

“THE BEST PART ABOUT HEAVEN”

JOHN 14:2-3, EASTER 5-A, MOTHER’S DAY, MAY 14, 2017

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:1-3)!

SOME OF THE QUESTIONS I have been asked the MOST OFTEN, AS A PASTOR, OVER THE YEARS—are questions ABOUT HEAVEN.

ONE THING THAT PEOPLE want to know is whether or not THEY WILL RECOGNIZE AND BE RECOGNIZED by their FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS ONCE THEY ARRIVE THERE! They certainly do not doubt that they and their loved ones who have died in the faith will all **ONE DAY** be in heaven! For they agree wholeheartedly with St. Paul who says in II CORINTHIANS 5:8, “TO BE AWAY FROM THE BODY IS TO BE AT HOME WITH THE LORD!”

Of course, the Bible answers this question for us UNQUALIFIEDLY WITH A “**YES!**” NOT ONLY WILL WE KNOW EVERY ONE WHOM WE HAVE KNOWN IN THIS LIFE THAT ARE THERE—and therefore, never again HAVE ANY PROBLEM CONNECTING NAMES WITH FACES, BUT WE WILL ALSO KNOW EVERYONE THERE! People whom we have never even met before—who lived on the OTHER SIDE OF THE GLOBE—EVEN THOSE PEOPLE WHO LIVED A THOUSAND YEARS BEFORE US OR A THOUSAND YEARS AFTER US!

In I CORINTHIANS 13:12-13, St. Paul writes: “FOR NOW WE SEE IN A MIRROR DIMLY, BUT THEN FACE TO FACE. NOW I KNOW IN PART; THEN I SHALL KNOW FULLY, EVEN AS I HAVE BEEN FULLY KNOWN. SO FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE ABIDE, THESE THREE, BUT THE GREATEST OF THESE IS LOVE!”

WE WILL SEE JESUS

THE PLACE TO BEGIN THIS DISCUSSION, however, is not with OUR RECOGNITION OF EACH OTHER and the ENJOYMENT we will experience THERE WITH ONE ANOTHER BUT WITH THE FACT THAT WE THEN SEE JESUS FACE TO FACE AND ENJOY HIM.

So let’s begin here with a **simple matter of priority!** For AS MUCH AS WE WILL WANT TO SEE A PARENT WHO HAS DIED, OR a HUSBAND OR WIFE, OR a CHILD, OR an EXTREMELY CLOSE FRIEND who has died—we will WANT TO SEE JESUS—MUCH MORE!

THIS IS WHAT WILL MAKE HEAVEN A REAL HOME FOR US! Yes, having our loved ones there will be a part of it, but the thing that will make heaven a true home is being with Jesus!

Some of you may know that one of the greatest American evangelists and preachers in the 19TH CENTURY was a man named DWIGHT L. MOODY (1837-1899), who founded a CHURCH IN CHICAGO that is still very much alive and active today that years later, was renamed after him: *The Moody Church!* *Dwight Moody also was highly instrumental* in the founding of a Christian college—also still in existence today known as—the “MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE!”

Years ago, he was preaching on this same Gospel lesson as ours today, on a Sunday that wasn't really MOTHER'S DAY because Mother's Day didn't come about until 1908. Nevertheless, in that sermon he told the story of a little girl whose mother had become very sick, and whose neighbor had taken the little girl with her into her house to care for her, hopefully, until her mother would totally regain her health and strength!

Unfortunately, instead of getting better, her mother only grew worse and died! Since this **young girl was only three years old**, the neighbors thought it was better *not to take that little girl back to her home until after the funeral was over.* , Because her dad had to work fulltime, the neighbors decided to wait until the little girl was older—before they told her—that her mother had died! SO AFTER A WHILE THEY SIMPLY BROUGHT THE LITTLE GIRL HOME.

AT ONCE SHE WENT TO FIND HER MOTHER. First, she went into—what was called back then the **“sitting room”** to find her mother. Not finding her there, she then went into what used to be called the **“parlor”** to find her mother but did not find her there. *She went from one end of the house to the other, but she could not find her mom!*

AT LAST, SHE ASKED HER CARETAKER, “WHERE IS MY MOM?” When the caretaker told the little girl simply that her mother was gone—**HOME SUDDENLY LOST ALL OF ITS ATTRACTION TO THIS LITTLE GIRL!**

Then *Dwight Moody concluded* his story by saying: “IT IS NOT THE JASPER WALLS and THE PEARLY GATES, or the STREETS OF GOLD, or the EMERALD FOUNTAINS THAT WILL MAKE HEAVEN THE MOST ATTRACTIVE TO US! IT WILL BE OUR BEING THERE WITH GOD; OUR BEING THERE WITH JESUS—WHOM WE WILL THEN SEE FACE TO FACE!”

To know that we are going to heaven is a wonderful thing! But more wonderful still is the fact that WE SHALL SEE Jesus and shall be able TO EXPRESS TO HIM THAT PRAISE AND LOVE HE DESERVES FOR HAVING LEFT HEAVEN TO COME TO EARTH AND TO DIE HERE FOR US SINNERS! SEEING JESUS FACE TO FACE WILL BE THE BEST PART OF HEAVEN!

A REUNION: The point at which we began is not whether or not we will see and recognize Jesus BUT WHETHER OR NOT WE WILL SEE AND RECOGNIZE EACH OTHER. Will we recognize each other? Of course, we will. What is more, there are MANY INDICATIONS GIVEN TO US THROUGHOUT THE BIBLE THAT THIS THEOLOGICAL TENET IS TRUE!

In the book of Genesis, there is a phrase that is used three times with respect to the death of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Aaron. In GENESIS 25:8, we read: “THEN ABRAHAM BREATHED HIS LAST AND DIED AT A GOOD OLD AGE, AN OLD MAN AND FULL OF YEARS. HE WAS BURIED AND HE WAS GATHERED UNTO HIS PEOPLE!”

When ISAAC died, we read in GENESIS 35:29, his sons Esau and Jacob buried him and that *HE TOO, “WAS GATHERED UNTO HIS PEOPLE!*

In GENESIS 49:33, we read that when JACOB had died, he too “WAS GATHERED TO HIS PEOPLE.” And the same thing is said of Jacob’s son, AARON in NUMBERS 20:24, “When Aaron died he too was gathered unto his people!”

AFTER THE CHILD THAT HAD BEEN CONCEIVED BY DAVID AND BATHSHEBA, YOU REMEMBER THAT THAT CHILD GREW VERY SICK. During the time of that child’s severe illness, which only grew worse day by day, KING DAVID PRAYED FOR THE CHILD AND FASTED, LYING ALL NIGHT, THE BIBLE TELLS US, “UPON THE EARTH!” When the child died, the women entrusted with that child’s care were totally fearful of breaking this news to David, but when they did so—KING DAVID SURPRISED THEM TOTALLY BY RISING FROM HIS PLACE OF MOURNING, WASHING HIMSELF, DRESSING AND RESUMING HIS DUTIES AS A 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? No! THEREFORE, I WILL GO TO HIM, BUT HE WILL NOT RETURN TO ME*” (2 SAMUEL 12:22-23)! David here was obviously expecting a glad reunion one day with his son in heaven!

In the NEW TESTAMENT, PETER, JAMES AND JOHN WHO HAD NEVER MET MOSES AND ELIJAH before, since Moses had lived some 1200 years before them, and Elijah had lived some 700 years before them---had certainly never seen a photograph or an artist’s conception of them—BECAUSE NOTHING LIKE THAT EXISTED—AT THAT TIME—but still they knew them, THEY RECOGNIZED THEM, FOR WHO THEY WERE AND PETER said so openly to Jesus who was at that time MAGNIFICENTLY TRANSFIGURED BEFORE THEM (LUKE 9:33)!

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, NOT ONLY WE WILL SEE JESUS—AT LONG LAST—FACE TO FACE IN HEAVEN! NOT ONLY WILL WE KNOW EVERYONE WHO IS THERE! **But at long last, we too will then become in that great hour all that we were meant to be!**

ALL THAT WE WERE MEANT TO BE

This truth is conveyed to us also by the Apostle John who writes in his first letter: “DEAR FRIENDS, NOW WE ARE CHILDREN OF GOD, AND WHAT WE WILL BE HAS NOT YET BEEN MADE KNOWN. BUT WE KNOW THAT WHEN HE APPEARS, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM, FOR WE SHALL SEE HIM AS HE IS” (1 JOHN 3:2)!

This means that not only will we be like Jesus—in that we too—will be given NEW AND GLORIED BODIES, but that we SHALL BE LIKE HIM, SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING TOO.

AS A RESULT, ALL OF THE SIN, IGNORANCE, ANGER, HATE, WEARINESS, AND PERVERSITY THAT TOO OFTEN MARKED OUR LIVES AND OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH ONE ANOTHER---WILL NOW AT LONG LAST ALSO BE ELIMINATED. In that day we will have a totally fresh view of each other, for we will see each other, not as we have come to know each other during our time while here below, in our sin, but rather as we were meant to be.

Moreover, the Risen Christ also tells us in REVELATION 22:12, we will then see each other REWARDED FOR OUR FAITHFUL SERVICE IN THIS LIFE, FOR THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF CROWNS THAT WILL BE GIVEN TO THOSE WHO WERE FAITHFUL. The Lord himself as said, “BEHOLD, I AM COMING SOON! MY REWARD IS WITH ME, AND I WILL GIVE TO EVERYONE ACCORDING TO WHAT THEY HAVE DONE!”

WITHOUT A DOUBT, HOWEVER, THE BEST PART OF HEAVEN WILL SIMPLY BE OUR BEING TOGETHER WITH JESUS! HE IS OUR RISEN SAVIOR WHO STILL COMES AMONG US TO CALM OUR TROUBLED HEARTS!

THE WORDS OF OUR GOSPEL LESSON THIS MORNING GIVE US A FLASHBACK TO JESUS’ PRESENCE with his disciples in that Upper Room of Jerusalem on the night before he died. WHAT

A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE, HOWEVER, THAT WE HAVE OVER AGAINST THOSE FIRST DISCIPLES of Jesus who were gathered together with their Lord in that room that first Maundy Thursday! WHY? BECAUSE WE ARE EASTER PEOPLE! WE ARE PEOPLE WHO KNOW FULL WELL HOW THE EVENTS OF THAT FIRST HOLY WEEK TURNED OUT! **“Jesus is Risen from the dead! Alleluia!”** This is a message that would soon become—and is still today—the **greatest “LIFE CHANGING MESSAGE”** in the world!

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God believe also in me.

JESUS KNOWS FULL WELL—THAT THERE ARE TIMES IN EACH OF OUR LIVES WHEN OUR HEARTS ARE TROUBLED INDEED! **And not a single one of us is ever totally immune from that kind of experience as we make our way through life!**

LEFT TO OURSELVES, WE CAN WORRY OURSELVES SILLY! LEFT TO OURSELVES—THE DEVIL DOES HIS BEST TO CONVINCING US THAT NO ONE ELSE IN THE HISTORY OF THE WHOLE WORLD HAS EVER FACED AS BIG OF A PROBLEM **as the one we are up against and facing now!** LEFT TO OURSELVES—OUR TROUBLED HEARTS—BEGIN TO QUIVER AND SHAKE! Left to ourselves the LEVEL OF OUR ANXIETY ONLY INTENSIFIES. And here Jesus reminds us once again that the ONLY TRUE ANTIDOTE FOR FEAR AND DOUBT IS FOR US TO RETURN IN FAITH, ONCE AGAIN, TO THE LORD OUR GOD. Then Jesus goes on to make some powerful promises to his disciples back then, as well as to you and me, still today!

*(1) First, Jesus teaches us, that whatever kind of hardship that you and I may be experiencing in our lives right now—it is **only temporary! Why?***

(2) Because he secondly promises us that he will come back for us at the appointed hour to live with him in his Father’s house forever!

Jesus was in no way abandoning his disciples as they must have thought that he was going to do. Jesus wanted them to understand that his impending death was PART OF THE FATHER’S PLAN BUT NOT THE FINAL ACT IN THE STORY OF OUR SALVATION! **Jesus would return to gather his disciples, but first he will prepare a place for us!** AND WHERE WAS JESUS GOING TO PREPARE THAT PLACE FOR US? YES, ULTIMATELY HE WOULD ASCEND TO HIS RIGHTFUL PLACE IN GLORY, 40 DAYS AFTER EASTER, BUT BEFORE THAT—THE PLACE WHERE JESUS HAD TO GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR US IN HEAVEN WAS TO CALVARY’S CROSS! **Therefore, should we really jump over the holy, innocent, bitter sufferings and death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ on that first Good Friday—so quickly—so thoughtlessly—and so haphazardly?**

I love the question that is asked by the PROPHET JEREMIAH, who was severely persecuted by the people of Judah throughout the days of his prophetic ministry among them. The false prophets did everything they could to discount and to discredit the words of Jeremiah’s prophecy among the people of his nation. Once, they even WENT SO FAR AS TO MAKE A PUBLIC SPECTACLE OUT OF JEREMIAH—PLACING HIM IN SOMETHING THAT WAS CALLED “THE STOCKS,” **not unlike the kind of cruel punishment** that the Puritans, at times, would inflict on fellow citizens who was guilty of some type of crime or offense against the community in New England during the late 17th and early 18th centuries! Perhaps JEREMIAH had this experience in mind when he asked a very personal question in **LAMENTATIONS 1:12**, *“Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which was brought upon me, which the LORD inflicted on the day of his fierce anger!?”*

Lenten Hymn: “DO WE PASS THAT CROSS UNHEEDING, BREATHING NO REPENTANT VOW?
THOUGH WE SEE YOU WOUNDED, BLEEDING, SEE YOUR THORN ENCIRCLED BROW?
YET YOUR SINLESS DEATH HAS BROUGHT US LIFE ETERNAL, PEACE AND REST.
ONLY WHAT YOUR GRACE HAS TAUGHT US CALMS THE SINNER’S GREAT DISTRESS!

WE KNOW, BROTHERS AND SISTERS, THAT THESE WORDS OF THE FAITHFUL PROPHET JEREMIAH WERE THEIR ULTIMATE FULFILLMENT IN JESUS OF NAZARETH, WHO WAS STRIPPED OF HIS CLOTHING, WHIPPED MERCILESSLY, SCORNE AND CROWNED WITH A CROWN OF THORNS AND NAILED TO CALVARY'S CROSS!

Still, however, he is preparing a place for us!

Still today, among many people, though I understand it is a practice that is fast evaporating, when a guest was coming to their home there was a time when many Americans used to do their best to make things as nice and as special as they possibly could as they anticipated the arrival of their guests. Today, I understand that this is a social nicety that is now slipping rapidly away from many people in our present day culture!

Back in the day, when a guest was coming to your house for a dinner party, you used to "PULL OUT ALL THE STOPS," like when the organist wants the organ to play every single sound it has in it—at once! That's what she does—she pulls out all the stops!

Back in the day, we southerners used to say as we were anticipating special guests to arrive at our home, it wasn't all that long ago that we used to say to one another that we were really going to "put on the dog!" We would, of course, clean the house and bring out our best china, and crystal glassware. Whoever was responsible for cooking the meal would then get out their best recipes.

Just imagine Jesus preparing a place for us in the Father's house. He tells us that this is what he is doing—all in the joyful expectation that he will one day bring us there to rejoice with him in his Father's house—that has room enough for everybody—with rooms to spare! AMEN