

Sermon Notes for August 29, 2004

Interesting Conversations With Jesus Series “There’s No Place Like Home” John 13:31-14:6

In **Our Greatest Gift**, Henri Nouwen tells a **parable of faith and hope**. He imagines **twins – a brother and a sister – talking to each other in their mother’s womb:**

The sister said to the brother, **“I believe there is life after birth.”** Her brother protested vehemently, **“No, no, this is all there is. This is a dark and cozy place, and we have nothing else to do but to cling to the cord that feeds us.”**

The little girl insisted, **“There must be something more than this dark place. There must be something else, a place with light where there is freedom to move.”** Still, she could not convince her twin brother. After some silence, the sister said hesitantly, **“I have something else to say, and I’m afraid you won’t believe that, either, but I think there is a mother.”**

Her brother became furious. **“A mother!”** he shouted. **“What are you talking about? I have never seen a mother, and neither have you. Who put that idea in your head? As I told you, this place is all we have. Why do you always want more? This is not such a bad place, after all. We have all we need, so let’s be content.”**

The sister was quite overwhelmed by her brother’s response and for a while didn’t dare say anything more. But she couldn’t let go of her thoughts, and since she had only her twin brother to speak to, she finally said, **“Don’t you feel these squeezes every once in a while? They’re quite unpleasant and sometimes even painful.”**

“Yes,” he answered. **“What’s special about that?”**

“Well,” the sister said, **“I think that these squeezes are there to get us ready for another place, much more beautiful than this, where we will see our mother face-to-face. Don’t you think that’s exciting?”**

The brother didn’t answer. He was fed up with the foolish talk of his sister and felt that the best thing would be simply to ignore her and hope that she would leave him alone.

Introduction

A. IS THERE A Heaven?

1. **79%** of all Americans believe that there will be a **day when God judges whether you go to heaven or hell.**
2. In our hearts, most of us seem to know, no matter what we have been taught. **“As Vice President, George Bush represented the U.S. at the funeral of former Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev.** Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev’s widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev’s wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience ever committed: **She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband’s chest.** There in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all **hoped that her husband was wrong.** She hoped that there was another life, and that that life was best represented by Jesus who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband.” Gary Thomas.

B. YES, There Is A Heaven.

1. The word heaven is mentioned some **140 times** in Scripture.
2. The most obvious example is the Lord's Prayer – taught by Jesus Himself.
 - a. "Our Father, who art in **HEAVEN**."
 - b. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in **HEAVEN**.

C. What DIFFERENCE Should The Knowledge Of Heaven Make In Our Lives?

1. It is wrong to wish for heaven so much that we wish our lives on this earth away.
2. It is foolish to live our lives as though there is no heaven at all.
3. Let's see Jesus' view of heaven as He speaks to His disciples.

I. TROUBLE In Our HEARTS.

A. The DISCIPLES' TENDENCY To Worry.

1. The disciples had every reason to worry.

John 13:33 - "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: **Where I am going, you cannot come.**"

 - a. even though Jesus has told them over and over that He must die and come back from the dead, **IT HAD NOT FULLY REGISTERED IN THEIR MINDS**
 - b. after all, the Jewish belief was that the Messiah was going to come and set up His earthly Kingdom and restore Israel to its original political and military prominence in the world
 - c. and now . . . He says that He will be leaving them
 - d. so . . . understandably, they began to worry
 - e. remember that the disciples were on the "front side" of the resurrection
 1. Where is He going?
 2. Can they go with Him?
 3. What will happen to them?
 4. What will happen to us?
2. But notice how Jesus confronts them. His solution to their worry:
 - a. **He tells them not to worry.**

Vs. 1a – "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

 1. the Greek means "stop letting your hearts be troubled"
 2. there is something that you can do and must do to stop this worrying
 - b. **He tells them about heaven.**

Vs. 1-2 - "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God ; trust also in me. **In my Father's house are many rooms**; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."

 1. He doesn't tell them to memorize verses on worry.
 2. He simply tells them about heaven.

B. OUR TENDENCY To Worry.

1. The reasoning of many Christians.
 - a. "Pollyanna Christianity"
 1. **James M. Boice** calls it "Pollyanna Christianity" – "It is the kind of Christianity that pretends that there are no troubles for any truly surrendered child of God."
 2. "Everything will be all right."
 3. "Act like a Christian, because Jesus loves you."

- b. **“The victorious Christian life”**
 - 1. we are to rise above all of our problems because Jesus is our King
 - 2. we are to be “victors over worry”
 - c. **“Prosperity Theology”**
 - 1. problems are there because of our sin
 - 2. problems are there because of Satan
2. **The reality of most Christians.**
- a. we live in a fallen world
 - 1. things break
 - 2. things fall apart
 - 3. James Dobson – The Law of Entophy
 - a. life is prone to disintegration
 - b. relationships are prone to disintegration
 - b. after all, Jesus Himself says that we will have problems
 - 1. **John 16:33** - "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. **In this world you will have trouble.** But take heart! I have overcome the world."
 - 2. EXPECT TROUBLES
 - c. I like what **James M. Boice** said:
 - 1. “This view (Pollyanna) 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.**”
 - 2. “Did the disciples **have cause to be troubled?** Certainly they did! **From this we learn that it is not wrong to honestly recognize and even analyze our problems.**”
 - 3. “**So, Christians are realists.** They are realists about all life’s problems. At the same time, however, we must add that they are realists about the **power of God and His promises.**”
3. **The response of Jesus.**
- a. Did you notice that Jesus was often “troubled?”
 - 1. at the **death of Lazarus** –
John 11:32-35 - When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, **he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.** “Where have you laid him?” he asked. "Come and see, Lord," they replied. **Jesus wept.**
 - 2. **in the upper room** –
John 13:18-21 - "I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.' "I am telling you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe that I am He. I tell you the truth, whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me." **After he had said this, Jesus was troubled**

- in spirit** and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me."
- b. Notice how Jesus comforted Himself –
Hebrews 12:2 – “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, **who for the joy set before him endured the cross**, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
 - c. The same faith that Jesus shared with His disciples is the same truth that we must grasp. **THERE IS A HEAVEN.**
 - 1. now, notice how Jesus expounds on His teaching on heaven
 - 2. after all, He is speaking to us as well.

II. TRUSTING In Our SAVIOR.

A. Trusting In His PROVIDENCE.

Vs. 1a – “Trust in God, trust also in me.”

1. Do we “**trust God?**”

- a. for thousands of years, Jehovah God prophesied about the coming of the Messiah
- b. God had **CLEARLY** planned for the Messiah to come and die for the sins of His people
- c. **THIS WAS GOD’S PLAN -**
 - 1. **THIS WAS HIS MISSION**
 - 2. and you have always believed God

2. Do we “**trust Jesus?**”

- a. well . . . Jesus is the physical fulfillment of these same prophecies
- b. Jesus is saying that: **I MUST GO TO THE CROSS.**
 - 1. I must **die**.
 - 2. I must **suffer for man’s sins**.
 - 3. I must **be resurrected**.
 - 4. I must **present my sacrifice to my Father**.
- c. **If I don’t go to the cross, you will never see heaven!**
 - 1. I have come to die for you!
 - 2. **BELIEVE ME!**
 - a. as fearful as you are
 - b. as bad as it looks now
 - c. **THIS IS FOR YOUR OWN SPIRITUAL ETERNITY!**

B. Trusting In His PREPARATION.

Vs. 3 – “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

- 1. Jesus not only is teaching His disciples that there is a heaven
- 2. Jesus, as well, teaches them that there are rooms in heaven.
 - a. Greek
 - 1. mone
 - 2. mansions
 - 3. dwellings
 - 4. abiding places
 - b. no one really knows what this term means
 - 1. Does everyone have a huge mansion?

2. Is it like a condo or apartment?
 3. Is there a huge house of the Father and we will all have our own room?
 - c. Whatever it is, **THERE IS A LITERAL PLACE** for believers in heaven!
3. **LOOK CAREFULLY AT THIS VERSE:**
- a. **He**
 1. Jesus Himself
 2. not His angels, or the saints
 3. but, Jesus personally
 - b. **is preparing**
 1. to make ready
 2. to make the necessary preparation
 3. the early meaning of the word was that servants go ahead of a King to fill in and level the road for the King's coming
 - c. **a place**
 1. a literal place
 2. NOT just a spiritual idea
 - d. **for you**
 1. **THIS IS A PERSONAL PRONOUN**
 2. not just:
 - a. for others, Moses, David, Paul
 - b. **BUT . . . FOR . . . YOU**
 - c. **Pastor Kent Hughes** tells the following story:
 Many years ago a perpetually barefoot little girl walked across the grass of a housing project, the kind built to house dependents of servicemen during World War II. She was on her way to a **Good News Club**. She had a dream, and she thought she could make her dream come true because Mrs. White, who taught that group, promised to give her a little book she could read. It was a wordless book, and she had dreamed about that book with its colored pages and its little clasp that neatly snapped shut. She had encouraged her older brothers and sisters to repeat over and over again the words that went with the pages. **The black** (Romans 3:23), **the red** (John 3:16), **the white** (Isaiah 1:16), and, very significantly, **the gold (John 14:2-3)**. That day she recited her verses, received her book, and sang with the rest of the children.

Once my heart was **black as sin**,
 Until the Savior came in.
 His **precious blood** I know
 Has washed it **whiter than snow**;
 And in this world I'm told
 I'll walk the **streets of gold**.
 Oh, wonderful, wonderful day;
 He washed my sins away.

That little girl, now my wife, Barbara, will never forget that day because on that day she met Jesus. In retrospect she says it was the **gold page – the promise of an eternal dwelling** – that caught hold of her and drew her to Jesus. We all have a longing for Heaven.

C. Trusting In His PERSEVERENCE.

Vs. 3 – “And if I go and prepare a place for you, **I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**”

1. Not only does Jesus say that He is going away in order for His disciples to go to heaven
 - a. that He must go and die
 - b. that He must resurrect from the dead
2. But . . . **THAT HE TOTALLY KEEPS HIS WORD BECAUSE HE IS COMING BACK!**
 - a. it would be enough for Jesus to go to the cross, die and then return to heaven – that should be enough
 - b. but . . . Jesus will RETURN to take His disciples back to heaven PERSONALLY**
 1. how much **more** can Jesus say?
 - a. yes, there is reason for your being troubled because I am leaving
 - b. but I **must** leave so that I can die for your sins – so that you can go to heaven
 - c. but I will not end it there – I will personally “escort” you to this heaven where you will live with me FOREVER!
 2. Do we truly **BELIEVE** Jesus?

D. Trusting In His PRESCRIPTION.

Vs. 5-6 - 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.**"

1. So, yes, there is a heaven and Jesus will take you to your room in heaven.
2. But . . . despite all of the encouraging words of Jesus about heaven and the fact that He is preparing a room for us, the disciples have a **“key”** to get into the room.
 - a. Jesus is the **Way**. (the **route** to God)
 1. Jesus is actually saying that He is the **“highway to heaven”**
 2. and that unless you use this “highway,” you will take the wrong road
 3. and this is different than merely getting directions; no, HE IS LITERALLY THE WAY, the road, the highway
 - a. it’s one thing to ask a person for directions
 - b. it’s another thing for them to put you in their car and “take you there” – THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT JESUS IS SAYING
 4. Jesus’ way is the only way.
 - a. He is the **only one to come from heaven.**
 - b. He is the **only one to live a sinless life.**
 - c. He is the **only one to take one’s sins upon Himself by the beatings and the cross.**

- d. He is the **only who rose again and took His finished work to the Father.**
 - e. He is the **only one who is interceding for us even now.**
 - f. He is the **only one who will escort us to heaven.**
- 5. So, if you do not go on “that highway” you will never get to heaven.
- b. Jesus is the **Truth.** (the **reasoning** of God)
 - 1. when you hear such an outrageous statement, you may say . . . that is crazy, there are other ways to get to heaven
 - 2. I love what C.S. Lewis once said of Jesus:
 - a. He is either a **liar**
 - b. He is either a **lunatic**
 - c. or He is indeed **Lord.**
 - 3. because, until you accept the fact that Jesus was and is exactly who He said He was, you will have no hope of heaven
 - 4. When the Holy Spirit comes into your life He will convince you that Jesus is the truth.
 - a. Joe Walker – Columbia
 - b. **John 16:13** – “But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.”
- c. Jesus is the **Life.** (the **reality** of God)
 - 1. ultimately, on this earth, the only way that you will really **know** if Jesus is true or not is whether your life has been **transformed** by His presence in your life
 - a. if you are not being changed by God
 - b. if you think the same way that you have always thought about life
 - c. if you have no real desire to know Jesus
 - d. if you never read your Bible, never serve Him, never desire to minister to others . . . **THEN YOU ARE NOT A CHRISTIAN!**
 - e. **YOU CANNOT ASK JESUS INTO YOUR LIFE AND SEE NO CHANGE IN YOUR LIFE!**
 - 2. So . . .
 - a. despite the fact that Jesus offers heaven to you
 - b. despite the fact that He would prepare a place for you personally
 - c. until His life becomes your life, you will **NOT** be going there
 - 3. So . . . do you have a key?
 - a. Do you want to go to heaven?
 - b. Do you want to live in mansions of glory?
 - c. Do you have a key?
 - 1. Have you accepted Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord?
 - 2. If not, you have no hope of ever going to heaven.

Conclusion:

1. In my discipleship ministry, I like to ask my disciples what God is doing **RIGHT now**.
 - a. He is being worshipped by all of heaven; all of the saints and all of the angels.
 - b. He is sitting at the right hand of the Father interceding for me and you.
 - c. **BUT ALSO . . . HE IS PREPARING A PLACE IN HEAVEN, PERSONALLY FOR YOU AND ME.**
2. THIS IS THE ULTIMATE HOPE OF THE SAINTS.
 - a. **Dr. A.L. Gaebelein** used to say that among his family treasures was a German Bible that went back many generations. He said one could open that Bible to some pages and it looked like it had just come off the press, **but when opened to John 14, it was spotted, soiled, and worn from the tears of many generations.**
 - b. **John Watson**, the great preacher, said that if someone in his flock was going through deep waters and was about to die, sometimes he would kneel down next to them and whisper, **“In my Father’s house are many mansions,”** and he said that three quarters of the way through the river, they would almost turn around and come back, and he would hear them repeating, **“ . . . Father’s house . . . many mansions . . .”**
 - c. **Henry Venn**, a Puritan preacher, was dying and, his biography tells us, **“The prospect made him so high-spirited and jubilant that his doctor said that his joy at dying kept him alive a further fortnight.”** We derive great comfort from the fact that Jesus is coming to take us to be with Him.
3. There is a story told about a **5-year-old-African-American boy** who will never be forgotten by those who knew him. **He was dying of lung cancer**, which is a terrifying disease in its final stages. **The lungs fill with fluid, and the patient is unable to breathe. It is terribly claustrophobic**, especially for a small child.

This little boy had a Christian mother who loved him and stayed by his side through the long ordeal. She cradled him on her lap and talked softly about the Lord. Instinctively, the woman was preparing her son for the final hours to come. Gracie told me that she entered his room one day as death approached, and **she heard this lad talking about hearing bells. “The bells are ringing, Mommie,”** he said. **“I can hear them.”**

Gracie thought he was hallucinating because he was already slipping away. She left and returned a few minutes later and again heard him talking about hearing bells ringing. The nurse said to his mother, **“I’m sure you know your baby is hearing things that aren’t there. He is hallucinating because of the sickness.”**

The mother pulled her son closer to her chest, smiled and said, **“No, he is not hallucinating. I told him when he was frightened – when he couldn’t breathe – if he would listen carefully, he could hear the bells of heaven ringing for him. That is what he’s been talking about all day.”**

That precious child died on his mother’s lap later that evening, and he was still talking about the bells of heaven when the angels came to take him. What a brave little trooper he was!

There will be no scurrying around trying to find a mansion for you, if the Lord were to call you home today. Because Heaven will be ready.
4. Pastor and Bible teacher, **Dr. James M. Gray** once wrote a song that had verse which said: **“Who could mind the journey when the road leads home.”**