EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS
ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,
And many Explanatory Notes.

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Let not your heart be troubled: ye 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. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

THE three verses we have now read are rich in precious truth. For eighteen centuries they have been peculiarly dear to Christ’s believing servants in every part of the world. Many are the sick rooms which they have lightened! Many are the dying hearts which they have cheered! Let us see what they contain.

We have, first, in this passage a precious remedy against an old disease. That disease is trouble of heart. That remedy is faith.

Heart-trouble is the commonest thing in the world. No rank, or class, or condition is exempt from it. No bars, or bolts, or locks can keep it out. Partly from inward causes and partly from outward,—partly from the body and partly from the mind,—partly from what we love and partly from what we fear, the journey of life is full of trouble. Even the best of Christians have many bitter cups to drink between grace and glory. Even the holiest saints find the world a vale of tears.

Faith in the Lord Jesus is the only sure medicine for troubled hearts. To believe more thoroughly, trust more entirely, rest more unreservedly, lay hold more firmly, lean back more completely,—this is the prescription which our Master urges on the attention of all His disciples. No doubt the members of that little band which sat round the table at the last supper, had believed already. They had proved the reality of their faith by giving up everything for Christ’s sake. Yet what does their Lord say to them here? Once more He presses on them the old lesson, the lesson with which they first began: “Believe! Believe more! Believe on Me!” (Isai. xxvi. 3.)

Never let us forget that there are degrees in faith, and that there is a wide difference between weak and strong believers. The weakest faith is enough to give a man a saving interest in Christ, and ought not to be despised, but it will not give a man such inward comfort as a strong faith. Vagueness and dimness of perception are the defect of weak believers. They do not see clearly what they believe and why they believe. In such cases more faith is the one thing needed. Like Peter on the water, they need to look more steadily at Jesus, and less at the waves and wind. Is it not written, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee”? (Isai. xxvi. 3.)

We have, secondly, in this passage a very comfortable account of heaven, or the future abode of saints. It is but little that we understand about heaven while we are here in the body, and that little is generally taught us
in the Bible by negatives much more than positives. But here, at any rate, there are some plain things.

Heaven is “a Father’s house,”—the house of that God of whom Jesus says, “I go to my Father, and your Father.” It is, in a word, home: the home of Christ and Christians. This is a sweet and touching expression. Home, as we all know, is the place where we are generally loved for our own sakes, and not for our gifts or possessions; the place where we are loved to the end, never forgotten, and always welcome. This is one idea of heaven. Believers are in a strange land and at school in this life. In the life to come they will be at home.

Heaven is a place of “mansions,”—of lasting, permanent, and eternal dwellings. Here in the body we are in lodgings, tents, and tabernacles, and must submit to many changes. In heaven we shall be settled at last, and go out no more. “Here we have no continuing city.” (Heb. xiii. 14.) Our house not made with hands shall never be taken down.

Heaven is a place of “many mansions.” There will be room for all believers and room for all sorts, for little saints as well as great ones, for the weakest believer as well as for the strongest. The feeblest child of God need not fear there will be no place for him. None will be shut out but impenitent sinners and obstinate unbelievers.

Heaven is a place where Christ Himself shall be present. He will not be content to dwell without His people:—“Where I am, there ye shall be also.” We need not think that we shall be alone and neglected. Our Saviour,—our elder Brother,—our Redeemer, who loved us and gave Himself for us, shall be in the midst of us forever. What we shall see, and whom we shall see in heaven, we cannot fully conceive yet, while we are in the body. But one thing is certain: we shall see Christ.

Let these things sink down into our minds. To the worldly and careless they may seem nothing at all. To all who feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of God they are full of unspeakable comfort. If we hope to be in heaven it is pleasant to know what heaven is like.

We have, lastly, in this passage a solid ground for expecting good things to come. The evil heart of unbelief within us is apt to rob us of our comfort about heaven. “We wish we could think it was all true.”—“We fear we shall never be admitted into heaven.”—Let us hear what Jesus says to encourage us.

One cheering word is this,—“I go to prepare a place for you.” Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people: a place which we shall find Christ Himself has made ready for true Christians. He has prepared it by procuring a right for every sinner who believes to enter in. None can stop us, and say we have no business there.—He has prepared it by going before us as our Head and Representative, and taking possession of it for all the members of
His mystical body. As our Forerunner He has marched in, leading captivity captive, and has planted His banner in the land of glory.—He has prepared it by carrying our names with Him as our High Priest into the holy of holies, and making angels ready to receive us. They that enter heaven will find they are neither unknown nor unexpected.

Another cheering word is this,—“I will come again and receive you unto myself.” Christ will not wait for believers to come up to Him, but will come down to them, to raise them from their graves and escort them to their heavenly home. As Joseph came to meet Jacob, so will Jesus come to call His people together and guide them to their inheritance. The second advent ought never to be forgotten. Great is the blessedness of looking back to Christ coming the first time to suffer for us, but no less great is the comfort of looking forward to Christ coming the second time, to raise and reward his saints.

Let us leave the whole passage with solemnized feelings and serious self-examination. How much they miss who live in a dying world and yet know nothing of God as their Father and Christ as their Saviour! How much they possess who live the life of faith in the Son of God, and believe in Jesus! With all their weaknesses and crosses they have that which the world can neither give nor take away. They have a true Friend while they live, and a true home when they die.

NOTES. JOHN XIV. 1-3.

1.—[Let not...heart...be troubled.] We must carefully remember that there is no break between the end of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth chapters. Our Lord is continuing the discourse He began after the Lord’s Supper and the departure of Judas, in the presence of the eleven faithful disciples. A slight pause there certainly seems to be, since He turns from Peter, to whom He had been speaking individually, to the whole body of the Apostles, and addresses them collectively. But the place, the time, and the audience are all one.

Our Lord’s great object throughout this and the two following chapters seems clear and plain. He desired to comfort, establish, and build up His downcast disciples. He saw their “hearts were troubled” from a variety of causes,—partly by seeing their Master “troubled in Spirit” (xiii. 21),—partly by hearing that one of them should betray Him,—partly by the mysterious departure of Judas,—partly by their Master’s announcement that He should only be a little time longer with them, and that at last they could not come with Him, —and partly by the warning addressed to Peter, that he would deny his Master thrice. For all these reasons this little company of weak believers was disquieted and cast down and anxious. Their gracious Master saw it, and proceeded to give them encouragement: “Let not your heart be troubled. It will be noted that He uses the singular number “your heart,” not “your hearts.” He means “the heart of any one of you.”

Hengstenberg gives the following list of the grounds of comfort which the chapter contains, in systematic order, which well deserves attention. (a) The first encouragement is, that to the disciples of Christ heaven is sure (v. 2, 3). (b) The second encouragement is, that disciples have in Christ a certain way to heaven (v. 4-11). (c) The third encouragement is, that disciples need not fear that with the departure of Christ His work will cease (v. 12-
14. (d) The fourth encouragement is, that in the absence of Christ disciples will have the help of the Spirit (v. 15-17). (e) The fifth encouragement is, that Christ will not leave His people for ever, but will come back again (v. 18-24). (f) The sixth encouragement is, that the Spirit will teach the disciples and supply their want of understanding when left alone (v. 25, 26). (g) Finally, the seventh encouragement is, that the legacy of peace will be left to cheer them in their Master’s absence (v. 27.) These seven points are well worthy the attention of all believers in every age, and are as useful now as when first pressed on the eleven.

Lightfoot thinks one principal cause of the disciples’ trouble, was their disappointment at seeing their Jewish expectations of a temporal kingdom under a temporal Messiah failing and coming to an end.

[Ye believe...God...believe...Me.] The Gospel words rendered “Ye believe,” and “believe,” in this place, admit of being differently translated; and it is impossible to say certainly whether our English version is right. Some, as Luther, think both words should be indicative: “ye believe and ye believe.” Some think both should be imperative: “believe and believe.” My own opinion is decided, that the English version is right. It seems to me to express exactly the state of mind in which the disciples were. They did, as pious Jews, believe in God already. They needed, as young Christians, to be taught to believe more thoroughly in Christ.

Among those who think that both verbs are imperative are Cyril, Augustine, Lampe, Stier, Hengstenberg, and Alford. Among those who adhere to our English version, and make the first “believe “indicative, and the second imperative, are Erasmus, Beza, Grotius, and Olshausen.

Let us note that faith, and specially more strong and distinct faith in Christ, is the truest remedy for trouble of heart. But we must never forget that true faith admits of growth and degrees. There is a wide gulf between little and great faith.

Ferus remarks that our Lord does not say “Believe my divinity,” but, Believe personally in Me.

Toletus observes that our Lord here teaches that Jewish faith was somewhat distinct from Christian faith. The Jew, not seeing clearly the Trinity, dwelt chiefly on the unity of God. The Christian was intended to see three Persons in the Godhead.

Wordsworth remarks that the verb “to believe,” followed by a preposition and an accusative, is never applied to any but God in the New Testament.

2.—[In my Father’s house.] This phrase can bear only one meaning. It is my Father’s house in Heaven: an expression accommodated to our weakness. God needs no literal house, with walls and roof, as we do. But where He dwells is called His house. (See Deut. xxvi. 15; Psalm xxxiii. 14; 2 Chron. xxxviii. 27; 2 Cor. v. 1.) There is something very touching and comforting in the thought that the heaven we go to is “our Father’s house.” It is home.

[There are many mansions.] The word rendered “mansions” means literally “abiding-places.” It is only used here, and in the twenty-third verse of this chapter, “abode.” We need not doubt that there is an intentional contrast between the unchanging, unvarying house in heaven, and the changing, uncertain, dwellings of this world. Here we are ever moving; there we shall no more go out. (See also Heb. xiii. 14.)

Our Lord’s intention seems to be to comfort His disciples by the thought that nothing could cast them out of the heavenly house. They might be left alone by Him on earth; they might be even cast out of the Jewish Church, and find no resting-place or refuge on earth; but there would be always room enough for them in heaven, and a house from which they would never be expelled. “Fear not. There is room enough in heaven.”
Chrysostom, Augustine, and several other ancient writers think the “many mansions” mean the degrees of glory. But the argument in favour of the idea does not appear to me satisfactory. Bishop Bull, Wordsworth, and some few modern writers take the same view. That there are degrees of glory in heaven is undoubtedly true, but I do not think it is the truth of this text.

The modern idea, that our Lord meant that heaven was a place for all sorts of creeds and religions, seems utterly unwarranted by the text. From the whole context He is evidently speaking for the special comfort of Christians.

Lightfoot’s idea, that our Lord meant to teach the passing away of the Jewish economy, and the admission of all nations into heaven by faith in Christ, seems fanciful.

If it were not so...told you. This is a gracious way of assuring the disciples that they might have confidence that what their Lord said was true. It is the tender manner of a parent speaking to a child. “Do not be afraid because I am leaving you. There is plenty of room for you in heaven. You will get there safe at last. If there was the least uncertainty about it, I would tell you.” We may remember that our Lord called the Apostles “little children” only a few minutes before. (John xiii. 33.)

I go...prepare...place...you. This sentence is meant to be another ground of comfort. One of the reasons why our Lord went away, He says, was to get ready a dwelling-place for His disciples. It is like the expression in the Hebrews, “the forerunner.” (Heb. vi. 20; see also Num. x. 33.)

The manner in which Christ prepares a place for His people is mysterious and yet not inexplicable. He enters heaven as their High Priest, presenting the merit of his sacrifice for their sins. He removes all barriers that sin made between them and God. He appears as their proxy and representative, and claims a right of entry for all His believing members. He intercedes continually for them at God’s right hand; and makes them always acceptable in Himself, though unworthy in themselves. He bears their names mystically, as the High Priest, on His breast; and introduces them to the court of heaven before they get there.

That heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people is a very cheering and animating thought. When we arrive there we shall not be in a strange land. We shall find we have been known and thought of before we got there.

And if I go...come again...receive...myself. These words contain another strong consolation. Our Lord tells the disciples that if He does go away, they must not think it is forever. He means to come again and take them all home, and gather them round Him in one united family to part no more.

Poole remarks “the particle ‘if’ in this place denotes no uncertainty of the thing, but hath the force of although, or after that.” (See also Col. iii. 1.)

Many think, as Stier, that the “coming again” here spoken of means Christ’s coming to His disciples after His resurrection, or Christ’s coming spiritually to His people in comfort and help even now, or Christ’s coming to remove them at last by death. I cannot think so. I believe that, as a rule, when Christ speaks of coming again, both here and elsewhere, He means His own personal second advent at the end of this dispensation. The Greek word rendered “I will come,” is in the present tense, and the same that is used in Rev. xxii. 20: “I come quickly.” The first and second advents are the two great events to which the minds of all Christians should be directed. This is Cyril’s view of the passage, and Bishop Hall’s.

That where I am...ye...also. Here is one more comfort. The final end of Christ’s going away and coming again is, that at last His disciples may be once more with Him, and enjoy His company forever. “We part; but we shall meet again, and part no more.”

Let us note that one of the simplest, plainest ideas of heaven is here. It is being “ever
with the Lord.” Whatever else we see or do not see in heaven, we shall see Christ. Whatever kind of a place, it is a place where Christ is. (Phil. i. 23; 1 Thess. iv. 17.)