

Jesus said ‘ I go and prepare and a place for you’

NT Reading: “Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe in God and believe also in me. ² There are many rooms in my Father’s house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. ³ And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. (John 14 v1-3)

OT Reading: ⁴⁰ “Now, O my God, look on us and listen to the prayers offered in this place. ⁴¹ Rise up now, LORD God, and with the Covenant Box, the symbol of your power, enter the Temple and stay here forever. Bless your priests in all they do, and may all your people be happy because of your goodness to them. ⁴² LORD God, do not reject the king you have chosen. Remember the love you had for your servant David.” ¹ When King Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and burned up the sacrifices that had been offered, and the dazzling light of the LORD’s presence filled the Temple. ² Because the Temple was full of the dazzling light, the priests could not enter it. ³ When the people of Israel saw the fire fall from heaven and the light fill the Temple, they fell face downward on the pavement, worshipping God and praising him for his goodness and his eternal love. (2 Chronicles 6v40-7v3.)

A manic mind

So this man is walking his pet greyhound and wanted to go into a café. He tied his dog up to a metal chair outside the café, then went inside. All was fine, until a sudden noise made the greyhound lurch forward and pull the chair over with a clatter that scared him. So he bolted, down the High street. He was still attached to the chair, which bounced noisily behind him frequently clattering into his backside, and making him all the more frightened. People tried to catch him, but he ran away even faster. What did the greyhound need to do? Calm down. Stand still. Then it would have stopped.

The disciples minds were in a complete spin. The meal with Jesus was not going well. Despite Jesus telling them often that he needed to die, when they arrived for Passover they still had in their minds that Jesus their personal Messiah was going to rule in power over the Jews. They had been arguing which cabinet position they were each going to have. “ I’ll be deputy PM, not you, Simon the Zealot will most likely be secretary for defence, and Judas will probably get the Treasury’ !

But Jesus had dropped some bomb shells on them during the meal. He told them, he was going away and they would not be able to come with him. They probably thought ‘Hang on – we have given up everything for you Jesus, and we’ve got some powerful enemies, we won’t be safe without you. To make it worse, he told them that one of them was going to betray him, and the rest of them would run away and desert him, even Peter would deny him, despite his protestations.

So, this meal was not going well for them. These words from Jesus had sent their minds spinning in a panic, like the greyhound. They were no longer thinking straight about Jesus and all that he had taught them.

When you’re mind is feeling manic, you seem to lose your reasoning, even your common sense. The disciples needed to let their minds calm down. Jesus needed them to focus on the bigger picture of what was true in Him.

Don’t worry or be upset

“Do not be worried and upset,” Jesus told them. “Believe in God and believe also in me. (John 14v1)

Jesus tries to calm them down, with reassurances. Don’t be upset about what is happening now, and don’t worry about the future. Believe in me and my Father. We love you, we have your best interests at heart. What is about to happen is for a purpose. You need to trust us. trust us, because we are dependable. Of course it did not stop them worrying one iota.

The message is the same for you and me today, no matter what you are going through in your mind right now, do not let it upset you. Whatever has been said about you or done to you, forgive and let it go. Jesus loves you. Your value comes from him, not from what others think of you or say about you. Don't worry about what is going to happen in your future, with your health, relationships, finance etc. Pray about them, and trust Jesus with them. He knows what is best for your life. You **can** depend on Him.

We are told again and again in our Bibles, not to be afraid and not to worry, and He knows that despite us hearing these words, and perhaps others telling us not to be upset or worry, that like the disciples, we will carry on anyway. The point is, he is saying that you don't **need** to, because he has got you in the palm of his hands. You can trust Him. He is God. He loves you. He is Trustworthy. Jesus says again today, to you – Do not be worried or upset, Believe in God, and Believe also in me.

The Vine – Jesus sets about reassuring his disciples, and in the next chapter of John, Jesus is describing himself as the 'True Vine'. He says '*those who abide in me, and I in them will bear much fruit*' (John 15v5). There are two different homes being mentioned here. Jesus can live in you, **and** You can live in Him. So there is a choice, our place or His, but Jesus is saying that if both happen, then your Christian lives will be fruitful.

We are going to look at the words of Jesus, in this John 14 passage, where after telling them to stop worrying and believe in Him, he follows up by saying that he is going to his Father's house to prepare a place for them, his place, but first I want to think about our place.

God has always been able to abide or dwell with his people, this is old school, old testament, or old covenant, whereas us being able to be in God's place, is new school, new covenant, only made possible by what Jesus did on the cross.

My Place

In the Old Testament King Solomon completes the building of the temple, piles up the altar with a mess of dead animals, and then dedicates the temple to God. Solomon prayed 'Arise O God and go to your resting place' (2 Chr 6v41). It was a very presumptuous request that the mighty God of creation would stop what he was doing and go and live in the place that Solomon had built him. But the amazing thing is that God does come to Solomon's place. When he had finished the prayer then it all kicks off. This Holy fire descends and consumes the sacrifices, then the presence of God filled the temple, and brings this light that is so dazzling that the priests couldn't enter it the temple without being blinded. (2 Chron 7v1-2).

God has always done this, to dwell with his people.

When we make a Christian commitment, then we say a prayer a bit like Solomon's, and we invite God to live in us. When we say to God, arise and come into this resting place, of my heart, then we become a temple of the living God, a dwelling place for him. He can come in and refine us, and burn up the mess in our lives if we give it over to Him. He can fill us with his presence, and be a light in us to others. Come and stay at my place Lord. No matter how chaotic or messy our lives, Jesus is happy to come and live in us through his Spirit. He can find rest even in the messiest of homes, cluttered with pride, selfishness, addictions, habits and stress. He can show us his love, and bring peace into all our situations. But it is still our place, and not His.

Jesus had come to the disciples and lived in their world. They left their homes and businesses to follow Jesus, but it was still their world, and their mind-set. Now he was going to leave them, so that he could prepare a new place for them, one in his Father's house.

Into the heart

After their meal, they go to the garden of Gethsemane, and sure enough just as Jesus said, Judas betrays him, and the other disciples abandon Him. Jesus is arrested, falsely accused, and crucified. When he died, there were two things that happened in the natural world that had huge implications in the spiritual world.

First when he died, there was the miraculous tearing in two of the thick temple curtain (behind which was Gods supposed dwelling place in the holy of holies). This signifies that in the heavenlies, the presence of God is being opened up to mankind.

Also when Jesus died, a Roman soldier thrust a spear in his side, to make sure he was dead. The body of Jesus would have been higher than the soldier, so as he thrusts in the spear, it must go upwards into his body, and as it did it pierced the lungs and opened up the heart of Jesus. We know this because the blood and water came out through the wound. So in his natural body we see the heart of Jesus being opened up. I see this as being symbolic of something else that is happening in the spiritual realm and that is that God is opening up his heart for us, as a place we can live in. Of course, not in our natural bodies, which at least for now are confined to earth, but our supernatural self, our spirits, can live in that place. He has prepared that place for us, right there in his heart, which is in the Fathers presence.

As we look closer at the words that Jesus says to his disciples to comfort them, he brings this message out.

Many Rooms

² There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a dwelling place for you. I would not tell you this if it were not so. And after I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to myself, so that you will be where I am. (John 14v2-3)

The reference to my Fathers house, would have always been understood by Jews like the disciples as the dwelling place of God, which is symbolised by their temple.

But then what is the place that Jesus is preparing, within this dwelling place of God?

People often jump to the conclusion that Jesus is talking about a place in heaven that he will take us to after we die, spacious and nicely furnished out for us with top range IKEA furniture, perfect pad for an eternity of worshipping God. But the disciples are in a panic now. What they need right away is some short-term assurance, not some ethereal promises about a future life. Whilst there is truth in us being provided for when we die, I don't think this is the primary meaning of what Jesus is saying.

The more likely explanation of Johns words, is that this 'dwelling place' is not a future heavenly realm, but is a 'dwelling place' in Christ, at one with Christ, where the presence of God is dwelling. This is the place that he wants them to dwell in, this is the place that he is going ahead of them to prepare, and he will be back soon, perhaps in two or 3 days to take them there.

But what is this place prepared for them, and of course for us by Jesus. What does it mean? What does it look like? Well let's have a closer look at the language Jesus is using.

The Jewish wedding

This place that Jesus is preparing for us comes out of his love for us, and our response to that love. The language he uses when he says 'I will go and prepare a place for you' was the language of a bridegroom to his bride in that Jewish culture. After a marrying couple make their promises to

each other, the husband-to-be goes away for a bit to prepare a place for his bride in his Father's house. The couple at this stage are set apart for each other, separated but joined in love and commitment, then the bridegroom returns with great celebration and takes his bride in triumph to his Father's house, amidst gifts, singing, dancing and much rejoicing. This is what those disciples would have understood, when Jesus said he was going to prepare a place.

They will be separated for a short while, but he has already made an ever-lasting commitment to them out of his love for them, and they do not have to be concerned while he is away. He'll be back very soon bearing gifts and take them to this special place that he will prepare for them, in his Father's house.

What incredible imagery when you know the background. Yet this relationship he is inviting us into is not one that is fixed in time and space like our normal marriages, but it is one that we have an eternity to explore. Jesus uses this imagery of a wedding betrothal, because it is the closest human imagery available to Him and to us.

Jesus will take them to a place that has been paid for in full by both parties. Jesus gave his life on the cross for them, which was his payment. They gave their lives over to Jesus, which was their payment, which makes living together there possible. It is the same for you and me. Jesus died for us. That's his payment. We give our lives to him. That's our payment. We then get this new home that he has prepared for us. Our place in Christ. There is no rent or mortgage. It is paid for in full. The place fully belongs to you and Jesus. This is new school, new covenant, new agreement. It wasn't possible before the death of Jesus.

But what does His place actually look like? For clues, we return to Solomon's temple.

A Temple, and a place of rest.

Solomon's temple has two bronze columns at the entrance that were 8 metres tall. On each column was a huge lily and 200 pomegranates. Beneath was a reservoir of water in the shape of another lily which was supported by 20 bronze bulls. The bulls represent strength, but they are submitting to the lily. The lily is a symbol of rest and trust. The pomegranates represent fruitfulness.

He is our pillar, he is our strength, but our strength comes when we rest in Him, not when we strive to serve him in our own strength.

Personally, my mind is always working overtime and I find it hard to rest, but I know that I must find rest in Jesus. I must come to his place of rest, the place he has prepared for me in his spiritual heart. I must spend time in his Word, I must spend time in his presence. I must spend time in Worship. This is what it means resting in Him. For me I have to work at resting. I have to find what time I can during my normal week, but then dedicate special times in my calendar to be resting in him. So I have worship music on in the car, I pray quietly in the office if I am walking down the corridors etc. But I need to programme into my calendar some dedicated time out too. Once a year, I go to an event on the South Coast which is just non-stop worship music for 72 hours. Sometimes I put in an 8, 10 or 12 hour shift of worship before I have a break. But I believe such times are important for my ministry. Another thing I do is book myself spiritual retreats every year in a hidden part of Wales, where there is no phone signal, and I spend hours by an open fire, resting and reading and then praying in the little church, or outside by the wooden cross. I get the bullish strength and power to do his work, through those times in his word, those times relaxing in his presence and those times lost for hours in worship. Then as I step out from that place of rest, equipped with his strength, then I get the pomegranates, I see the fruit. I see people being saved, I see people being encouraged in their faith, and I see people being comforted and healed. I have

been very fortunate and blessed to have seen the pomegranates of fruitfulness in recent years, but the fruit does not originate in my own efforts, it comes out of the that place he has prepared for me, it comes from that place in his presence, that place of rest.

Heartbeat

In the year 2000 the Millennium dome was opened in London as a huge new exhibition, the centre-piece of which was called the 'body zone'. I love special occasions, so I bought tickets for me and my 7 year old daughter. We got to walk inside this model of the body, and could see and marvel at the inner workings of a human. I am now inside a body, with a heart beat resonating loud and clear in my ears.

God has a heart for our world, for the poor, for those persecuted, for the vulnerable, and for the fragile planet we live on. His heart beats for those things. As Jesus opens up his heart within Gods presence and prepares a place for us, then we start to hear his heart-beat for one or more of those areas. I believe the place he prepares for us will be chosen in ear-shot of the heart-beat he wants us to respond to. So if you hear his heart-beat for the hungry, you may develop a passion for starting up a food bank or a soup kitchen. If you hear his heart-beat for teenagers, you may find others similarly oriented, and start up a church youth group or do detached work on the streets. If you hear his heart-beat for the environment you may start up recycling projects or raise money to help endangered species. When I was a young Christian I couldn't understand why all Christians didn't have the same passion for youth work as I did, but they were hearing different heart-beats, from the place that Jesus had prepared for them, which was different to my place. It was right that they had different passions, because we are all made uniquely.

What heart-beat or heart-beats of God are you tuned into? If you don't know ask him? For sure, he has something for you, he has gone ahead and made plans for you, but you need to find that place of rest and tune it to God, and discover these purposes in the place of rest, then with his strength, you can respond in our physical world to that spiritual heart-beat, and go out in the world to make a difference in that area, produce the fruit.

Patience and the dying seed

In Paul's book to the Galatians, he encourages them to let the Spirit direct their lives. He contrasts what human nature wants as being opposite to what the Spirit wants. (Gal 5:16-17). In other words it is the Spirit that tunes us out from listening to the worldly heart-beat and tunes us into the heartbeat of Jesus. He goes on to say that when we let the Spirit tune us into the rhythm of Jesus, then it produces in us love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility and self-control. The list includes 'patience', which growing up would not be a virtue that many would attribute me with ! But in Jesus, I have to learn to be tune in to what I believe he wants me to do with my life, and be patient with it. Keep praying into the things that he has given me and trust him with it even if I cannot see any immediate results.

God's timing is not our timing, and we can be standing in that place of rest and praying into many things that are precious to his heart, and our heart and yet not seeing any fruit. – Where are the Pomegranates? Why is no-one coming to faith on my local estate? Why are my prayers for healing not answered? Where is the spiritual gift I kept praying for? Why is my sister still not a Christian?

In Asia there is a type of bamboo which can grow up to 60 feet in a few weeks. It can be a very a profitable crop for the farmers, but on planting this bamboo, nothing happens for the first five years, of watering and waiting, then all of sudden, POW, a forest of bamboo. The farmers would have changed crops after a year or two if they weren't confident that there was plenty happening unseen beneath the surface. We have to be confident too, that if we are take up our place in the

heart of Jesus, and are persistent in prayer, then even when we can't see any fruit, there is plenty going on unseen beneath the surface.

Rest and the Storm.

In 1520 the Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan, took a year trying to find a way around South America, and at the very tip he was confronted with raging winds, towering ice-burges and stormy seas. His crew threatened mutiny to make Magellan go back, but he told them to believe in him, and he kept his calm in the storm. He steered out of the raging Atlantic into new peaceful waters off the coast of Chile. He named it the Peaceful Ocean, the Pacific. They had plenty of adventures and challenges ahead, but they had steered through the storm and found a place of Peace.

At the last supper, Jesus was about to steer his follows into a storm of life, one in which they would become mutinous and abandon him once he was arrested. Jesus is telling them on this Thursday not to be upset or worried, but knows they when he sees them again on Sunday, they would be in hiding in a locked room, still upset and worried. But his love for them, and his commitment to them, never wavered over that first Easter, and just like the Jewish bridegroom, he had returned with joy and gifts as he breathes on them the Holy Spirit, a foretaste of what would come at Pentecost. They could no through the Spirit live in Him, and would be the first people in history since pride entered the world, to have this close fellowship with God.

He would live in them, transforming their lives, and they would find that place of rest in Him, and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. There would be more storms ahead for them, but he would guide them through the storms, and even help them find rest within the storm. We see this on occasions where disciples are in singing in prisons and leading people to faith there. As Jesus once said to them, they could do even greater things than Him, and they went on to produce much fruit.

Jesus can guide you too through the storms of life, and even help you find rest in the storms. My favourite Psalm is Psalm 23. The Lord is my Shepherd. It says that even in the deepest darkness (deaths dark vale) I will not fear because He is with me, but it goes on to say that he prepares a banquet for me in the presence of my enemies. Life can be raging at you from all directions, trying to bring you own, but you can find that place of rest, and rejoicing, right there in the middle of it all.

If you want to live a fruitful life for Jesus, then we need to take on board those words of Jesus 'Abide in me, and I in you, and you will produce much fruit'. Let Jesus come into your life and transform you. But also find that place of rest in Him, through your bible, through your prayers, through your worship or just resting and meditating with Him.

- In that place, you will hear his heart-beat for the work he wants you to do.
- In that place, you will be empowered with spiritual strength from the Holy Spirit.
- From that place, with his patience and the other fruits of the spirit developing in you, you will be able to step out, and be his hands and feet in a hurting world, and bring in the fruit for Him. Amen.