

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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How Many and How Glorious?

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. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. (John 14:1-4, KJV 1900)

Building on the commandment to the disciples to believe in Him as they believed in God, Jesus teaches the greatest truth that had the potential to comfort and sooth their troubled hearts. While He would leave them in this world, He was going away to put the final touches on another place where they would join Him and enjoy even greater fellowship and blessing than they had experienced with Him during the last three years. And, during His time away from them, He would send the Holy Spirit, an ever-present Comforter who would be just as present and effective a companion and helper as He had been to them. They would not be left alone.

When people confuse passages dealing with discipleship and passages dealing with eternal life, they inevitably conclude that the relative number of people whom God saves, eternally saves from their sins, is small. This conclusion must ignore any number of passages that state the mirror opposite, that the number of people whom the Lord saves and who shall enjoy Him for eternity is relatively large. Jesus adds yet another such passage here.

In my Father's house are many mansions. Jesus didn't give a precise number, but He did give a relative point, **many** as contrasted with **few**. Jesus reinforces the point; "...if it were not so, I would have told you." If He intended to prepare heaven—and populate it—with only a few people relative to all humanity, He says that He would have told the disciples that fact. This comment in and of itself tells us that we cannot interpret any of Jesus' "few" comments as a reference to eternity and the relative number of the elect. A careful study of those passages in context will show that they focus on discipleship, not eternity. And Scripture abundantly warns us that the difficulties and required self-denial of discipleship will render the number of faithful disciples to be few indeed.

Jesus' use of the term, "many mansions," adds further to Scripture's revelation of our future with the Lord in glory. The dwelling place for the Lord's people in heaven is not a shanty hut that might last for a brief time, but is so flimsy that it shall soon fall to the ground. That place is not a temporary tent. It is a place suitably luxurious—luxury measured by the Lord's standards, not ours—to be an appropriate dwelling for all eternity.

I go to prepare a place for you. Jesus here associates His many dwelling places, "mansions," with people. There shall be no empty, unoccupied dwelling place in heaven, not even one. Several years ago during the housing crisis in California, Sandra and I occasionally drove through a very nice upscale street near where we live. As we drove along this street, more than half the houses were vacant with foreclosure signs in the front yard. It felt as if we were driving through a ghost town. Just a few months earlier we had driven this same street and seen children playing in the yards, parents working to make their home comfortable and attractive, and cars parked in driveways. What happened? How could so many dreams be shattered? In fact, every vacant home on that street represented a family with a shattered dream. Will heaven be filled with reminders of shattered dreams and unrealized potential? No, Jesus completed the work—and this passage is all about reminding us of this truth—necessary to ensure that every "mansion," every glorious dwelling place in heaven shall be occupied.

I go to prepare a place for you. ...for you, Jesus identifies that His going to prepare this place is not for some vague someone who will make a decision, believe the gospel, or otherwise supplement His work to gain their access to this place. A modern dodge to the Bible doctrine of election builds on this errant idea. As the idea goes, since Isaiah 42:1 in prophecy identifies Jesus as God's "elect," all Bible election has to do only with Him personally. According to this idea, if you will take the necessary steps to put yourself into Jesus, then you become identified with Him as God's elect. Paul writes—

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

By specifically defining that anyone who is in Christ is a new creature, the product of a new creation, Paul defines "Creation" as the process and excludes any other process by which a person may find himself "in Christ." The person who is truly "in Christ" is not a new evolution. He is not a new self-made man. He is in Christ by a creative work that

occurred outside himself. The natural world didn't actively contribute to its creation in Genesis 1. God created it exclusively by Himself. (Genesis 1:1) The product of creation must attribute his existence to his Creator, not to himself. Further, when Jesus taught Nicodemus about the new birth, He concluded His lesson with an analogy of blowing wind. You hear its sound blowing through the trees, but you are not in charge of wind. You can't tell where it blew before it blew at your location, and you can't tell where it will blow in the next ten minutes.

Jesus states the fact. He left the disciples to accomplish a work that only He could complete, and the recipients of that work's benefit are as specific as the work itself, "...for you." A story will illustrate the point. A young man came to believe that God had called him to preach. In his denomination's tradition, a man in his situation must graduate Bible college or seminary. He enrolled in his denomination's seminary and started his training. As he studied his Bible, he increasingly came to see the Bible doctrine of election. When he started talking to people about his beliefs that He had discovered in his Bible, word soon got to the administrators of the college. They called him to a hearing for his beliefs that contradicted the college's and the denomination's stated freewill beliefs. The college had one professor who believed the doctrine of election; he was so respected in the denomination and by his students that they quietly tolerated his belief. This man happened to be on the hearing board that heard this young man's case. After the young man simply stated why he had come to believe in Biblical election, he was dismissed, and the board discussed his case privately. The professor who shared this belief argued for the young man. He had immersed his mind in the Bible. What was wrong with that? He had discovered an unpopular, but clearly taught doctrine in his studies of the Bible. What was wrong with that? The board decided to allow the young man to continue his studies. Subsequently, the young man and the professor who shared his belief in Biblical election became good friends. The professor took the young student under his wings and guided him through his studies. Sometime later in a general assembly of the students, the college president used the gathering to preach a brief sermon on his beliefs in man's free will. Near the end of his sermonette, the president quoted a verse that he believed supported his idea, Revelation 22:17.

The president added volume and intensity to his voice as he stated, "I believe the 'Whosoever wills of the Bible.'" The professor who believed the Bible doctrine of election was a very short man. When he sat in the seats in the auditorium, his feet didn't touch the floor. In the quiet of the audience, the professor seated by his adopted student friend, jumped from his seat, landed his feet on the floor with a thump, and shouted, "But what are you going

to do with all the 'Whosoever will nots' in the Bible?" No answer.

No two Bible doctrines, rightly divided and rightly understood, contradict each other. Revelation 22:17, rightly divided, in no way contradicts the equally clear teachings of Scripture regarding God's election of a chosen, specific people to be His family throughout eternity. The only people who are in fact willing to come to Jesus are people who were previously born of His Holy Spirit. They possess eternal life. Jesus affirmed that the believer in Him already possesses eternal life. (John 5:24; a truth that John affirms, 1 John 5:1) If eternal life is already a fact at the time we believe, our belief cannot possibly be either causative or instrumental in our coming to possess eternal life. Those who are willing to respond to the gospel as they come to believe in Jesus have already been born again. They are already children of God. They are both elect and born again. A person's will is a function of his nature; a dead person has no will. A person's willing faith and obedience to the Lord and to His gospel is manifestation that he presently is a living, born-again child of grace. (Ephesians 2:1-10; Paul specifically equates our condition prior to being saved by God's grace as "...dead in trespasses and sins," a state that God in kind grace reverses by giving us eternal life)

I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. Jesus arose from the dead after three days in the borrowed tomb. He appeared to the disciples and taught them for forty days. He then ascended out of their sight in glory, returning to the Father. (Acts 1:9-11) However, in this ascending, Jesus did not take the disciples with Him. They remained behind. His promise of returning and receiving them to Himself remains unfulfilled, but it is no less certain today than when Jesus spoke the words of promise. Today we abide in the same hope that stirred the disciples' faith in the first generation of the faith. We do not know the time. It will come unannounced and unexpected, but it shall surely come. And when it comes, our Lord shall appear in glory and receive to Himself His chosen and beloved children, the "Many" children for whom He prepared "many" mansions.

At that day, we shall hear our Lord speak the glorious and joyful words, "Behold I and the children which God hath given me." (Hebrews 2:13b) When we appear before the Father, we shall be nestled in our Lord's loving embrace, for He shall then receive us to Himself. From that moment and throughout timeless eternity, we shall be with Him where He is. We shall never know a moment of lonely gloom, looking for His appearing. We shall never feel a touch of anxiety, wondering "When shall He come?" We shall never visit a cemetery to remember our loved ones who have gone before us. For a joyful eternity, we shall be with Him where He is.

If you have friends in gloryland

who've left because of pain,
There'll be no pain in gloryland;
they'll suffer not again.

So weep not friends, I'm going Home.
Up there we'll die no more.
No coffins will be made up there,
no graves on that bright shore.
The Primitive Quartet

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor