

John 14:1-4

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[0 : 00] It's good to get home. I don't travel much. I don't have much occasion to, but every so often I'll have a meeting in Edinburgh that's maybe all day between going and coming back. And after a long day driving up Quarry Road and turning into the driveway at the Mance, there's always a sense of grateful relief and satisfaction that I've arrived home. I'm home.

I made it home. And for those of you who are more adventurous and whose travels are further afield and perhaps for longer periods of time, I'm sure you can identify with that longing to get back home, even though you may be enjoying the trip and the adventure of it. There's always that sense. It's good to get home. Home is that place where we are loved and secure. Certainly that's what it ought to be. Home is where we belong. The Bible describes heaven in different ways. Different pictures are painted to give us some insight into heaven. It's described as a country, as a city, a kingdom, a paradise. But also, and in a way that merges the picture with the reality as our home, where we belong. In the words of the country gospel song, this world is not my home. I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, and I can't feel at home in this world anymore. For the believer, heaven is home. In John chapter 14, we have recorded words of Jesus directed to the disciples where the picture he uses or the language employed is of heaven as our home. I want us to consider what Jesus has to say about heaven in this passage, and especially the first few verses of chapter 14. And we can arrange what we want to say with the help of three headings. First of all, heaven described. Then heaven prepared. And then thirdly, and finally, heaven assured. So heaven described, heaven prepared, and heaven assured. And having spent a little time considering these three aspects of Jesus' teaching, we'll close by considering what we need to do in the light of what Jesus teaches concerning heaven. And so that question will occupy us as we draw things to a close. First of all then, heaven described. Well, how is heaven described?

Does the Bible, be it in this passage or elsewhere, does it give us the equivalent of an estate agent's brochure to satisfy our curiosity? What's it like? What's heaven like? What does it look like? How big is it? How spacious? Are there any special features that we could be told about to look forward to? The Bible and Jesus in our passage is much more concerned with who is there. Heaven is where the Father is. Heaven is where Jesus is. And heaven is where we will be. And that really is the primary concern of the Bible in speaking of heaven for us. It concerns itself with who is there rather than perhaps what it is like. So let's think about those who occupy heaven, the Father, the Son, and in due course ourselves as believers. Heaven is where the Father is. Notice the language that Jesus uses to describe heaven. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. In my Father's house are many rooms. Heaven is the Father's house. It is the family home where the father of the family resides. More than a palace, it is a home. It is the place where the

[4 : 41] Father showers his love on his children. It is the place where the Father joyfully welcomes home his children. It is the place where each child of God finds rest and peace. And it is the place where scattered family members ultimately will gather all together at the Father's table in the Father's house.

heaven is the Father's house. It is where the Father is. But it's also very clear from what Jesus says here and of course elsewhere in Scripture that heaven is where Jesus is. He also belongs in heaven. Jesus describes heaven, as we've just noted, as my Father's house. And so, by necessary consequence, it is his home too. It is my Father's house. And so, of course, it is my home too, as says Jesus, or clearly implies. We know that Jesus came from heaven and returned home to heaven. Indeed, it is of this that he is speaking in this passage. Also in these verses, Jesus speaks of the prospect of the disciples being where I am. That in verse 3, 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. That is where I belong. That is where I reside. That is where I am. And in due course, I will bring you to be where I am. Heaven is where Jesus is. Of course, this is the prospect that Jesus intends will calm their troubled hearts. The chapter begins with this call. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Why were they troubled? Why the need for their troubled hearts to be calmed? Well, we have read in the verses that come immediately preceding chapter 14, what it was that had caused their hearts to be troubled. And principally, what Jesus had said to them there in verse 33 of the previous chapter, 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. Now, they didn't understand really what he was saying, but whatever he meant, they didn't like it. This prospect of separation was what was troubling them. There may have been other elements to it, but this was at the heart of their troubled heart. He's going to leave. We can't follow him. What will we do? We're going to be abandoned by the master. And so they were troubled. And Jesus says, don't be troubled. Because the time is coming when I will bring you to be with me where I am in heaven. Heaven is where Jesus is. We're reminded in this connection of the words of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians, I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far. Heaven is where the Father is. Heaven is where Jesus is. And heaven, of course, is where we will be as believers. I guess that the one detail here in these verses that might approximate to estate agents speak is the reference to many rooms. Or those of us who still in our minds are more familiar with the language of the authorized version, many mansions. My Father's house are many mansions or many rooms or many dwelling places. What is the significance of this? We'd have to say less than precise detail of many rooms.

[8 : 44] What's the intention in Jesus in describing heaven in this way or giving this detail concerning heaven? Well, the rooms, of course, the dwelling places that He speaks of are for the disciples, for us.

And the intention of Jesus in speaking of many rooms is surely to assure us that there is room enough for all the redeemed. There's no prospect of there not being any room in heaven for God's people. There is room enough. But the language of rooms or dwelling places also points to a place of permanent residence.

Here in this world, we're pilgrims. We're just passing through. But heaven is presented as a place of permanent residence for God's people. There are no evictions from the Father's house.

So heaven is described, but described, as we've noticed, very importantly in terms of its residence, who is there. But then in this passage, there's also a reference and a somewhat intriguing reference to heaven prepared, or at least that's the manner in which we're summarizing it, heaven prepared. Jesus uses in these verses this language of preparing a place for His disciples, and He's very insistent on this. There in verse 2, in the second half of the verse, I am going there to my Father's house, I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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. Now, we're familiar with the language.

[10 : 38] The passage is one that I'm sure we've often read or heard read. So we're familiar with the language. I'm going to prepare a place for you. But I wonder, have you ever given any thought to what that means?

What did Jesus mean when He said, I'm going to prepare a place for you? In what sense? To think about this or to get our heads around it in some way, let's ask one or two questions. In what sense is heaven not already prepared for God's people? What preparation is required? What does this preparation involve? What does it mean? What does Jesus mean when He says, I'm going to prepare a place for you? I think the honest answer to that would be that I don't know. But I want to suggest what it is that Jesus might be meaning by the use of this language. I am going to prepare a place for you. And in order to try and understand what Jesus is saying, we need to first of all, take clear note of when Jesus is speaking. And in due course, I hope that will become clear why that's important. When is it that Jesus is addressing His disciples? In what very specific context? That's the first thing that we'll need to do. But the other thing we'll need to do is to try and identify what is, we might call, the principal verb in the sentence in question. And I'm thinking there, especially there at the end of verse 2, I am going there to prepare a place for you. Two verbs that stand out. I am going to prepare. Which of these is the one that is intended to be the principal verb, if we can use that language. So first of all, the first question that we pose, when is Jesus speaking about heaven?

When is it that He speaks to His disciples and says, you know, I'm going to my Father's house? When is it that He says that? When might we have imagined that He would speak in these terms? We might imagine, of course we know, but we might imagine that just before the ascension that would be an appropriate time to say, well, I'm going now.

I'm going to my Father's house. But when is it that He speaks to His disciples in this way? Well, the passage that we're looking at is a part of what is known as the Paschal or Passover address given by Jesus on the very eve of His death in the place of these very disciples.

Jesus is speaking in the very shadow of Calvary, His atoning death, the pivotal event in the whole of God's redemptive story is what looms large in His own mind and soul. And I want you to just hold that thought that this is the occasion in which Jesus is speaking to His disciples. But then with that thought held for future reference, what are the verbs in Jesus' statement there in verse 12?

I am going there to prepare a place for you. I've always imagined, I don't know if this is true, also of you, but I've always imagined consciously or unconsciously that it is the second verb, prepare, that's the principal verb. The going is simply the necessary prelude to the preparing.

[14:09] In order to prepare, well, He needs to go. So, I'm going, but what really occupies our attention is this, task of preparing the place for us. But I wonder, might it not rather be that it is the going that constitutes the preparing? Let me explain what I mean by that. And we can try to explain what I mean by that by asking this question, what would this going to heaven involve for Jesus? How would He get there?

How was Jesus to go to heaven? What is the route that He would have to take? And this is where it's important to bring back into our minds when it is that He is speaking, what it is that awaits Him on the day that will follow. His going, in the light of this, His going would involve and require His death and resurrection. This is the route that He had to take to go to heaven, to His Father's house. This was His route map to heaven. There was no other way to the Father's house for Jesus than via Calvary. No shortcuts, no alternative routes. This was the only way that He could get to where He was going. He had to go through Calvary. And what I'm suggesting is that it is by going that Jesus prepares the way for us.

Jesus, by His death and resurrection, both prepares us for heaven and prepares heaven for us. Listen to what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says that gives credence to, or is certainly consistent with what we're suggesting. In Hebrews chapter 9 and in verse 23 and 24 we read, it was necessary then for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, a reference to the Old Testament economy and the sacrifices that God had ordained. But then we carry on reading, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one. He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. Jesus, having died in our place and risen victorious over death for us, entered into heaven as our forerunner and planted His banner in glory, as our great high priest. He entered into the Holy of Holies. He entered into the Holy of Holies with our names, with your name engraved on His nail-pierced hands. By going, He has prepared heaven for us.

Heaven prepared. But then thirdly, let's just notice one other aspect that we find here in these words of Jesus. And this is heaven assured. Heaven assured. In verse 3, the disciples are given what we might call a double-lock guarantee or assurance that they will, in due course, also find themselves welcomed into heaven as permanent residence in the Father's house. What are these two aspects of this assurance or guarantee? Well, firstly, as we've just noticed, Jesus has prepared a place for His people. However, we understand that. I've suggested one way in which we might understand it. But however we understand it, it is certainly true that Jesus has prepared a place for us. And we know that Jesus never works in vain. Jesus will not prepare a place that will then remain unoccupied. That simply is not going to happen. And if we understand the going of Jesus as a reference to His death and the means of preparing a place for us, the certainty of our taking our place in heaven is reinforced. The death of Jesus does not provide an open door to heaven for those who choose to walk through that door. The death of

Jesus rather secures a place in heaven for all of God's people. And so this reality that Jesus has prepared a place for us gives us that assurance that will bring comfort to troubled hearts that there is no doubt that God's people will in due time occupy the place that has been prepared for them.

[19:17] But there's another way in which Jesus brings this assurance of heaven to His disciples. Jesus, in the passage, speaks of coming back and taking His disciples to be with Him. Notice that again in verse 3, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with

me, that you may also, that you also may be where I am. I will come back. A reference that is, I think, very reasonably understood as His second coming. He says, I'm going to come back. And when I come back, I'm going to take you to be with me. And so again, in this way, in this very tender way, He assures His disciples, yes, I'm going. But first of all, be clear on this. I'm going to prepare a place for you. So you need not fear that this separation will be permanent. But I want to guarantee you even more. And I want to say that I'm going to come back. And when I come back, I'm going to take you to be with me. What greater assurance could we possibly imagine or ask for?

Jesus has not only opened up the way to heaven for God's people, He also promises to come down from heaven and take us by the hand and lead us home to be with Him. Indeed, the country gospel song that we quoted at the beginning doesn't do justice to the glorious and gracious reality. It's not angels who beckon me from heaven's open door. It's not angels who say, well, see if you can make it up here.

The door's open. See if you can make it. Do your best to make it here. No, that's not the picture. But rather the God of heaven in the person of His own dear Son who comes down and takes us home. Heaven is assured for God's people. So heaven described, described principally in the matter of who it is, who resides there. Heaven prepared and heaven assured, which leads us to the question we said we would pose having considered these three aspects of Jesus' teaching in heaven. What are we to do? In the light of all this, what are we to do? What are you to do? Now, if the question is, what do you need to do to get to heaven? The answer in one respect is nothing. We don't need to nor can we do anything to secure our place in heaven. By any effort of our own, by anything that we can bring to the table. Jesus has both prepared a place for us and has promised to come and to take us there.

And yet, though that is true, it would be wrong to conclude that there is nothing we can or must do in the light of what Jesus has done for us. What then are we to do as we turn to the passage and get answers to that question? What are we to do? Well, the first thing that we are to do and the fundamental thing that we are to do is that we are to trust in Jesus. We're told that explicitly by Jesus as He addresses His disciples and by extension He addresses us there at the beginning of the chapter, do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust also in Me. He says, this is what you need to do. I'm the one that will prepare heaven for you. I'm the one who will take you there. I'm going to do all the work. But what you need to do is you need to trust in Me. That's what you need to do.

[22 : 53] You trust in Me. Just trust in Me. I think He also is exhorting and encouraging the disciples to trust in Him in what He says further down in verse 4. What He says, you know the way to the place where I am going. And of course, we know that Thomas was confused and didn't know what that meant. And he responded, and certainly with a refreshing honesty, Thomas said to Him, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? And Jesus' reply really paraphrases, yes, you do.

You say you don't know the way. You think you don't know the way, but actually you do. I am the way. You need to stick with Me. You need to follow Me. You need to believe and trust in Me. That's what you need to do. You don't need to gain your place in heaven. You don't need to earn it or merit it.

But what you need to do is trust in Me. Indeed, as we just think of this challenge or this invitation to trust in Jesus, and we go back to the very explicit words that at the beginning in verse 1, trust in God, trust also in Me. It's worth noting the manner in which Jesus places Himself very boldly on a par with God, with God the Father in the matter of being the worthy object of our faith and trust. Trust in God. Trust also in Me. As you trust in God, so trust in Me. It's one and the same.

Yes, there is a sense in which Jesus can and we can legitimately distinguish, for the persons of the Trinity are indeed distinct persons. And yet it is also true that if we trust in God, then we trust in Jesus. If we trust in Jesus, then we are trusting in God. What are we to do? We are to trust in Jesus.

Are you trusting in Jesus? Have you put your trust in Him as your Lord and your Savior? Is He the one that you have turned to that you might know forgiveness and acceptance into God's family? This is what you must do.

[25 : 13] Trust in Jesus. But I think there's a second thing we can say as we just open up the picture somewhat beyond the immediate verses before us. And that is this, that we are to live as those who are heaven-bound.

That is our destination. And the very fact that that is our destination should impact on the manner in which we live in the here and now. Heaven is assured, as we've already noticed, but we're not there yet.

And we're not there yet because in God's purposes, He would not have us there yet. But in the meantime, how are we to live? What does Jesus say in the preceding verses there from verse 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. Evidently, you cannot come now. Or implicit, you cannot come now. A new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another by this. All men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another. This is the manner in which the heaven-bound are to live. Loving one another prepares us for heaven. If we can't love each other now, well, we better get used to loving each other there because that's the only option that will be available to us. So loving one another prepares us for heaven. But loving one another also serves to invite others to heaven. As we read there, what Jesus says, by this, all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.

Love, in the words of Francis Schaeffer, is the final apologetic. Just to quote the sentence from which we've extracted this phrase that he's known for, love is the final apologetic. And let me just quote what he says, but after we have done our best to communicate to a lost world, still we must never forget that the final apologetic which Jesus gives is the observable love of true Christians for true Christians. This is the life that is to be lived by those who are heaven-bound. So what are we to do? We are to trust in Jesus. We are to live as those who are heaven-bound. And then finally, we are, as we trust and obey, to enjoy a foretaste of heaven. There's an intriguing detail in this chapter in connection with a word found in verse 2. And then subsequently in verse 23. First of all, notice there in verse 2, the word that's translated, rooms. In my Father's house are many rooms.

[28 : 01] That same word is only used on two occasions in the whole of the New Testament, here in verse 2, and then again in the same chapter in verse 23. And let's just read that verse. We hadn't, we didn't read that far earlier in the service, but let's notice it now. Verse 23 of chapter 14, Jesus replied, if anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. There the word translated home in that verse is the same word that is translated room in verse 2. Now my question for you is this, what is the common thread on both occasions that the word is employing? Well, the common thread is the presence of the Father and the Son. In heaven, that is where the Father is. It is where Jesus is. And here in verse 23, this is also the common theme. Jesus says, we, the Father and myself, we will come and make our home with you.

Now in verse 2, as we've already established, Jesus is speaking of his Father's house. He's speaking of heaven. But in verse 23, he is speaking of the here and now, what we might call a foretaste of heaven, as the Father and the Son by the Spirit make their home in the life of the believer. And this foretaste is a foretaste surely that is to whet our appetite for more. If we can paraphrase a song that I'm sure is familiar to many of you, homeward bound. I know I am homeward bound, home where my love lies waiting joyfully for me. That is true of us. If we are trusting in Jesus, we are homeward bound. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word. We thank you for the richness of your love and of your blessings for us. We thank you for that which we enjoy now. We thank you for this mysterious reality that we have only fleetingly touched on, that you are the God who makes your home with us. But we thank you also that we are looking forward to the day when we will be called home to be with you. And we pray that we would look forward in anticipation to that day, but that also we would recognize that in the meantime we have a life to live, a life that is to be characterized by love one for another. And that as we so love one another, so others might recognize who we are as disciples of Jesus and be drawn to our Savior. Help us then so to live. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to sing now as we close our service. We're going to sing from Psalm 36. In Sing Psalms, it's on page 44. Psalm 36, we'll sing from verse 5 through to verse 10. And we'll sing to the tune Huddersfield. Your steadfast love is great, O Lord. It reaches heaven high. Your faithfulness is wonderful, this is wonderful, extending to the sky. Psalm 36, verses 5 to 10. Let's stand to sing.

Psalm 36, verse 10.

[31 : 55] Psalm 36, verse 10.

Psalm 36, verse 10.

Psalm 36, verse 10.

Psalm 36, verse 10.

Psalm 36, verse 10.

[34 : 25] Now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always. Amen.