

A Place Prepared

Summary

Future Certainties. Present Strength. Saints need assurance about their future. Unlike unbelievers, they seek deeper comfort from the Holy Spirit. Jesus promises a place in Paradise, initiating their eternal transformation now.

Hymn: *by Isaac Watts*

1. My God, the spring of all my joys, the life of my delights,
The glory of my brightest days, and comfort of my night!
2. In darkest shades, if Thou appear, my dawning is begun;
Thou art my soul's bright morning star, and Thou my rising sun.
3. The opening heavens around me shine with beams of sacred bliss,
If Jesus shows His mercy mine, and whispers I am His.
4. My soul would leave this heavy clay at that transporting word,
Run up with joy the shining way, to see and praise my Lord.
5. Fearless of hell and ghastly death, I'd break through every foe;
The wings of love and arms of faith would bear me conqueror through.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father we love coming together as the assembly of the Resurrection. Your people of hope. Grant us this day being 'serviced ' by your holy word, hearing your voice, to grow more steadfast and eager to discover and live your will, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

The Lord's prayer (said aloud whether in congregation or alone)

Encouragement:

Let us ponder living words of life reinforcing hope. Hope makes happy. Hope makes us holdfast. Hope is bread for the spirit soul. We have been clothed with a body for what is a second of our lifespan on this beautiful earth. We await the full measure of redemption including our resurrection bodies, our next home and eventually a new heaven and earth where *the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain.*

Hymn: *by John of Damascus (8th cent)*

1. The day of resurrection! Earth, tell it out abroad;
the passover of gladness, the passover of God.
From death to life eternal, from earth unto the sky,
our Christ hath brought us over, with hymns of victory.
2. Our hearts be pure from evil, that we may see aright
the Lord in rays eternal of resurrection light;
and listening to his accents, may hear, so calm and plain,
his own "All hail!" and, hearing, may raise the victor strain.

A Place Prepared

3. Now let the heavens be joyful! Let earth the song begin!
Let the round world keep triumph, and all that is therein!
Let all things seen and unseen their notes in gladness blend,
for Christ the Lord hath risen, our joy that hath no end.

Scripture:

- John 14.1-14
- 2 Corinthians 5.1-10

Message: A Place prepared: Future certainties, present strength

It is important for Saints to know about the future. You and I, ordinary believers who walk daily holding the faith we now own, need at least in the back of our minds to know where we are heading. This is necessary for the mental health of a Christian. Unbelievers do not feel such a need. To know that all is well for a good weekend satisfies them. Or to know their superannuation or pension is intact, that's enough. A good report at the medical office will keep their hopes alive.

But you and I need much more. The flickering hearths of passing comforts are inadequate for us. We must have the inner warmth of the Holy Spirit bringing the words of Jesus to comfort us. We are born again that way.

The Apostles ministering to the early little house churches knew that. So John penned the words of Jesus to strengthen the believers – the very words of Jesus: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe in Me as well. In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that 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 welcome you into My presence, so that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”*ⁱ

I am going there to prepare a place for you! Jesus earnestly desires his disciples to be assured of their future. He is like a bridegroom who labours to build a pleasant home for his new bride dreaming every working hour of the pleasure he will bring her as he carries her across the threshold of her beautiful new home which he has prepared for her. And she rests excitably in his arms as he takes her over.

Jesus is like that to you and me. Let his word rid us of shadows of uncertainty or blurred images of fear.

And the Apostles also addressed the grief of saints who mourned, they gave them strong words about this hope and a little of what we could confidently expect. They wrote about a place called Paradise. Indeed Paul spoke of his own ‘out of body’ experience too wonderful to speak ofⁱⁱ. Matthew Henry commented on this with; An amazing experience; *‘We are not capable, nor is it fit we should yet know, the particulars of that glorious place and state. Paul did not attempt to publish to the world what he had heard there.’*

Both Paul and Peter described their earthly end not as death but as ‘being free’, sometimes ‘departure’ and simply making their ‘exodus’. Paul explains the rapture to the Corinthians,

A Place Prepared

about the split-second change believers will experience transitioning to the next stage of eternal lifeⁱⁱⁱ.

More than that, the final Revelation of Holy Scripture mentions numberless multitudes vitally alive and joyous in heaven. Of others having conversations with Jesus. And presenting believers like you and me alive on the earth as one with those in the full life in heaven. O the amazing demography of the people of our Lord's family, the household of God! Jesus himself refers to the day of his return to the earth when he will bring 'from the four corners of heaven' those who have previously left this earth^{iv}.

This event is one of the great triumphs of Jesus which was before him as an anticipated joy of his work through the cross. He could see this day and rejoiced in it. So can you and I because physical death is a staging point where we change from this tired old life to a new next part of the journey, which the Lord of life is taking us along.

That brings us to the beautiful pastoral exchange between Jesus and the thief next to him on Calvary's hill: *Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom! "And Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."*

Jesus did several things during those three (earthly time) days from crucifixion to resurrection; he visited and proclaimed the gospel to those prisoners in their spiritual forms, he was alive in spirit, he presented himself in the presence of his Father, and he communed comfortingly and with glorious subject matter with the former thief on the cross.

So to ignore these Scriptures is to assume we know better about our own spiritual needs to know these things and how to draw sustenance and spiritual and intellectual energy from them.

But there is more. I want to tell you something that ought to get more preaching airtime and meditation time with believers. Here it is: **Your future life has already started now.** It is the part of you which will be the next stage of your life. Amazing.

Your Resurrection has already started. The seed has germinated. You are already becoming what you will be. Raised up now with Jesus^v, starting with your spirit-soul life, which is the seat of your developing Christ-like character where such eternities of love, faith and hope from Jesus are maturing in your daily life. That is happening now especially as you fall in love with Jesus letting him know you, even into the secrets you would like to share with anyone. And doing what he tells you in your conscience. It's called obeying his commands^{vi}.

This isn't just idle talk – this is your character formation. The Bible says we are being metamorphosed by God. Metamorphosing caterpillars becoming butterflies.^{vii}

This is our heavenly lifestyle being formed now! Becoming ready for the appropriate outward form, paradise bodies and then full glorious resurrection bodies later.

Prayer

Our heavenly Father, thank you for planning and taking care of everything to do with the abundant lives which your Word promises us. We are braced and

A Place Prepared

eager to be refreshed in the excitement of Kingdom living. We receive the urging of your Word to us that though the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, you have led us in victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Therefore, as beloved brothers and sisters, we shall be steadfast and immovable. We can always excel in the work of the Lord, because we know that our labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Hymn: *by Martin Luther*

1. Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands, for our offenses given;
but now at God's right hand He stands and brings us light from heaven.
Therefore let us joyful be and sing to God right thankfully
loud songs of hallelujah. Hallelujah!
2. It was a strange and dreadful strife when life and death contended;
the victory remained with life, the reign of death was ended.
Holy Scripture plainly saith that death is swallowed up by death;
his sting is lost forever. Hallelujah!
3. Here the true Paschal Lamb we see, whom God so freely gave us;
He died on the accursed tree – so strong His love to save us.
See His blood upon our door; faith points to it, death passes o'er,
and Satan cannot harm us. Hallelujah!
4. So let us keep the festival whereto the Lord invites us;
Christ is Himself the Joy of all, the Sun that warms and lights us.
By His grace He doth impart eternal sunshine to the heart;
the night of sin is ended. Hallelujah!

Benediction:

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you unblemished in His glorious presence, with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all time, and now, and for all eternity.

Amen

This services was prepared by Rev Ian Clarkson for HopeNet SA

ⁱ John 14.1-4

ⁱⁱ 2 Corinthians 12.1-6 ,and note reading on this blessing came when he cried out to Lord in his deep distress and perplexity. See also his desire Philippians 1.23

ⁱⁱⁱ 2 Timothy 4.6. 2Peter1.14-15 1Corinthians 15 and 1Thessalonians 4

^{iv} Revelation 7.9, 6.9-11, 1.12-16, Matthew 24.30-31

^v Ephesians 2.6, 1.3. Romans 6.3-10

^{vi} Colossians Chpt 3

^{vii} Romans 12 .1-2, 2Corinthians 3.18