

“That Where I Am You May be Also”

Isaiah 33:13-16; John 14:1-7, 15-18 (text)

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Congregation of Christ: In 1949, Ira Stanphill composed a song entitled “Mansion Over the Hilltop” that was made popular by Elvis Presley. This song is based upon the misleading translation and mistaken interpretation of Jesus’ promise in John 14:2, “In my Father’s house are many *monai*.” The King James Bible translates the Greek word *monai* into “mansions,” which in 1611, simply meant “dwelling-places.” Sadly, even though the word “mansion” has a very different meaning today, this word is still widely used when quoting John 14:2. Obviously, the meaning of “mansion” has changed from an ordinary “dwelling-place” or house in 1611 to “a large and impressive house” today (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*).

The word *monai* is the plural of *mone*, which means “home,” “abode,” “dwelling-place,” or “a place to stay or remain or abide” (see also John 14:23). The Latin Vulgate translates it as *mansiones*, from which the KJV derived “mansions.”

The first stanza of Stanphill’s song says,

*I’m satisfied with just a cottage below
A little silver and a little gold
But in that city where the ransomed will shine
I want a gold one that’s silver lined.*

And the refrain begins with, “I’ve got a mansion just over the hilltop.” This famous song strikes us as ironic. Some Christians say that they will be satisfied with a shack in heaven, for it will be much better than a palace on earth. Still, this songwriter covets a mansion, “a gold one that’s silver lined”!

Our text today is the source of this Christian dream of a “mansion in the sky” built by “Jesus the Carpenter.” In John 14:2, we read, “*In my Father’s house are many rooms*” (ESV, NIV). Most translations use “rooms” or “dwelling-places,” and only the KJV use “mansions.” The context tells us that this is Jesus’ farewell address to his disciples before he was crucified. He came down from heaven and assumed human nature to save his people from sin by his sacrifice on the cross. After this, he will go back into his “Father’s house,” by which he means heaven itself. In heaven, there will be many “rooms,” or “dwelling-places,” for all believers. He goes back to prepare these dwelling-places for us. But he promises that we will not be orphans while he is away in heaven, for the Father will send the Holy Spirit to “dwell” within us. And in the fullness of time, he promises believers that he will return, “*And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.*”

So today, our theme is: “**That Where I AM You May Be Also**” under three headings: (1) **Where is Christ’s Dwelling-Place?** (2) **Why Did Christ Come and Then Leave?** and (3) **Are We With Him Only When He Returns?**

Where is Christ's Dwelling-Place?

In our studies of the Gospel of John this Advent, we have often read John 1:1, *"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."* God revealed himself to us as the Word who *"became flesh and dwelt among us"* (1:14). This Word is God, the same substance as God, as the Second Person of the Trinity, and existed in eternity with God. There was never a time when he was not the eternal Son of God. Before he assumed human flesh, he dwelt in glory where God, the First Person of the Trinity, dwelt.

In John 6, we read that Jesus proclaimed himself as the *"bread that came down from heaven."* This statement made the Jews furious against him, because to them, Jesus was committing the ultimate blasphemy – claiming that he was God, equal to God, and coming down from heaven, God's dwelling-place.

That Jesus came down from heaven is one of the Apostle John's main themes in his Gospel. He refers to Jesus' baptism in 1:32 when John the Baptizer witnessed, *"I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove."* In his instructions at the Upper Room before his arrest, Jesus told his disciples, *"I came from the Father and have come into the world, and now I am leaving the world and going to the Father"* (John 16:28). And in his prayer at the Garden of Gethsemane before his death, he prayed to his Father in heaven, *"And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed"* (John 17:5). Jesus himself reveals to us that he was with his Father in heaven in eternity past. Then he also prayed, *"And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you"* (John 17:11).

Then after he was raised from the grave, he was with his disciples for 40 days, teaching and exhorting them before he ascended into heaven. At his ascension, a cloud lifted him up out of their sight, and two angels appeared to his disciples, saying, *"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven"* (Acts 1:11). His ascension fulfilled what Daniel 7:13 prophesied, *"And behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him."* So at his trial before the high priest, Jesus again declared to the astonishment of the Jews, *"from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven"* (Matt 26:64).

Therefore, Christ in his humanity, is now dwelling in heaven, seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. This is why our Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 47 says, "Christ is true man and true God. According to His human nature He is now not on earth, but according to His Godhead, majesty, grace, and Spirit, He is at no time absent from us." In our Lord's Supper, then, Christ is not present in his humanity, but through the Holy Spirit by faith. Again, the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 80 says, "Christ, with His true body, is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father, as is there to be worshiped."

Still, why did Jesus come as an infant, raised by his human parents, and lived as a man, when ultimately, after he died and was raised from the grave, he would leave his disciples to go back to his Father in heaven?

Why Did Christ Come and Then Leave?

When the angel appeared to Joseph to announce the birth of Jesus by his betrothed wife, he said, *“She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins”* (Matt 1:21). It is for this reason alone that the Son of God was born as an infant in Bethlehem. His name means “God saves.”

This is the same good news that the angels brought to the shepherds on the field when Jesus was born, *“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord”* (Luke 2:11). So when Jesus preached, he said, *“I have come into the world as light... I did not come to judge the world but to save the world”* (John 12:46-47). For three years, he preached the gospel of repentance and faith, *“Repent and believe in the gospel”* (Mark 1:15). The only way to heaven is opened through repenting of sin and believing in Jesus as Savior.

So when Nicodemus came to speak to Jesus, he told him, *“unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God”* (John 3:5). No one can be saved unless the Holy Spirit gives him a new heart, unless he is born from above by the Spirit.

And after the Spirit was poured out on the disciples, Peter preached to the Jewish leaders, *“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12). Peter remembered that when Thomas asked Jesus where he was going, and how do they know the way, Jesus answered, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life”* (John 14:6). He is the only Savior. There is no other name, no other religion, no good works by which anyone may be saved and forgiven of sins, except Jesus, for *“through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you”* (Acts 13:38).

In his farewell speech to his disciples in John 14, his disciples were distraught and troubled after he told them that he was leaving them soon. What will happen to them? Who will be their leader? Jesus comforted them, saying, *“I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever”* (John 14:16). After he leaves them on earth, he and the Father will pour out the Spirit on his disciples. And when he is seated at the right hand of his Father in heaven, he will be “our Advocate in the presence of His Father in heaven.” John says in his letter, *“if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”* (1 John 2:1). Paul says that Jesus is at the right hand of God *“interceding for us”* (Rom 8:34). He pleads for the forgiveness of our sins. He brings our needs, our sufferings, our afflictions, and our thanksgivings, praises and songs to God's throne of grace.

Are We With Him Only When He Returns?

John says that *“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”* And the Word really became flesh as an infant born of a virgin, and this infant is called “Immanuel,” which means “God

with us.” This is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that a virgin shall conceive and bear a son and his name will be “Immanuel.”

This is also the fulfillment of God's ages-long covenant promises to Abraham, Moses, David and all the prophets, when he said, *“I will be your God, and you shall be my people.”* God in human flesh came down from heaven and dwelt among his disciples for three years. But when he was about to leave them, he left this promise, *“I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18)*. When was he coming back to them? After he was crucified for our sins, we read about three comings.

First, he came back to them after his resurrection. He was with them for 40 days. But then he left them when he ascended into heaven. So second, he came back to them when he poured out his Holy Spirit on them on Pentecost Sunday, ten days after his ascension. From that Pentecost Sunday, Christ has been dwelling with us. When he sends the Holy Spirit, he promised his disciples, *“he will be with you forever”* and *“he dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17)*. This is also what he promised his disciples in the Great Commission, *“I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 18:20)*, and in Hebrews 13:5, *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.”* Paul says that even now, God through the Spirit has *“raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6)*. When we come together for worship as we do now, the Spirit raises us up and seats us with Christ in the heavenly places!

The Spirit indwells us not only to guide, comfort, and make us holy till the end, but also *“the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (Eph 1:14)*. The Spirit is God's “down payment” or “promissory note” of our heavenly inheritance. Therefore, Jesus keeps his promise not to leave us as orphans through the indwelling Spirit.

He came back to his disciples after his resurrection. He came back when he poured out the Spirit on them. His “third coming” is his final coming. This is his promise in our text, *“I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also” (John 14:3)*. When he ascended into heaven, he was also a pledge, a promise, that as the Head of his church, he will also take us his members up to himself into heaven. And on that last day, when he returns from heaven, all the world *“will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30)*. As he has promised 2,000 years ago, in the fullness of time that no one knows, he will come again to take his people to himself to the new heaven and new earth.

Finally, Immanuel, “God with us,” will be our God, and we will be his people forever. The Word who became flesh will now “tabernacle” with his people. God's promise to Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, and to all the prophets, to dwell with his people will be fulfilled.

Beloved people of God, every Advent season, we focus on our blessed hope, God's promise, that he will be with us till the end. This is not only a future promise, for he is with us even now, in all our joys and sorrows, in health and in afflictions.

Most elderly Christians look forward to this promise. But when they look back to their past, they often wish that they would have focused more on serving God rather than enjoying life's pleasures; given more gifts, instead of accumulating material possessions; spent more time with their families and church ministries rather than with friends; loving and caring for their brothers and sisters in Christ more than loving themselves.

But it is never too late to fix our gaze heavenward. Even the criminal dying on the cross pleaded with Jesus to remember him when our Lord returns to his heavenly paradise. We can start today to have a heavenly, eternal perspective in our lives. May we, like Abraham, look forward to the heavenly city, whose designer and builder is God, where all of us will have dwelling-places. May we be mindful this Christmas to “*seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.*” May we “*set [our] minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth*” (Col 3:1-2).