

PREPARATIONS

By

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Before we all get too far along the road to Utopia and succumb to the Great Society of equalization, where everything is equal to the worst, let us stop and consider God's purpose and preparation He is making for His own creation. The night before Jesus died He made a great promise to the apostles. He said, "Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

Now just what does He mean? What does our Lord mean by "many mansions", and what does He mean by "prepare a place"? Does He mean that after death we go immediately in some spiritual form to live in a mansion? Does He mean that in the meantime He is off up in Heaven somewhere with saw and hammer, building a lovely mansion? These are among the ideas often indicated in songs and sermons, especially at funerals when the attempt is made to give comfort to those mourning over the death of a loved one. But the passage means something different and greater than this.

In the first place, the word "mansion" in the original Greek language does not mean a huge dwelling place with a dozen bedrooms and baths and halls and so forth. In fact, the idea of living in some huge house — the kind of thing we usually speak of as a "mansion" — doesn't appeal to most of us. The word means "abiding place". In the footnotes of most Bibles it will give "abiding places" as the original meaning. This term, "abiding place", as it is used here, simply refers to the fact that God gives us the position or the opportunity of abiding where He abides.

In verse 3 Jesus said, "I will come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Now notice carefully that Jesus plainly said that it is when He comes again that He will receive us, that where He is there we may be also. When are we going to be where He is? When He comes again! The Bible says that "no man has ascended into heaven, but he that descended out of heaven, even the Son of man" (John 3:13). So this scripture does not teach that the hope of the Christian is to die and go off to heaven and live in a mansion. Rather it teaches that when Jesus comes again, then, and only then, will He receive the Christian to live and fellowship with HIM. Of course it would have to be after Christ comes again, because it will not be until His return that all the dead Christians shall be raised up to live. This is why He said, "Let not your heart be troubled." He was going away, but he is coming back. The hope which he held out to those apostles is the very same hope that is held out to every true Christian of all ages.

Somehow this hope — the hope of Christ to return to His earthly creation to restore life to men and then to live with them forever in a new creation — somehow this terrific truth has

been perverted to the extent that the purpose of Christ to return and raise up the dead is looked upon as a sort of odd-ball belief, or as a kind of fringe benefit, something that may happen but which is of little consequence. In the place of this mighty hope of the return of Christ there has arisen the belief that the Christian dies and goes off immediately in some spiritual manner to live in mansions in the sky. Some have adopted the heathen view of reincarnation, and a great many are accepting the Jewish concept that there is no individual and personal hope of life, but merely the biological progress of the race. This is one reason for the rise of the socialist concept, the Utopia without God. Of course all such ideas run counter to what Jesus taught. He plainly said that He would return, and just prior to this He made it clear that when He returned He would raise the dead from the graves, and those who have committed their lives to Him, He will raise as immortal people to live in a new creation forever. This, after all, is the purpose of God, to have men **IN HIS OWN IMAGE**, to live as His created people in His presence and in fellowship with Him.

Of course it is Satan's intent to destroy any belief in and hope for the personal return of Jesus, and a literal resurrection. Just as he deceived Eve by telling her that she wouldn't die if she ate the forbidden fruit, so Satan deceives the nations today by declaring from pulpit and religious journal that Jesus will not actually return like He said He would, and that eternal life is a survival of spirit, rather than a real restoration to life in a body. Without any understanding of what this kind of eternal life would be, mankind soon loses his interest in the Christian hope. When men cease to look for the return of Christ and when men no longer eagerly anticipate the final restoration of life in a new and perfect creation, they accept the only alternative, the man-made kingdom which has no future beyond the curtain of time.

Now let us take a look at the other thing Jesus promised in this passage of Scripture: "I go to prepare a place for you." If Jesus has been preparing a place for some 2,000 years, does that mean that He is in the construction business, building houses? Obviously not. Then what has Jesus been doing all this time since He ascended into Heaven to be with the Father? The Scripture makes it clear what the occupation of Jesus has been. "For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, like in pattern to the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us" (Hebrews 9:24). The purpose of His appearing before the face of God is in order to be a mediator for every believer who comes to Him. John writes that "if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 2:1-2). An advocate is an attorney or counselor who pleads another's case. Jesus pleads the case of every sinner before God the Father. He said, "Whosoever will confess me before men, Him will I confess before my Father who is in Heaven." Each time a sinner comes to believe in the sin-offering of Jesus, when a person really believes that Jesus died for him, in His place and comes to Christ in complete acceptance of his sin-offering, then Christ is there to intercede and confess before the Father that He is that person's Savior. Thus, Christ is making a place; He is preparing a place in the fellowship of God.

Remember that it was just about 12 to 18 hours after Jesus said these words: "I go to prepare a place", that He died on the cross. It was in His death that the foundation for our

salvation was laid. It was by His taking man's sin, and paying the penalty of sin in His own death, that He prepared a way for men to receive pardon, and, thus the gift of life and fellowship with God. All of that happened on the day Christ died. But since that day, and since His ascension into Heaven, millions of people have believed in Him, have placed their trust in that sacrificial death, and have sought forgiveness of their sins on the basis of Christ's having paid sin's penalty. And as each succeeding generation has sought relief from sin and the resulting death, Christ has, according to His promise, made a place for them in the Lamb's book of life. Thus He has been preparing places for Christians constantly almost 2000 years.

Having been pardoned from sin, the Christian has an abiding place with God. At any moment, and at all moments, he is in fellowship with the Father. When he is burdened with sin he can be relieved by confession to God. It is written in 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (Notice that this is written about Christians, as John uses the personal pronoun "us". The sinner, who has not yet entered the fellowship with God, must do more than confess his sin. He must "repent and be baptized for the remission of sins.") In this same passage, (verse 7), it says that the "Blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin". So Jesus is in the process of constantly cleansing and making a place for us in fellowship with God, "and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

When the Christian is puzzled and frustrated, trying to figure out what's going on in this maddened world – wondering just what new crisis or problem lies ahead – he again relies on this promise of Jesus: "let not your heart be troubled. I will come again, and will receive you unto myself." This is the one thing you can count on. And no matter what kind of world condition prevails, we know that in the final analysis, after all is said and done, after tyrants and corrupt men have done their very worst; after communism has drenched the globe in the blood of the saints; after the anti-Christ has finally gained control to receive the devotion of all the race; the purpose of God is going to be fulfilled. Jesus will return, and receive all Christians to Himself. Even those over the past centuries who have long since fallen asleep in death, Jesus will resurrect and cause to live again just as He Himself came forth from the tomb – after being dead for three days. Then as immortal men we shall live forever in fellowship with the Creator of a new heaven and new earth (Rev. 21:1, 2 Peter 3:13).

There is sufficient evidence in our society that there has already occurred a "falling away" from the faith, after which the "man of sin" (the anti-Christ) will be revealed (2 Thess. 2:3). Christians throughout the world have witnessed this "falling away" in their churches, in their pulpits and in their publications. When he is revealed, the Bible says, he will "oppose and exalt himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as God." The opposition to the Bible and prayer, the loss of integrity, the degradation of sex, the leveling of all society into one common denominator and the centralization of power in nations and in continents, are preparing the way for the rule of this anti-Christ. But the Believer need not despair nor fear. At the critical moment, Jesus will come again. "And then shall be

revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to naught by the manifestation of his coming” (2 Thess. 2:8). “I will come again” is the key to history. All that transpires until then is prelude. The real world of men in God’s image will then begin. This is only preparation. It is rehearsal, for us Christians. The concert has not yet begun. Is your heart troubled? You believe in God, you say. You believe in Jesus, too. Well, then, He is keeping the prepared place at the throne of God. And He is coming again! Remember that our citizenship is recorded in Heaven, “whence also we wait for a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself” (Philippians 5:20-21).

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