he was the first. Even if we were allowed into heaven, without Jesus being there to greet us, I don't think we'd ever be at home. My dear old book-teacher, **Alexander Maclaren**, wrote 100 years ago, *"Like some poor savages brought into a great city, or rustics into the presence of a king and his court, we should be ill at ease amidst the glories and solemnities of that future life unless we saw standing there our Kinsman, to whom we can turn, and who makes it possible for us to feel that it is home. Christ's presence makes heaven the home of our hearts."* [p.276]
- And there is one more thing: Jesus is there to prepare our wedding. I don't suppose it takes much effort or time in heaven to spread a banquet table—to pluck fruit from the trees of life, to gather heaven's manna or pour heaven's wine. **But heaven grows more beautiful by the day for each day heaven echoes with more praise for the saving works of God**—more testimonies, more lost sheep found and prodigal sons come home, more rejoicing in heaven. I wonder if our Bridegroom Jesus looks about the splendors of heaven while he waits for our coming and whispers, *"More songs! More joy! More crowns! More white linen! More places at my table! My Bride is coming!"*

Never forget that Jesus has prepared our home.

Then Jesus tells us something even more important: **v.3...**

II. NEVER FORGET THAT JESUS WILL COME BACK FOR US (14:3)

- A. After all he has done to prepare for us, it is inconceivable that Jesus wouldn't return for us! *After the journey I took for you! After presenting my blood on heaven's altar, and sending my own Spirit to be in you, and after all the promises I've made and preparations I've gone to—do you think I'd forget to bring you home!? Could any groom forget his bride? Forget to carry her over the threshold?!*
- B. Here's something that is hard to imagine: Jesus yearns for our coming more than any bridegroom has ever waited for his wedding day. Jesus wants nothing more than for us to be with him in the Father's house. We often say that heaven wouldn't be heaven without Jesus, **but for Jesus heaven wouldn't be heaven without us!** Heaven will be filled with joys on every hand. But **the heart of heaven's joy will be that we're together with Jesus.** *Illus.:* Some of you remember Joe and Angie Welty, students who met here at VCL about 15 years ago. Each summer Joe would head up into the wilds of Canada to work on a tree-planting crew, where he was almost completely isolated. That included the summer before their Sept. 2 wedding. Before he left I said to Joe, *"I bet this is really hard for you to be away from Angie for a whole summer so close to your wedding."*

And Joe said, *"I love anticipating big events. I am already imagining how wonderful it will be when we get back together."* That's how Jesus feels about us! *Do not let your hearts be troubled. Jesus promised to come back for us!*

Vv.4-6 *"You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

III. NEVER FORGET THAT JESUS HIMSELF IS OUR WAY TO THE FATHER'S HOUSE (14:4-6)

- A. Jesus had just told Thomas where he was going—to the Father's house to prepare a place for us. Thomas seems to be asking, "Well, where is that?" I wonder if the disciples thought Jesus might be planning to elude his betrayer and his enemies; to escape into the night. Perhaps they were asking where the hideout was. But Jesus was talking about heaven.

Many years later, Jesus appeared to the aged John and gave him a glimpse of "the Father's house." **Rev 21** says, *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*

- B. Thomas said, "How can we know the way." To which Jesus replied, "I am the Way." Jesus doesn't draw us a map and tell us to come later. The way we get to the Father's house --to be with Jesus—is to go in Jesus. He is the vehicle, the Carrier. We get *into* Jesus and he takes us there. He *is* the Way, he doesn't just *show us* the way. That's why we love to think about Jesus' Second Coming when we will *"rise to meet the Lord in the air and so be with him forever."*
- C. Jesus is the Carrier—the Way—because he is the Truth and the Life. All that God wants people to know flows forth from Jesus, the Truth. All that we must know to be with God is found in Jesus Christ. Similarly, the life that we must have pass unscathed through the grave, to breathe the air of heaven, to walk the streets of glory, to live in the presence of the heavenly Father, is life that Jesus gives.

Thomas a Kempis famously said, *“Without the way there is no going; without the truth there is no knowing; without the life there is no living. I am the way which thou must follow; the truth which thou must believe; the life for which thou must hope.”* [*The Imitation of Christ*, 56.1.; in Carson]

Conclusion

At Village Church we think and sing often about heaven because it will make us a better home here and now. God intends our church to be a taste of heaven on earth. A good church gives us a kind of forward memory—a feel for the home we haven’t yet seen, a foretaste of the meal we haven’t yet eaten, a bond with the vast family we’ve never met, and a yearning for the Lord Jesus who waits eagerly to carry us over the threshold.

Illus.: This is Becca Spellman’s last Sunday with us. She’s heading to Seattle. She’s been part of Village Church for four years. She grew up as a missionary kid in Brazil so when she came here for school she says, *“I didn’t really have a notion of home or what was home for me. But when I came to VCL I found it. Being loved by the congregation.”* She said, *“One of the biggest points of my testimony is that while I don’t have a physical home, I have a home wherever I go with the people of God.”* She asked if I’d sing the home song as a benediction. *“That song kind of became my anthem,”* she said.

Though you are homeless, though you’re alone

I will be your home

Whatever’s the matter, whatever’s been done,

I will be your home.

I will be your home, I will be your home,

In this fearful, fallen place I will be your home.

When time reaches fullness, and I move my hand,

I will bring you home;

Home to your own place in a beautiful land;

I will bring you home.

I will bring you home; I will bring you home.

From this fearful, fallen place,

I will bring you home.”

[Michael Card]