

Going to the Father's House

📖 John 14:1-3

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In our series Major Prophetic Passages we have seen Israel's prophetic picture was designed to culminate in the kingdom of God coming into history. However, when the time was ripe the King came to the people of Israel and they rejected Him. As a consequence, Jerusalem and the Temple would go to destruction and their prophetic program and kingdom would be postponed. The postponement was declared by Jesus to be a mystery, meaning something previously concealed from human knowledge, but now revealed. In light of the postponement Jesus began to prepare His disciples for their ministry in a new program to be revealed, the Church. In Matt 16:18 Jesus revealed it for the first time with the words, "I will build My church." This was not understood by the disciples at the time but later it would be defined. Eph 1:20-23 defines the Church as the body of Messiah and 1 Cor 12:13 defines entrance into the body as occurring by means of Spirit baptism. As far as the beginning of Spirit baptism Acts 1:4-5 said Spirit baptism was yet future, not many days from now. In Acts 11:15-17 Peter said that the Spirit had fallen upon the Gentiles in the same way He had fallen on the Jews at the beginning. No other time frame could be in view other than Acts 2, the Day of Pentecost. Therefore, the Church must have begun in Acts 2. It began with Jewish believers baptized by the Spirit, was expanded in Acts 8 to include Samaritan believers baptized by the same Spirit and expanded again in Acts 10 to include Gentile believers baptized by the same Spirit. Therefore, the distinguishing mark of the Church is not faith, salvation has always been by grace through faith, but being baptized by the Spirit into the body of Messiah is unique to the Church. No OT believer was ever baptized by the Spirit. The Spirit had other ministries during the OT. He filled some believers, He even indwelt some believers, temporarily, but what He had never done was baptize believers into the body of Messiah. He could not do that yet because that ministry required the death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation of the Messiah so that the Father and Messiah could pour forth the Spirit to do His baptizing work of identifying believers with the body of Messiah. Since these are new things never before revealed it gives merit to the idea that there might be other new truths related to the Church that were not true of Israel.

We discussed five of these new truths, called mysteries in the NT. In the Greek NT a "mystery" was something previously concealed, inaccessible to man, because hidden in God, but now revealed so that the truths can be

fully known. The first mystery we observed was Eph 2:11-22 and 3:1-12, that Jewish and Gentile believers are united in one new man, one body. This one new man is not Israel or Gentile but an entity distinct from both. The mystery was not that Gentiles could be saved. That was already known in the OT. But the mystery is that Jewish and Gentile believers have equal privileges as part of one and the same body. This was completely unknown during the OT. The second mystery we observed was Col 1:24ff, that Christ indwells every believer in the Church. The mystery is not that the Holy Spirit would indwell. That was a truth in the OT. But that the Messiah Himself would indwell individual believers, that was entirely unknown. The third mystery we observed was Eph 5:22-33, that the Church is the bride of Christ. The OT taught that Israel was the wife of YHWH, but there was no revelation that the second person, the Son, would have His own bride. Therefore, the mystery is that the Church is the bride of Christ. The fourth mystery is Rev 1:20, that each local church is a lampstand and has a guardian angel. Angels were known in the OT, that is not the mystery. But that there would be local churches spreading around the world that would have the responsibility to shed forth the light of the gospel to their community and that each of these churches would have a guardian angel was something entirely unknown. The fifth mystery we observed is 1 Cor 15:50-58, that one generation of the Church will not taste death but will be translated. The OT taught that at the Second Coming all the dead saints would be raised to enter the kingdom and those who were alive would be rescued, judged and taken into the kingdom in mortal bodies. But there was never a teaching that one generation of believers would be alive and not have to taste death, just simply being transformed into resurrection bodies in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. This is the doctrine of the rapture and it was a mystery, but now fully known, though often rejected by believers. Taken together all five of these mysteries show that the Church itself was a mystery in the OT. It had to be this way for the offer of the kingdom to Israel in the Gospels to be a genuine offer. If the prophets had foretold the Church then such an offer of the kingdom would have been bogus, since the Church would have had to come before the kingdom could come. But as it is the Church was an entire mystery, thus preserving the genuine offer of the kingdom and the culpability of Israel for rejecting their King's offer.

Having introduced the Church as an entity distinct from Israel with distinct truths we have desire to look at prophetic truths that are unique to the Church. There are several but we will mention only two. The first one I want only to mention in brief. This is the prophesy of apostasy. Turn to 1 Tim 4:1. The Church age will move toward apostasy. When we say apostasy we mean doctrinal apostasy. The idea of apostasy is "departure." In this case the departure is from truth. The trend of the Church will be to depart from the truth and turn to error. Paul says, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth." The main point is that this is a prophecy of the trend of departing from truth in Scripture and turning to doctrines of demons. In later times, Paul said, some will fall away from the faith. That's a movement from truth to error. A second passage prophesying of the apostasy of

the Church is 2 Tim 4:1. This passage also shows the same downward trend of doctrinal apostasy. Paul is speaking to Timothy, at the time a young preacher of the word and he says to him, "I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." Why? Verse 3, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." Since the trend is always away from sound doctrine to error the pastor-teacher must be resolute in his stand to teach truth, be firm and very patient. It's sound teaching that serves as a bulwark against apostasy among believers. That's why what Dennis and I am doing is very important. We are fighting this trend toward error and the way we fight is with sound doctrine. As you know, sound doctrine is increasingly unpopular, just like God said it would be. People in our time just want to have their ears tickled, just want to hear something that makes them feel good, something that meets the needs of the moment, and they accumulate teachers who will give them these things. That is exactly what we are seeing now. Denomination after denomination over the last 200 years has gone apostate. Church after church has invited false teachers into their pulpits. And the reason why is the people want that and the ministers in those pulpits are willing to give them what they want rather than what they need. That's the difference between a true pastor-teacher, such as myself, and a phony. It doesn't matter if they're nice, it doesn't matter if they part their hair on the right side, it doesn't matter if they have a good personality, the only thing that matters is integrity to the word of God. If they don't have that they are apostate and they are part of the apostasy that Paul says will develop over the Church age. So the first prophecy related to the Church is that it will go toward apostasy. We looked at two passages. There is another major passage about apostasy that we'll talk about in a few weeks, that's 2 Thess 2, and that one is, in some way connected to the rapture.

So today I want to discuss the first of three major rapture passages; John 14:1-3; Turn to John 14. John 14 is part of the Upper Room Discourse. The discourse is named after the Upper Room because that is where the discourse was given. But actually, only John 13-14 were spoken in the Upper Room, the rest was spoken on the way to the Garden of Gethsemane. We want to note that the Upper Room Discourse is very different from the Olivet Discourse which was given the day before. The Olivet Discourse is Matt 24-25 which we already studied a few weeks ago. It is Jesus' last words to Israel. They asked what the sign of His coming in His kingdom would be. He answered that a time of great difficulty would come upon the whole world and especially for Israel, and that at the consummation of this time the sign of His coming would appear and He would return like lightning in judgment to establish the kingdom. He then explained that in light of this people living during the tribulation should be prepared for His coming as early as possible in the tribulation time because when He returns He is coming in judgment. I say this to take a stand against the idea that the rapture is first taught in the Olivet Discourse. Many Christians think the rapture is in the Olivet Discourse but if you follow sound exegesis you will see that it is not in view, but the Second Coming is in view, and it is distinct from the rapture. So the Olivet

Discourse is Jesus' last words to Israel. He has nothing more to say to Israel. So the next day He is in the Upper Room and He gives His first words to the Church. John 13 is the setting because they were partaking of the Last Passover. Note in John 13:1, "Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He would depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end." Jesus was about to do what? Depart out of this world. Where was He going? To the Father. And who did He love? His own who were in the world? You can see a separation was coming. And if you love someone and you are going to be separated from them what do you do for them before you separate? You prepare them for the separation. So important was this preparation that what do you see again in verse 3, "*Jesus*, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, got up from supper" and what's He going to do? Wash their feet. Now this has been explained many ways, but why is He going to wash their feet? To prepare them for humbly serving one another after He departs. This act of washing another's feet was a very humble job, it was the job of a slave. Jesus gets down there and shows them what humble service of others is all about. He made Himself least because who is the greatest in the kingdom? He who is least in this world. So He is teaching them about humble service. This is His preparing them for the separation. Of course, they didn't really understand, but they had to be prepared. There's not much time left, in less than 12 hours He will have been betrayed, arrested, taken to trial, accused and crucified. So there is not much time left to prepare them. In verse 33 Jesus says to them, "Little children, I am with you a little while longer." See, it's not very long. You will seek Me; and as I said to the Jews, now I also say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.'" Can you imagine hearing Him say this? Put yourself in their shoes. They had left everything and followed Him. For three and a half years they had dedicated themselves to following Him. They knew He was the Messiah. They knew He was to establish the kingdom. Now He is leaving? Where is He going? Peter didn't know. Look at verse 36, "Simon Peter said to Him, "Lord, where are You going?" The idea of Jesus leaving them was not on Peter's radar. "Jesus answered, "Where I go, you cannot follow Me now; but you will follow later." Think about that answer. I'm going. You can't follow Me now...you will follow Me later. What is the movement in the passage? Jesus goes somewhere else, they can't go at that time but later they will go to the same place He is going. Where is Jesus going? Well, 13:1 already told us; "out of this world to the Father." So He's not going to some other planet, He's not going to Jupiter, He's not going somewhere in the universe. He's going out of the universe. Verse 3 said the same thing, He "was going back to God," meaning the Father. So if Jesus is going to the Father and they can't go now but later they will go the Father, where are Jesus and them going? To heaven. That is the most obvious interpretation. The Father is viewed throughout the OT as being in heaven. That's why the prayer says, "Our Father who art in heaven..." But Peter didn't hear verses 1 and 3 and so he didn't know where Jesus was going. All he heard was that Jesus was going and he couldn't come now but would come later. That meant there was going to be a separation and nobody likes separation. Jesus didn't even like it. In verse 37 Peter is expressing that sentiment. "Lord, why can I not follow You right now?" I've been following you consistently, can't I follow you right now so there is no separation. My point in taking you through parts of John 13 is to show you that we already know a lot about what Jesus is teaching before we come to John 14. The

movement is already worked out. Me to the Father in heaven, you can't come now, later you will come. But the separation was causing them emotional turmoil and so that is what Jesus is addressing in 14:1.

Do not let your heart be troubled. Why not be **troubled**? Because there is a doctrine of great comfort. A comfort He already mentioned in brief in 13:36. What's the comfort? "you will follow later." The kingdom had been postponed. He had something for them to do in the meantime. Then they could be with Him. So **do not let your heart be troubled.** There's a doctrine of comfort.

Then He says, **believe in God, believe also in Me.** In the Greek both **believes** are indicative moods. Usually the indicative just means a statement is being made. But an indicative can function as an imperative. An imperative is a command. And our translators chose to translate both **believes** as commands. **Believe in God, believe also in Me.** That may or may not be correct. No one can be 100% certain and that is why language students continue to disagree on this point. It could mean one of three things; since you believe in God, believe also in Me; you believe in God, you also believe in Me; or believe in God, believe also in Me. Good language students are on all sides of this, but two things we see clearly. First, that believing in God and in Christ is critical to quelling their troubled hearts and being comforted. If we have faith then our fears subside and comfort comes in its place. That is something we see clearly. Second, we see that Christ is the equivalent of God the Father, that they are co-equal. Stedman said, "Here again—as He has numerous times before in the gospel of John—Jesus clearly places Himself on a plane of equality with the Father, speaking not only as a man but as God." How does this verse show that Jesus is God. Well, if Jesus is not God, then what good would it do to believe in Jesus in addition to believing in God? Wouldn't believing in God be sufficient? What additional thing could believing in Jesus do that believing in God could not do? Therefore, we see that Jesus is putting Himself on an equal plane with the Father, that He is co-equal with the Father. Believe in God, believe also in Me. That will be critical to calming their fears and being comforted with the announcement that Jesus is leaving.

In 14:2 He gives further information to the doctrine of comfort. And the emphasis is clearly on believing Jesus' words. **In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, you may be also.** What's the movement again? The same movement as in chapter 13. Jesus is going, they are staying, He will come again to receive them to Himself so that they can go where He is going, which is where? The **Father's house**. What is the **Father's house**? You would think this would be obvious because it is obvious. "Our Father who art in heaven." The Father's house is heaven. He already said in 13:1 that it is somewhere outside this world. Where else could it be other than heaven? And yet commentator after commentator will say the Father's house is the Church or it's the universe or some other nonsense. The **Father's house** is heaven. And here we are told that in heaven there **are many dwelling places**. This is the word the KJV translated "mansions." It was the Latin Vulgate which translated this word as *mansiones* that gave rise to the idea of "mansions." The Greek word is *μοναι*, it's a cognate of *μενω* which means "abide," as in "abide in Me and I in

you, and you shall bear much fruit. That's a usage of the word. The usage here is of "abidings" or "rooms." The old commentator Godet said, "The image is derived from those vast oriental palaces, in which there is an abode not only for the sovereign and the heir to the throne, but also for all the sons of the king, however numerous they may be."¹ So it is a place, a great house, but the emphasis is not on the luxuriousness of the house, as mansions might imply, but on the spaciousness of the house. Constable said, "The picture that Jesus painted of heaven is a huge building with many rooms or suites of rooms in which people reside. The emphasis is not on the lavishness of the facility as much as its adequacy to accommodate all believers."²

Next Jesus assured them that **if it were not so, I would have told you**. In other words, if heaven were not spacious enough to accommodate all of them then He would have been sure to inform them. He then says, **for I go to prepare a place for you**. Now what does this mean? Most people think it means that when Jesus left He spent the last 2,000 years in heaven building mansions for them. That can't be true because 14:2 says these dwelling places were already there. "In My Father's house are many dwelling places." They are already there before Jesus even left them. So there is no need for Jesus to go build them. He means something else. What He means by **preparing a place for you** is He would go forge a path to heaven so that they could follow the same path later. The path He prepared is laid down by His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Constable said, "His death and resurrection, as well as His ascension and return to heaven, would prepare a place for them. The place, the Father's house or heaven, already existed when Jesus spoke these words. He would not go to heaven to create a place for believers there. Rather all that He would do from His death to His return to heaven would constitute preparation for believers to join Him there ultimately."³ This is why Jesus explained later in verse 6, "I am the way." He meant "I am the path that leads to heaven, and if you put your faith in Me then you will come down the path to heaven later."

In 14:3, **If I go and prepare a place for you** is a 3rd class condition, meaning that upon the condition being fulfilled that He was successful in preparing a place for them by way of His crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, then He would then **come again and receive** them **to Himself**. This condition has been fulfilled and so He will **come again and receive** them **to Himself**. One of the most interesting things about the way this is stated is that He didn't put any kind of time-indicator on it. As far as they could tell, after He departed He could come for them at-any-moment. This is what we mean by imminency. When we talk about the rapture we say it is imminent. This means that it can happen at any moment, that there is no prophesied event which must happen before the rapture can happen. And that's the way this sounds and that is very different than the Second Coming because there are many things that must happen before the Second Coming can happen, the global wars and catastrophes, the rise of the anti-Christ, the abomination of desolation, and so forth and so on.

The other interesting thing about this is that it says **you**, "I will come again and receive **you** to Myself." Who is the you? The **you** is the disciples. This made it a real possibility in their minds that He would come within their lifetimes. If that were the case they would not have to taste death. This is another concept unique to the rapture.

At the rapture the believers on earth don't die but are changed into resurrection bodies. This, too, is different from the Second Coming because at the Second Coming the believers on earth are not changed into resurrection bodies but go into the kingdom in their normal bodies.

So two concepts unique to the rapture are here; the concept of imminency, that He could come for them any time, and the concept of not tasting death but being changed into resurrection bodies, He would simply receive them to Himself. My good friend Dave Olander said, "One has to see an air of imminency built into this Text...assuming they would still be alive to take them with Him to the Father's house...the thought is that of only being w/Him in His Father's house... yet His taking them out of 'here' in life.... not death... So imminency is of critical concern for the disciples.... He had 'not gone away' as yet but this must have permeated their 'thinking' all the while awaiting His 'taking them home'....They all knew this but Paul really had some kind of edge on this truth as proven by his detailed exposition of this truth..."⁴

Despite these clear concepts just what He meant when He said **I will come again** is heavily debated. First, some think it means He will come after His resurrection and meet them in the Galilee. He did do this, but that does not meet the demands of the text. In the text He went to prepare a path to the Father's house, which is heaven, and would take them there. The meeting predicted here is not on earth as proponents of the post-resurrection meeting in the Galilee claim. Second, others think it means that He will come to them by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit did come to them on the Day of Pentecost in a unique way. However, that violates the movement of the text. He does not say that He will send them the Holy Spirit but that He will receive them to Himself, so that they could be in the same place He was, which is in heaven, not on earth as on the Day of Pentecost. Third, some say that it means that He will come to the believer at death. This is a figurative coming. Support is garnered from Stephen's vision of Jesus at the right hand of the Father when he was being stoned to death. But the text doesn't say anything about them dying. It only says something about receiving them to Himself. So the concept of Jesus meeting each believer at death is not taught in this passage. Fourth, still others say it means that He will come to them at the Second Coming. Jesus will come at the Second Coming. However, when Jesus comes at the Second Coming He establishes His kingdom on earth, but in this passage He returns to the place He came from with them, which is heaven, the Father's house. Showers said, ". . . it is important to note that Jesus did not say that the purpose of this future coming to receive believers is so that He can be where they are—on the earth. Instead, He said that the purpose is so that they can be where He is—in heaven."⁵ Gaebelein went further when he said, "He speaks then of a coming which is not for the deliverance of the Jewish remnant, not of a coming to establish His kingdom over the earth, not of a coming to judge the nations, but a coming which concerns only His own."⁶ So then, the views that this means His coming after resurrection to the Galilee or His coming by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost or His coming to the believer at death or His coming at the Second Advent all fall short of the text. Only a coming at the Rapture makes sense of all the details. J. Vernon McGee said, "This is the first time in the Bible where you find a mention of God taking anyone off this earth to go out yonder to a place that He has prepared."⁷ This, therefore, is the first, and seminal teaching of the rapture.

The word rapture we are told is not in the Bible. It is true that it is not in the English Bible. But it is in the Latin Bible. And if you were a scholar in the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages you would have read this word in several places in the Latin Bible. The big issue is not the Latin word rapture but the Greek word *αρπαζω*. That word is not used here but concepts related to it are. The word has two meanings. The first is simply "to make off with someone's property by attacking or seizing it." It is referring to stealing or carrying off someone else's property. The second is "to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control of, to snatch, take away." That is the concept described here by the word **receive you to Myself**. It means that Christ will suddenly grab or snatch away believers to bring them into an intimate or close connection with Himself. This is what will happen at the rapture.

Now quickly, in verse He says, **And you know the way where I am going**. That is, you know the path. In verse 5, **Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?"** If you don't know where someone is going you can't know how to get there. They did not know where He was going because they still did not believe His words that He was going to die and be raised. They were still unbelieving that. They thought He was going to establish His kingdom on earth. But now He would die, be raised and ascend to heaven.

How do they get there? In 14:6 **Jesus said to him, "I am the path, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me**. When Jesus said **I am the path** He was emphasizing that His death, resurrection and ascension are what formed the path to the Father. The reason He is the path is because he is the truth and the life. Constable said, "The "way" is slightly more dominant in view of Thomas' question and its position in relation to the "truth" and the "life." Jesus is the way to God because He is the truth from God and the life from God. He is the truth because He embodies God's supreme revelation (1:18; 5:19; 8:29). He is the life because He contains and imparts divine life (1:4; 5:26; 11:25; cf. 1 John 5:20)."⁸

So the text presents a movement of Christ from earth to heaven, when His followers will be left behind, after which, at some undefined time Christ will return for believers and receive them to Himself, presumably without having to die, and take them to heaven. This is not at all what will happen at the Second Coming. At the Second Coming nobody goes to heaven. All the believers go into kingdom on earth. Therefore this must be the rapture separate from the Second Coming. Finally, seeing that there is nothing in the context about a time of trouble or difficulty in the world like Tribulation judgments, wars, anti-Christ, ten world kings, global earthquakes and famines, abomination of desolation or any signs of His coming, then it is reasonable to conclude that the rapture does not take place within the Tribulation or at the end of the Tribulation but before the Tribulation even begins. This is pre-tribulationism or what is known as the pre-trib Rapture. Everything is not resolved here, but in the coming weeks I hope to resolve more clearly this unique and important truth. And this passage is certainly the seminal passage on the pre-trib rapture.

¹ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 239.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Jn 14:2.

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Jn 14:2.

⁴ E-mail correspondence 2/22/17.

⁵ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Jn 14:3.

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Jn 14:3.

⁷ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary: The Gospels (John 11-21)*, electronic ed., vol. 39 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 77.

⁸ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Jn 14:6.