

Many Mansions

A Sermon

by

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JOHN 14:2.

In My Father's house are many mansions.

In these words may be observed two things,

1. The thing described, viz., Christ's Father's house. Christ spoke to his disciples in the foregoing chapter as one that was about to leave them. He told 'em, verse 31, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him," and then goes to giving of them counsel to live in unity and love one another, as one that was going from them. By which they seemed somewhat surprised and hardly knew what to make of it. And one of them, viz., Peter, asked him where he was going; verse 36, "Simon Peter said unto him, Lord whither goest thou?" Christ did not directly answer and tell him where he was going, but he signifies where in these words afterwards, in the verse 12, he tells 'em plainly that he was going to his Father.

2. We may observe the description given of it, viz., that in it there are many mansions. The disciples seemed very sorrowful at the news of Christ's going away, but Christ comforts 'em with that, that in his Father's house where he was going there was not only room for him, but room for them too. There were many mansions. There was not only a mansion there for him, but there were mansions enough for them all; there was room enough in heaven for them. When the disciples perceived that Christ was going away, they manifested a great desire to go with him, and particularly Peter. Peter in the latter part of the foregoing chapter asked him whither he went to that end that he might follow him. Christ told him that whither he went he could not follow him now, but that he should follow him afterwards. But Peter, not content with Christ, seemed to have a

great mind to follow him now. "Lord," says he, "why cannot I follow thee now?" So that the disciples had a great mind still to be with Christ, and Christ in the words of the text intimates that they shall be with him. Christ signifies to 'em that he was going home to his Father's house, and he encourages 'em that they shall be with him there in due time, in that there were many mansions there. There was a mansion provided not only for him, but for them all (for Judas was not then present), and not only for them, but for all that should ever believe in him to the end of the world; and though he went before, he only went to prepare a place for them that should follow.

The text is a plain sentence; 'tis therefore needless to press any doctrine in other words from it: so that I shall build my discourse on the words of the text. There are two propositions contained in the words, viz.,

I. that heaven is God's house, and

II. that in this house of God there are many mansions.

Prop. I. Heaven is God's house. An house of public worship is an house where God's people meet from time to time to attend on God's ordinances, and that is set apart for that and is called God's house. The temple of Solomon was called God's house. God was represented as dwelling there. There he has his throne in the holy of holies, even the mercy seat over the ark and between the cherubims.

Sometimes the whole universe is represented in Scripture as God's house, built with various stories one above another: Amos 9:6, "It is he that buildeth his stories in the heaven;" and Psalm 104:3, "Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters." But the highest heaven is especially represented in Scripture as the house of God. As to other parts of the creation, God hath appointed them to inferior uses; but this part he has reserved for himself for his own abode. We are told that the heavens are the Lord's, but the earth he hath given to the sons of men. God, though he is everywhere present, is represented both in Old Testament and New as being in heaven in a special and peculiar manner. Heaven is the temple of God. Thus we read of God's temple in heaven, Revelation 15:5. Solomon's temple was a type of heaven. The apostle Paul in his epistle to the Hebrews does from time to time call heaven the holy of holies, as being the antitype not only of the temple of Solomon, but of the most holy place in that temple, which was the place of God's most immediate residence: Hebrews 9:12, "He entered in once into the holy place;" verse 24, "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true, but into heaven itself." Houses where assemblies of Christians worship God are in some respects figures of this house of God above. When God is worshipped in them in spirit and truth, they become the outworks of heaven and as it were its gates. As in houses of public worship here there are assemblies of Christians meeting to

worship God, so in heaven there is a glorious assembly, or Church, continually worshipping God: Hebrews 12:22,23, "But ye are come unto mount Sion, [and unto] the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, that are written in heaven."

Heaven is represented in Scripture as God's dwelling-house; Psalm 113:5, "Who is like [unto] the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high," and Psalm 123:1, "Unto thee I lift up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens." Heaven is God's palace. 'Tis the house of the great King of the universe; there he has his throne, which is therefore represented as his house or temple; Psalm 11:4, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven."

Heaven is the house where God dwells with his family. God is represented in Scripture as having a family; and though some of this family are now on earth, yet in so being they are abroad and not at home, but all going home: Ephesians 3:15, "Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." Heaven is the place that God has built for himself and his children. God has many children, and the place designed for them is heaven; therefore the saints, being the children of God, are said to be of the household of God, Ephesians 2:19: "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." God is represented as a householder or head of a family, and heaven is his house.

Heaven is the house not only where God hath his throne, but also where he doth as it were keep his table, where his children sit down with him at his table and where they are feasted in a royal manner becoming the children of so great a King: Luke 22:30, "That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom;" Matthew 26:29, "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

God is the King of kings, and heaven is the place where he keeps his court. There are his angels and archangels that as the nobles of his court do attend upon him.

Prop. II. There are many mansions in the house of God. By many mansions is meant many seats or places of abode. As it is a king's palace, there are many mansions. Kings' houses are wont to be built very large, with many stately rooms and apartments. So there are many mansions in God's house.

When this is spoken of heaven, it is chiefly to be understood in a figurative sense, and the following things seem to be taught us in it.

1. There is room in this house of God for great numbers. There is room in heaven for a vast multitude, yea, room enough for all mankind that are or ever shall be; Luke 14:22, "Lord it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room."

It is not with the heavenly temple as it often is with houses of public worship in this world, that they fill up and become too small and scanty for those that would meet in them, so that there is not convenient room for all. There is room enough in our heavenly Father's house. This is partly what Christ intended in the words of the text, as is evident from the occasion of his speaking them. The disciples manifested a great desire to be where Christ was, and Christ therefore, to encourage them that it should be as they desired, tells them that in his Father's house where he was going were many mansions, i.e., room enough for them.

There is mercy enough in God to admit an innumerable multitude into heaven. There is mercy enough for all, and there is merit enough in Christ to purchase heavenly happiness for millions of millions, for all men that ever were, are or shall be. And there is a sufficiency in the fountain of heaven's happiness to supply and fill and satisfy all: and there is in all respects enough for the happiness of all.

2. There are sufficient and suitable accommodations for all the different sorts of persons that are in the world: for great and small, for high and low, rich and poor, wise and unwise, bond and free, persons of all nations and all conditions and circumstances, for those that have been great sinners as well as for moral lovers; for weak saints and those that are babes in Christ as well as for those that are stronger and more grown in grace. There is in heaven a sufficiency for the happiness of every sort; there is a convenient accommodation for every creature that will hearken to the calls of the Gospel. None that will come to Christ, let his condition be what it will, need to fear but that Christ will provide a place suitable for him in heaven.

This seems to be another thing implied in Christ's words. The disciples were persons of very different condition from Christ: he was their Master, and there were his disciples; he was their Lord, and there were the servants; he was their Guide, and they were the followers; he was their Captain, and they the soldiers; he was the Shepherd, and they the sheep; [he was, as it were, the] Father, [and they the] children; he was the glorious, holy Son of God, they were the poor, sinful, corrupt men. But yet, though they were in such different circumstances from him, yet Christ encourages them that there shall not only be room in heaven for him, but for them too; for there were many mansions there. There was not only a mansion to accommodate the Lord, but the disciples also; not only the head, but the members; not only the Son of God, but those that are

naturally poor, sinful, corrupt men: as in a king's palace there is not only a mansion or room of state built for the king himself and for his eldest son and heir, but there are many rooms, mansions for all his numerous household, children, attendants and servants.

3. It is further implied that heaven is a house that was actually built and prepared for a great multitude. When God made heaven in the beginning of the world, he intended it for an everlasting dwelling-place for a vast and innumerable multitude. When heaven was made, it was intended and prepared for all those particular persons that God had from eternity designed to save: Matthew 25:34, "Come, ye blessed [of my Father, inherit the Kingdom] prepared for you [from the foundation of the world]." And that is a very great and innumerable multitude: Revelation 7:9, "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues, stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes." Heaven being built designedly for these was built accordingly; it was built so as most conveniently to accommodate all this multitude: as a house that is built for a great family is built large and with many rooms in it; as a palace that is built for a great king that keeps a great court with many attendants is built exceeding great with a great many apartments; and as an house of public worship that is built for a great congregation is built very large with many seats in it.

4. When it is said, ["In my father's house are many mansions"], it is meant that there are seats of various dignity and different degrees and circumstances of honor and happiness. There are many mansions in God's house because heaven is intended for various degrees of honor and blessedness. Some are designed to sit in higher places there than others; some are designed to be advanced to higher degrees of honor and glory than others are; and, therefore, there are various mansions, and some more honorable mansions and seats, in heaven than others. Though they are all seats of exceeding honor and blessedness yet some are more so than others.

Thus a palace is built. Though every part of the palace is magnificent as becomes the palace of a king, yet there are many apartments of various honor, and some are more stately and costly than others, according to the degree of dignity. There is one apartment that is the king's presence-chamber; there are other apartments for the next heir to the crown; there are others for other children; and others for their attendants and the great officers of the household: one for the high steward, and another for the chamberlain, and others for meaner officers and servants.

Another image of this was in Solomon's temple. There were many mansions of different degrees of honor and dignity. There was the holy of holies, where the ark was that was the place of God's immediate residence, where the high priest

alone might come; and there was another apartment called the holy place, where the other priests might come; and next to that was the inner court of the temple, where the Levites were admitted: and there they had many chambers or mansions built for lodging-rooms for the priests; and next to that was the court of Israel where the people of Israel might come; and next to that was the court of the Gentiles where the Gentiles, those that were called the "Proselytes of the Gate," might come.

And we have an image of this in houses built for the worship of Christian assemblies. In such houses of God there are many seats of different honor and dignity, from the most honorable to the most inferior of the congregation.

Not that we are to understand the words of Christ so much in a literal sense, as that every saint in heaven was to have a certain seat or room or place of abode where he was to be locally fixed. 'Tis not the design of the Scriptures to inform us much about the external circumstances of heaven or the state of heaven locally considered; but we are to understand what Christ says chiefly in a spiritual sense. Persons shall be set in different degrees of honor and glory in heaven, as is abundantly manifested in Scripture: which may fitly be represented to our imaginations by there being different seats of honor, as it was in the temple, as it is in kings' courts. Some seats shall be nearer the throne than others. Some shall sit next to Christ in glory: Matthew 20:23, "To sit on my right hand and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father."

Christ has doubtless respect to these different degrees of glory in the text. When he was going to heaven and the disciples were sorrowful at the thoughts of parting with their Lord, he lets them know that there are seats or mansions of various degrees of honor in his Father's house, that there was not only one for him, who was the Head of the Church and the elder brother, but also for them that were his disciples and younger brethren.

Christ also may probably have respect not only to different degrees of glory in heaven, but different circumstances. Though the employment and happiness of all the heavenly assembly shall in the general be the same, yet 'tis not improbable that there may be circumstantial difference. We know what their employment [is] in general, but not in particular. We know not how one may be employed to subserve and promote the happiness of another, and all to help one another. Some may there be set in one place for one office or employment, and others [in] another, as 'tis in the Church on earth. God hath set every one in the body as it hath pleased him; one is the eye, another the ear, another the head, etc. But because God has not been pleased expressly to reveal how it shall be in this respect, therefore I shall not insist upon it, but pass to make some

IMPROVEMENT

of what has been offered.

I. Here is encouragement for sinners that are concerned and exercised for the salvation of their souls, such as are afraid that they shall never go to heaven or be admitted to any place of abode there, and are sensible that they are hitherto in a doleful state and condition in that they are out of Christ, and so have no right to any inheritance in heaven, but are in danger of going to hell and having their place of eternal abode fixed there. You may be encouraged by what has been said, earnestly to seek heaven; for there are many mansions there. There is room enough there. Let your case be what it will, there is suitable provision there for you; and if you come to Christ, you need not fear that he will prepare a place for you; he'll see to it that you shall be well accommodated in heaven.

But II. I would improve this doctrine in a twofold exhortation.

1. Let all be hence exhorted earnestly to seek that they may be admitted to a mansion in heaven. You have heard that this is God's house; it is his temple. If David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah and in the land of Geshur and of the Philistines, so longed that he might again return into the land of Israel that he might have a place in the house of God here on earth, and prized a place there so much, though it was but that of a door-keeper, how great a happiness will it be to have a place in this heavenly temple of God! If they are looked upon as enjoying a high privilege that have a seat appointed them in kings' courts or in apartments in kings' palaces, especially those that have an abode there in the quality of the king's children, then how great a privilege will it be to have an apartment or mansion assigned to us in God's heavenly palace, and to have a place there as his children! How great is their glory and honor that are admitted to be of the household of God!

And seeing there are many mansions there, mansions enough for us all, our folly will be the greater if we neglect to seek a place in heaven, having our minds foolishly taken up about the worthless, fading things of this world. Here consider three things:

(1) How little a while you can have any mansion or place of abode in this world. Now you have a dwelling amongst the living. You have a house or mansion of your own, or at least one that is at present for your use, and now you have a seat in the house of God; but how little a while will this continue! In a very little while, and the place that now knows you in this world will know you no more. The habitation you have here will be empty of you; you will be carried dead out of it, or shall die at a distance from it, and never enter into it any more, or into any other abode in this world. Your mansion or place of abode in this world,

however convenient or commodious it may be, is but as a tent that shall soon be taken down, but a lodge in a garden of cucumbers. Your stay is as it were but for a night. Your body itself is but a house of clay which will quickly moulder and tumble down, and you shall have no other habitation here in this world but the grave.

Thus God in his providence is putting you in mind by the repeated instances of death that have been in the town within the two weeks past, both in one house: in which death he has shown his dominion over old and young. The son was taken away first before the father, being in his full strength and flower of his days; and the father, who was then well and having no appearance of approaching death, followed in a few days: and their habitation and their seat in the house of God in this world will know them no more.

Take warning by these warnings of Providence to improve your time that you may have a mansion in heaven. We have a house of worship newly created amongst us which now you have a seat in, and probably are pleased with the ornaments of it; and though you have a place in so comely a house, yet you know not how little a while you shall have a place in this house of God. Here are a couple snatched away by death that had met in it but a few times, that have been snatched out of it before it was fully finished and never will have any more a seat in it. You know not how soon you may follow, and then of great importance will it be to you to have a seat in God's house above. Both of the persons lately deceased were much on their death-beds warning others to improve their precious time. The first of them was much in expressing his sense of the vast importance of an interest in Christ, as I was a witness, and was earnest in calling on others to improve their time, to be thorough, to get an interest in Christ, and seemed very desirous that young people might receive council and warning from him, as the words of a dying man, to do their utmost to make sure of conversion; and a little before he died left a request to me that I would warn the young people in his room. God had been warning of you in his death and the death of his father that so soon followed. The words of dying persons should be of special weight with us, for then they are in circumstances wherein they are most capable to look on things as they are and judge aright of 'em,--between both worlds as it were. Still that we must all be in.

Let our young people, therefore, take warning from hence, and don't be such fools as to neglect seeking a place and mansion in heaven. Young persons are especially apt to be taken with the pleasing things of this world. You are now, it may be, much pleased with hopes of your future circumstances in this world; [and you are now, it may be, much] pleased with the ornaments of that house of worship that you with others have a place in. But, alas, do you not too little consider how soon you may be taken away from all these things, and no more forever have any part in any mansion or house or enjoyment or happiness under

the sun? Therefore let it be your main care to secure an everlasting habitation for hereafter.

(2) Consider when you die, if you have no mansion in the house of God in heaven, you must have your place of abode in the habitation of devils. There is no middle place between them, and when you go hence, you must go to one or the other of these. Some have a mansion prepared for them in heaven from the foundation [of the world]; others are sent away as cursed into everlasting burnings prepared for the [devil and his angels]. Consider how miserable those must be that shall have their habitation with devils to all eternity. Devils are foul spirits; God's great enemies. Their habitation is the blackness of darkness; a place of the utmost filthiness, abomination, darkness, disgrace and torment, O, how would you rather ten thousand times have no place of abode at all, have no being, than to have a place [with devils]!

(3) If you die unconverted, you will have the worse place in hell for having had a seat or place in God's house in this world. As there are many mansions, places of different degrees of honor in heaven, so there are various abodes and places or degrees of torment and misery in hell; and those will have the worst place there that [dying unconverted, have had the best place in God's house here]. Solomon speaks of a peculiarly awful sight that he had seen, that of a wicked man buried that had gone [from the place of the holy], Ecclesiastes 8:10. Such as have had a seat in God's house, have been in a sense exalted up to heaven, set on the gate of heaven, [if they die unconverted, shall be] cast down to hell.

2. The second exhortation that I would offer from what has been said is to seek a high place in heaven. Seeing there are many mansions of different degrees of honor and dignity in heaven, let us seek to obtain a mansion of distinguished glory. 'Tis revealed to us that there are different degrees of glory to that end that we might seek after the higher degrees. God offered high degrees of glory to that end, that we might seek them by eminent holiness and good works: 2 Corinthians 9:6, "He that sows sparingly [shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully]." It is not becoming persons to be over anxious about an high seat in God's house in this world, for that is the honor that is of men; but we can't too earnestly seek after an high seat in God's house above, by seeking eminent holiness, for that is the honor that is of God.

'Tis very little worth the while for us to pursue after honor in this world, where the greatest honor is but a bubble and will soon vanish away, and death will level all. Some have more stately houses than others, and some are in higher office than others, and some are richer than others and have higher seats in the meeting-house than others; but all graves are upon a level. One rotting, putrefying corpse is as ignoble as another; the worms are as bold with one carcass as another.

But the mansions in God's house above are everlasting mansions. Those that have seats allotted 'em there, whether of greater or lesser dignity, whether nearer or further from the throne, will hold 'em to all eternity. This is promised, Revelation 3:12 : "Him that overcometh I will make him a pillar in the temple [of my God, and he shall go no more out]." If it be worth the while to desire and seek high seats in the meeting-house, where you are one day in a week, and where you shall never come but few days in all; if it be worth the while much to prize one seat above another in the house of worship only because it is the pew or seat that is ranked first in number, and to be seen here for a few days, how will it be worth the while to seek an high mansion in God's temple and in that glorious place that is the everlasting habitation of God and all his children! You that are pleased with your seats in this house because you are seated high or in a place that is looked upon honorable by those that sit round about, and because many can behold you, consider how short a time you will enjoy this pleasure. And if there be any that are not suited in their seats because they are too low for them, let them consider that it is but a very little while before it will [be] all one to you whether you have sat high or low here. But it will be of infinite and everlasting concern to you where your seat is in another world. Let your great concern be while in this world so to improve your opportunities in God's house in this world, whether you sit high or low, as that you may have a distinguished and glorious mansion in God's house in heaven, where you may be fixed in your place in that glorious assembly in an everlasting rest.

Let the main thing that we prize in God's house be, not the outward ornaments of it, or a high seat in it, but the word of God and his ordinances in it. And spend your time here in seeking Christ, that he may prepare a place for you in his Father's house, that when he comes again to this world, he may take you to himself, that where he is, there you may be also.

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