

Heaven Guaranteed

John 13:36-14:4

Introduction

Our age has been called the “age of anxiety”. The plaintive cry of society is best summed up by John Margolis, of the *Chicago Tribune*, who once wrote, “I have seen the future and it doesn’t work.”

Even Charlie Brown, of the cartoon *Peanuts*, got into the act. He announced to his friends, “I have a new philosophy in life – I am going to begin dreading only one day at a time.”

In our discussion of John, chapter 13, verses 31 through 35, we left the disciples in the upper room. They were in the process of becoming extremely troubled about their future. It was not working either.

Three Reasons for the Disciple’s Agony

Now, you need to understand why the disciples were troubled.

Jesus had just announced that one of them would be a traitor

1. Jesus had just announced that one of them would be a traitor.

The other gospel accounts record their reaction as shock. They asked, in Matthew, chapter 26, verse 22b,

... *Surely not I, Lord?*

Judas asked, in verse 25 of that chapter,

... *Surely it is not I, Rabbi? ...*

Jesus had warned Peter that he would deny Him three times

2. Jesus had warned Peter that he would deny Him three times.

We will look closely at this later, but, for now, notice the Lord’s words in John, chapter 13, verses 37 and 38.

Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow you right now? I will lay down my life for You.” Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a cock shall not crow, until you deny Me three times.”

Just as Peter is beginning to talk like a hero, Jesus announced that he would become a casualty of fear.

When the civil war broke out, the Potomac Light Infantry, to the man, decided to disband and go into hiding rather than risk death in war. When the time came for them to split up, one of them proposed a toast that has become legendary, “The Potomac Light Infantry – invincible in peace time, invisible in war time.”

Now, I am sure that Christ’s prediction of Peter’s denial not only shocked Peter, but the other ten disciples as well. Peter? Deny the Lord? Peter had been the only one willing to risk his neck by walking on the water. It was Peter who had become one of Jesus’ closest confidants. If brave, strong Peter will deny Jesus, what will the others do?!

The room was filled with deniers and a betrayer. This was a troubling thought!

Jesus had notified them that He was going to leave them

3. The third reason, and by far the most devastating factor that would rip the disciples' hearts apart, was that Jesus had notified them that He was going to leave them.

Look at John, chapter 13, verse 33.

Little children, I am with you a little while longer. You shall seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, I now say to you also, "Where I am going, you cannot come."

The Lord used the Greek word, "teknion," in addressing His disciples as "little children," in this verse. It is the only time Jesus used this word toward them in the gospels. It is an intimate, tender term, often used in Greece between a mother and her little child.

Why, at that moment, did Jesus speak so tenderly toward them? Why did He refer to them as His little precious children?

Because He is telling them something that would instantly create confusion, insecurity, and fear in the life of a child. He is telling them, that He is going to leave them. And, like children, they are immediately filled with questions.

Marsha and I celebrated one anniversary by driving to Wilmington, North Carolina, and eating on an old-fashioned style paddlewheel boat. My kids were instructed how to act with the babysitters. There were two stages of babysitters – one for the afternoon and one for the evening hours – until our return around 11 p.m. My little six year old girl had lots of questions, but the one that we are still laughing about was the question, "Now, Mommy, what happens if the boat shrinks?"

I am not sure what would be worse – for the boat to sink, or for the boat to shrink!

Look again at Peter's questions.

Chapter 13, verse 36,

... Lord, where are you going? ...

Verse 37,

Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow you right now? ..."

Skip to chapter 14, verse 5. Thomas chimes in with a question.

... Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?

Verse 8 is in the form of a request from Philip,

... Lord, [will you] show us the Father, and it is enough for us.

Skip to verse 22.

Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us, and not to the world?"

QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS, QUESTIONS . . .

Why? Because the disciples saw things working out a lot differently than they thought things would, and now they are surrounded by doubts and fears. Jesus has dealt the ultimate blow to them, as He says, "I'm going to leave, and you can't come with me!"

How else can you explain the first phrase of chapter 14? Jesus says,

Let not your heart be troubled . . .

And we can read that rather glibly, "Yea, big deal. It'll all work out!"

Now we know the rest of the story; we know what will happen, "Don't sweat it, Peter."

But, when it comes to interpreting and applying the scriptures, you are imposing, on your mind and heart, a blindness, unless you are willing to crawl back into that scene. As Howard Hendricks used to teach us, "See what they saw, smell what they smelled, and feel what they felt."

As far as the disciples could see, they were headed into a terrible storm. As Marsha and I, and a couple we doubled with for our evening cruise, drove toward Wilmington, we could see billowing black clouds ahead. We eventually drove into that thunderstorm – with the rain falling in sheets and the heavy winds pushing and pulling our van from one side of the lane to the other. I had to slow down to sixty five miles per hour! We finally drove into beautiful weather. The weather in Wilmington was that much more wonderful because of the storm we had driven through.

The point is, ladies and gentlemen, if you do not fully understand the problem, you can never fully appreciate the solution!

Hope for Healing . . . Three Principles

With all of this in mind, we discover that chapter 14 is a chapter of solutions. It is a chapter that answers the disciples' basic question, "Just what will happen when Jesus leaves?!"

Jesus is completely trustworthy

So, Jesus begins, in chapter 14, by saying,

Let not your heart be troubled . . .

You could translate that, "Stop letting your hearts be troubled."

The word "trouble," in the Greek, is "tarasso". It means, "distressed; anguished; in turmoil".

Now, it does not do a child any good to say, "Stop crying," unless you give them a reason! The first part of Jesus' reason is actually a command! You could take your pen and draw two exclamation points. Look at verse 1.

Let not your heart be troubled; . . .

The next part of the verse is the first imperative.

. . . believe in God, . . .

Exclamation point!

. . . believe also in Me.

Exclamation point!

It is interesting to woodenly translate verse 1 with each of the Greek tenses exposed, "Stop letting your hearts be troubled. Keep on believing in God and keep on believing in Me."

Now this continual believing has nothing to do with salvation. Jesus is not encouraging the believer to hang on in order to get to the shores of heaven, He is encouraging them to hang on in order to get through the storms of life.

Jesus seems to be suggesting that it will be much harder to keep on believing in Him. Why??!! Because they are about to see Him dragged off to court, condemned by the rulers, nailed to a cross, and jeered by the mob.

They are to continue trusting Him?! This kind of faith is seen in Abraham, in the book of Romans, chapter 4, verse 18, "Who against hope, believed . . .".

In other words, "You believe in God, whom you've never seen, now keep trusting Me, even though you don't understand what you are about to see!"

1. So John, chapter 14, verse 1, begins with Jesus, in effect, saying, "Stop agonizing in your hearts, I am completely trustworthy."

Heaven is a promised reality

The next few verses have been considered, through the ages, to be the most comforting words in all of scripture.

Why? Because every one of us struggle with hurting hearts. It may be a man who has just received a diagnosis of cancer; a man who is frightened that he might lose his job; another whose heart is agonizing over a child that is away from the Lord; and still another whose marriage is about to collapse. It may be someone who is struggling with sin or the pain of failure. It may be many who are uncertain about our nation's future, the economy, or what tomorrow holds.

On the highway, headed for my parents home in Virginia, we pass through a little community made up of small homes and old cars. I have noticed, over the years, a fortune teller's home, situated just off of the highway. It is a small wooden home with a run down screen porch. Several years ago, when I first noticed the place, my attention was drawn by a small wooden sign, with hand painted letters, that advertised Sister Maria's ability to read your palm and tell your future. Today, more than ever, success has come due to the fact that the world is filled with troubled, confused, hurting, fearful hearts.

New York telephone alone, handles more than one million calls per month on its "dial-a-horoscope" lines.

The truth is, every human heart craves an answer about tomorrow. The only difference is where people look for the answer.

For the one who will look to God's Word, one of the wonderful things about John, chapter 14, is that Jesus tells His disciples, and us, about the future, "Here's the real story; here's the truth."

But you have to admit that all of John, chapter 14, is based upon the first principle in verse 1. The only way this passage will ever heal your heart is if you will believe that Jesus Christ is completely trustworthy.

Do you? Then the second principle from this passage can heal like nothing else.

2. Not only is Christ completely trustworthy, but our future home in heaven is a promised reality.

Let us read on to verse 2.

In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

A Gallup poll revealed some interesting information. Now, seventy eight percent of Americans believe in a place like heaven and eighty eight percent of those polled felt they had a good to excellent chance of going there one day. We will discuss the entrance requirements in a later discussion. If you talk to people about heaven though, you will get a variety of impressions.

A group of children, from Ohio, were asked what they thought heaven is like.

- Little Eric said, "It is a place where there is a lot of money lying around."
- Scott said, "Heaven is up in the sky, and you can look down at circuses for free if you want to, 'cept you have to ask God for permission first."
- One little honest kid, named David, said, "Heaven is kind of big and you sit around playing harps. I don't know how to play a harp, but I suppose I'll have to take some dumb harp lessons pretty soon."
- One little girl said, "Heaven will be the happiest part of my dead life."
- Tommy blurted out his true feelings, "I know what heaven is, but I don't want to go up there. I want to go down to North Carolina instead."

I thought it was heaven or hell – this kid thinks it is heaven or North Carolina!

There are a lot of misconceptions about heaven. That is probably because it follows another mystery – death. Most people are not quite sure how to talk about that either.

It is like the fellow, that I read about, who bumped into an old friend he had not seen for many years. They talked, and then he asked his friend, "And how's your wife?"

He replied, "She's in heaven now."

Without thinking, he responded, "Oh, I'm sorry."

Then, realizing that was not the best phrase to use, said, "I mean, I'm glad she's in heaven."

Now really flustered, he said, "What I'm trying to say is, I'm surprised."

Two Misconceptions

Well, we cannot answer all the misconceptions today, or clear all of the confusion, but two misconceptions, from this verse, desperately need clearing!

Jesus said, in verse 2,

In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

Heaven is filled with huge mansions

1. Misconception number one is that heaven is filled with huge mansions!

The King James translation of the first part of this verse is, "In my Father's house are many mansions . . .". This has sparked many imaginations to think in the same category as, "what I'd like to live in if I won the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes".

Gospel songs have not helped much either, when they talk about "my mansion in the sky".

The truth is, most of us have grown up thinking that heaven is this incredible real estate development. We think, when we get there, some angelic agent will point and say, "Now, if you go down that golden street and turn left at the first intersection, then go three blocks and turn right, you'll see your mansion on the right, just past the lake."

Jesus refers to "My Father's house". The Greek word for "house" is "oikia". It is made up of many "mansions," or "mone," which could be translated, "dwelling places, or rooms, or abodes".

Jesus is speaking in a way that His hearers would immediately understand, but we are confused! In Christ's day, when a son married, the father would add a wing to his house. When another son married, another wing would be added. Eventually, the original dwelling would become a set of dwellings. A patio would be enclosed in the middle and all the relatives lived around that patio.

The misconception has you living miles away from the Father, depending on how good you were.

The proper picture is that you, as the bride to His son, who married you, are living under the same roof, in a wing that has been added just for you.

The point is, we will be in the immediate presence of God forever!

Heaven is under construction

2. Misconception number two is that heaven is under construction!

Jesus said, in verse 2b,

. . . for I go to prepare a place for you.

Many have, unfortunately, concluded that, in some way, Jesus has a hammer and blueprints and is in the process of building the new city, where everyone's home is currently under construction. Furthermore, the size of your house is being determined by how much material you are in the process of sending on ahead.

I have even read the foolish suggestion that, since Jesus was a carpenter on earth, He knew exactly what to do to build our heavenly homes. And to think that He created all there is, according to Colossians, chapter 1, verse 16, in six creation days, and yet, in over two thousand years, He is still not finished with heaven yet?!

No! When Jesus ascended, following His resurrection, He sat down at the right hand of the Father. It was finished.

So, what was Jesus talking about?

One of the great commentators of yesteryear is William Barclay. He did us a great service by pointing out the concept that Jesus Christ is often pictured as One who has gone before us. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus goes before us, so that we may follow safely in His footsteps.

One of the Greek words that is used to describe Jesus and, I believe, explain His statement in John, chapter 14, verse 2, is the Greek word "prodomos". It is most often translated "forerunner". Hebrews, chapter 6, verses 19 through 20a, read,

This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one which enters within the veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us

In the Roman army of Christ's day, the "prodromoi" were the troops sent ahead of the main

army to blaze the trail and to ensure that it was safe for the rest of the troops to follow.

Robert Hughes, a seminary professor in Philadelphia, was a coal miners son. His father's job was to, every morning, go down into the mines to check for methane gas before the miners would go down to work. So, every morning, he would descend into the mines, taking with him the safety light. He would begin to go through the darkened tunnels, checking out each of the tunnels and shafts of the mine to make sure that there was no deadly methane gas present. Of course, if the light of the safety lamp would so much as flicker, he would himself be in great danger. And then, every morning, he would rise up to the surface of the mine, and there, on the surface, were all the miners gathered around waiting. He would announce, "It's okay, it's safe, you can now go down into the mine."

Robert Hughes' father prepared the mine for the workers.

In that way, Jesus was going to prepare heaven for His children. That is, He was going before all of us. Jesus has already climbed through the dark tunnels of death and hell. He has ripped the stinger out of death and removed our obligation to hell. And He has made a clear path from this earth to heaven.

Our home in heaven is a promised reality! It is as real and trustworthy a destination as Jesus Christ is truly God.

By the way, when John wrote the book of Revelation, he had a vision of that heavenly city – he saw heaven in its completed form. Chapter 21 gives us his vision; in fact, it gives us a hint of how large heaven is. Turn to chapter 21, and we will start with verses 1 through 4.

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

Now just how big is this new city? Skip to verse 16.

And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.

So, this new city is where the Father and Son and Spirit sit enthroned. This is the residence of the saints. Look at verse 21.

And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.

Have you ever seen pure gold as clear as glass? It does not exist, but the Lord will make it. Continue to verses 22 and 23.

And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Skip to verse 27.

and nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Now look at chapter 22, verses 3 through 5.

And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bondservants shall serve Him; and they shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.

Do you want to know your future? Look here – and marvel!!

By the way, the dimensions of this heavenly city have been calculated. From chapter 21, verse 16, engineers have calculated that the heavenly city would be two million two hundred fifty thousand square miles. To give you a point of comparison, London, England is one hundred forty square miles; the heavenly city is more than two million square miles. The ratio of population, based on London's population – one hundred billion.

And notice, it was over two thousand years ago that John the apostle wrote the book of Revelation. In his divinely inspired tour of heaven, there was no scaffolding and Jesus was not wearing a carpenter's bib and overalls. Oh no! Two thousand years ago, heaven was ready and waiting.

So, if your heart is hurting, Jesus says, in the very beginning of John, chapter 14, this chapter of answers, that you need to remember, He is completely trustworthy. Secondly, you need to remember that your home in heaven is a promised reality.

Now, turn to this chapter of John once more.

Our future is guaranteed permanently

3. Principle number three is that our future is guaranteed permanently!

Look at verse 3.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

You need to note, as this verse tells us, that what is important, is being with Jesus Christ. We are invited, not so much to a place, as to a Person. In other words, "Heaven is My Father's house. I'm going to be there – and you're coming to be with Me."

Job wrote, in chapter 19, verses 25 through 27, paraphrased, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that I'm going to see Him face to face. And when I see Him, I won't be a stranger to Him and He won't be a stranger to me."

If Jesus Christ is infinite God, totally trustworthy and reliable, and He lives forever, and our future is with Him, then our future is, according to His own words, forever.

Remember, your future is guaranteed permanently!

Whether you are weak or strong, whether you have little faith or great faith, whether you are a mature disciple or an immature one, whether you have been a Christian for years or you have just received Him – you are on your way home!

Is it any wonder that, around 125 AD, Aristides, the Greek scholar, was trying to explain part of the success of Christianity. He wrote,

When a member of the Christians passes from the world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God and they escort the body to burial with

songs and thanksgiving, as if he were setting out from one place to another place nearby!

Just think of stepping on shore, and finding it heaven, of taking hold of a hand, and finding it God's, of breathing new air and finding it celestial, of waking up in glory – and finding it home!

Do you have a troubled heart? Do you have unanswered questions, fears, and doubts? Jesus begins this chapter of answers by simply telling you that you are not home yet. There will come a day when all of your questions will have answers, all of your fears will be put to rest, all your tears will be

wiped dry. But, it will not happen here, not completely. So, in the meantime, if you want to apply healing to your hurting heart, remember that Jesus Christ is completely trustworthy, regardless of what you see happening around you. Rejoice that your home in heaven is prepared and waiting and your future is guaranteed permanently.

And it will happen on that day when Jesus calls you to Himself – by death or through the rapture of the church. That will be the day when you and I are finally, finally home.

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