

The Final Encounter

Today's teaching finishes up a series on encounters with Jesus. In some ways this is probably the most enjoyable topic and yet at the same time it was the hardest to prepare for. You see, the final encounter with Jesus is when He returns and we all join Him in Heaven. The problem is, I don't know what that looks like exactly. I don't know when it happens. I really don't know many details at all. Plenty of other things I can talk about because they are history. But our final, eternal, encounter with Jesus is still to come. But let me share with you what I have found. I hope it will be a comfort to you.

John 14:1-7 – "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. 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. You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

My Father's house has many rooms and I am going to prepare a place for you. The word rooms that was used in the original Greek actually has a second meaning. That meaning is home. Jesus is not just preparing a room for us. He is preparing a home for us in Heaven.

I remember a time when my mother had to move to another city and I stayed with family for a little while so she could prepare our home. I stayed with my aunt and uncle, and staying with them was OK but I didn't know them very well. I didn't know my cousins well and I didn't know their friends at all. I slept in someone else's bed, with someone else's sheets and pillows. The rules weren't the same and the neighborhood wasn't the same. It wasn't home. But it was where I needed to live for awhile until my home could be prepared for me.

When I finally got to go home, everything had been unpacked. Everything was in its place. My room was set up with all of my toys and all the things that were familiar to me. I had a pennant collection which she put up on my walls so I could see each one. Even though I had never been in this particular house before, I knew immediately that it was home and it felt immediately like home. My mom was there, my toys were there, and my bed was there.

Christ is preparing a home for each of us in Heaven. I wonder what people and things will be in my home? Which friends and family members that I've missed for so many years will be waiting to greet me? What will they say to welcome me home? Will there be things from my life there and if so, what items would Christ put up on my wall or stand on a table? Will I find my long lost pennants, each with such memories up on my wall? Will I find the books I've read and loved on a giant bookshelf? Christ is called wonderful counselor and comforter. What people from your life will He have waiting for you to greet you? How will he prepare your home in heaven so you know immediately that you have arrived home?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 – Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.

Are these words encouraging to you? They are to me. Probably for about the same reason they were originally written too. You see, 1 Thessalonians was written by the apostle Paul to the church in Thessalonica. It was a busy seaport with a population around 200,000 making it the largest city in Macedonia. In my mind I think of it like New York city. The church was relatively new and he was writing to help encourage them. They were experiencing persecution for proclaiming the name of Christ and many of the new believers were confused because they had been raised to believe that once you died that was it. They were still working on this concept that because Christ rose again, and because they believed that Christ died for their sins and then rose again, that they too would rise again when Christ returned. Some of them were afraid that if they died before Christ came that they would lose out on eternal life with him in Heaven.

You see, I don't think some of those people Paul was writing to are so different than people today. With all of the science and arguments and evidence of this and that it can make a person waver some times. As we try to work out exactly how the second coming looks and how Heaven looks and how the Earth was created we can start to miss the point. The point is that we don't need to grieve like the rest of the world does when this life comes to an end because we have eternal life in Christ. If we can look past the short-term loss of a loved one we can celebrate the eternal gain!

When my mom went ahead of me to prepare our new home I felt the loss of her presence and I mourned it (in the form of being home sick). But that was only a short period of time in comparison with my life. And what joy when we were finally reunited! What greater joy can I expect than the time that I am reunited with my loved ones and my Father in Heaven in the home he has prepared just for me? That too, is only a short time away in comparison to the eternal length of my life in Christ.

And although I don't know exactly what that will look like I trust that Christ loves me and anything he does for me will be good. I do, however, think I may have found at least a small sneak peak into what life with Christ through eternity looks like and I would like to finish with these verses.

Revelation 7:14-17 - "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and

serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."