

“It’s a Big, Big House”

*You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy (1 Peter 1:8)*¹

My Mom grew up on a farm in Grayson County, Kentucky, not far from Mammoth Cave. Both of her parents were school teachers, and her Dad was a bi-vocational pastor as well as serving in the Kentucky Legislature. By the time my brother and I came along, though, my Grandparents had retired to a small farm near “downtown” Leitchfield, Kentucky, and they lived in a large two-story farmhouse with porches, swings, a huge garden, chickens, and a cow or two.

All of that is gone now, but I have outlined the extent of that farm on this picture from *Google Earth*. Mom and Dan and I spent two weeks there every summer, and I have many happy memories of that house and of wandering those hills with my brother. To pre-teen boys, the whole place seemed nearly limitless, and to city kids, nearly magical.

In order to get to Leitchfield from Atlanta, we had to ride all day on a Greyhound bus, so “Over the river and through the wood, to Grandmother’s House we go,” fit that journey pretty well. And it is to that large, old house that my mind first goes when I consider our African-American spiritual for this final Sunday of Black History Month—*Come and Go with Me*:

Come and go with me to my Father’s house,
to my Father’s house, to my Father’s house.
Come and go with me to my Father’s house;
there is joy, Joy, JOY!

Come just as you are to my Father’s house . . .

Jesus will be there in my Father’s house . . .

People have no fear in my Father’s house . . .

There’s music everywhere in my Father’s house . . .



Of this week’s drawing, our artist, Timothy Botts, wrote that “Pictures of homes in Burkina Faso, covered with patterns, inspired this design for the Father’s house. Do you see the people of various shades marching together inside? Jesus has promised us a future home without grief, cost, pretention, restrictions, hunger, or fear! The wonder of heaven cuts loose my imagination.”²

There’s another version of this song from which I took the title for this meditation. The chorus of this other version goes, “It’s a Big, Big House with lots and lots of room. A Big, Big Table with lots and lots of food. A Big, Big Yard where we can play football. A Big, Big House, it’s my *Father’s House!*”³

The verses of “Come and Go with Me to my Father’s House” form the outline for this sermon, though I won’t give equal time to every verse. The first verse is

¹ A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on February 26, 2017. The inspiration for this sermon is an African American Spiritual taken from Timothy R. Botts, *Bound for Glory: Celebrating the Gift of African American Spirituals through Expressive Calligraphy*, with reflections by Patricia Raybon (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House, 2011).

² Botts, pp. 114-115.

³ “Big House,” by Audio Adrenaline (Kelly Nickels, Mick Cripps, Philip Lewis, Steve Riley, and Tracii Gunns).

Come just as you are to my Father's house,
to my Father's house, to my Father's house.
Come just as you are to my Father's house;
there is joy, Joy, JOY!

I can't think of those words without also thinking about a song I learned years ago at a *Promise Keepers* rally. It's "Come Just As You Are," by Crystal Lewis:

Come just as you are. Hear the Spirit call. Come and see, come receive, come and live forever! Life everlasting, strength for today. Taste the Living Water and never thirst again!

Come just as you are. Hear the Spirit call. Come and see, Christ, my King, come and live forever more.⁴

The words and the haunting melody of this song move me deeply, and the best thing about them is that they're *true*. One of Satan's most effective strategies is to try to convince us that we have to "get our lives together" before we can come to God. But that idea, like everything else Satan tells us, is a lie.

Like the Prodigal Son in Jesus' parable,⁵ all we have to do is to get up out of the muck and the mess that we've made of our lives and walk home to God, where we will be welcomed with Love that knows no bounds. And you don't even have to wait until the end of this service to make that journey.

You can come home to Jesus and to your Father's House in your heart at this very moment. If you've never done that, if you've never asked God to forgive your Sin and to adopt you into His Family because of Jesus, then nothing else in your life really matters at all until you've done that. I hope you'll not leave this room without doing it!

The second verse of our spiritual is

Jesus will be there in my Father's house,
in my Father's house, in my Father's house.
Jesus will be there in my Father's house;
there is joy, Joy, JOY!

The Scripture we read earlier as background for this message is part of what we call Jesus' "High Priestly Prayer" in John 17,⁶ and I want to highlight especially the first and last verses we read. In John 17:13, Jesus said, "[Father,] *I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they [the disciples] may have the full measure of my **joy** within them.*"

I hope you've noticed that the last line of every verse of today's spiritual is about **Joy**. The presence of Joy—which is much greater, broader, and deeper than mere happiness—is a sure sign of the Presence of God,⁷ and the Bible tells us that Jesus went to the Cross because of the **Joy** He anticipated in opening the way Home to God . . . for you (Hebrews 12:2).

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UsD2urNjIWQ>

⁵ Luke 15:11-32

⁶ This prayer is really "The Lord's Prayer." What we generally call "The Lord's Prayer" is more accurately called "The Model Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13).

⁷ <https://teihard.com/2013/05/27/teihard-de-chardin-quote-of-the-week-may-27-joy-and-the-presence-of-god/>

In His prayer in John 17, Jesus asked the Father that we who follow Him might know “the full measure” of His joy. And this means that if **joy** is not a central characteristic of and a frequent experience in your relationship with God, then you have not yet discovered the central and most powerful dimension of what God wants to give to you!

And notice what Jesus said in the last verse of our text: “*I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world*” (John 17:24). When we love someone or when we think highly of them, we want them to know us, and we want them to know both important and unimportant things about us. We want them to see where we live, and when they visit us, we give them the complete tour of the house.

That’s what Jesus was saying here. He wants us to see where He lives, and He wants us to know what He is really like. “Come and go with me,” Jesus says, “to my Father’s House!”

Now there’s a lot we don’t know about the world to come, and we’re certainly curious about those things, but there’s really only one thing we need to know. It’s illustrated by a story about a farmer and his country doctor. I was a country pastor once, with a country doctor of my own, and I think of a particular office and a particular room when I tell this story

The farmer had finished the medical part of his visit with the doctor, but because they were good friends and went to church together, and because life is slower in the country, they lingered in conversation in the examining room. The conversation turned to the life to come, and they talked about some of the same things you and I might talk about on that subject.

As they wondered together what heaven might be like, the farmer got up and opened the door to the examining room, whereupon his faithful dog bounded into the room—this was a country office, after all. The farmer said to his friend, “Old Shep here had no idea what was in this room. There could have been a bear in this room. There could have been *anything* in this room. *All he knew was that I was in this room, and so in this room is where he wanted to be.*”

And I submit to you that this is really all we need to know about the life to come:

Jesus will be there in my Father’s house,
in my Father’s house, in my Father’s house.
Jesus will be there in my Father’s house;
there is joy, Joy, JOY!

The next verse of our spiritual builds on this same idea:

People have no fear in my Father’s house,
in my Father’s house, in my Father’s house.
People have no fear in my Father’s house;
there is joy, Joy, JOY!

There is much that I could say at this point, but because time is limited I just want to offer two verses. The first verse is 1 John 4:18: *We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us* (The Living Bible). This is important, so let’s do it again. Would you read it with me?

We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us.

And the second verse I want to suggest is Luke 12:32, which comes at the end of what I'm about to read: ²⁹*And do not set your heart on what you will eat or drink; do not worry about it.* ³⁰*For the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them.* ³¹*But seek his kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.* ³² ***“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom.”*** There is NO FEAR in our Father's House.

The last verse of our Spiritual goes like this:

There's music everywhere in my Father's house,
in my Father's house, in my Father's house.
There's music everywhere in my Father's house;
there is joy, Joy, JOY!

Don Piper was killed in an auto accident and was dead for ninety minutes before God miraculously restored him to this world. Don confirmed that “there's music everywhere in my Father's House” in his remarkable book, *90 Minutes in Heaven*:⁸

“Everything I saw glowed with intense brightness. The best I can describe it is that we began to move toward [the] light. . . . As I stared ahead, everything seemed to grow taller—like a gentle hill that kept going upward and never stopped. . . . The powerful light I had encountered when I met my friends and loved ones paled into darkness as the radiance and iridescence in front of me increased. . . . The farther I walked, the brighter the light. The light engulfed me, and I had the sense that I was being ushered into the presence of God. . . .

“And then I heard the music.”

“My most vivid memory of heaven is what I *heard*. I can only describe it as a holy swoosh of wings. But I'd have to magnify that thousands of times to explain the effect of the sound in heaven.

“It was the most beautiful and pleasant sound I've ever heard, and it didn't stop. It was like a song that goes on forever. . . . I didn't just hear music. It seemed as if I were *part* of the music—and it played in and through my body. I stood still, and yet I felt embraced by the sounds. . . .

“A second sound remains, even today, the single, most vivid memory I have of my entire heavenly experience. I call it music, but it differed from anything I had ever heard or ever expect to hear on earth. The melodies of praise filled the atmosphere. The nonstop intensity and endless variety overwhelmed me.

“The praise was unending, but the most remarkable thing to me was that hundreds of songs were being sung at the same time—all of them worshipping God. . . . If we played three CDs of praise at the same time, we'd have a cacophony of noise that would drive us crazy. This was totally different. Every sound blended, and each voice or instrument enhanced the others.

“As strange as it may seem, I could clearly distinguish each song. . . . Many of the old hymns and choruses I had sung at various times in my life were part of the music—along with hundreds of songs I had never heard before. Hymns of praise, modern-sounding choruses, and

⁸ Don Piper, with Cecil Murphey, *90 Minutes in Heaven: A True Story of Death & Life* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2004), pp. 20-32.

ancient chants filled my ears and brought not only a deep peace but the greatest feeling of joy I've ever experienced. . . .

“The celestial tunes surpassed any I had ever heard. I couldn't calculate the number of songs—perhaps thousands—offered up simultaneously, and yet there was no chaos, because I had the capacity to hear each one and discern the lyrics and melody. . . . **Even now, back on earth, sometimes I still hear faint echoes of that music.**”

There's music everywhere in my Father's house,
in my Father's house, in my Father's house.
There's music everywhere in my Father's house;
there is joy, Joy, JOY!

Well, as we begin wrap things up for today, I want to offer a few more thoughts about “Our Father's House.” I don't expect that the New Heaven and New Earth that God has promised will have anything to do with harps and clouds.

You and I long for a perfect world, without the corruption of sin, where God walks with us and talks with us in the cool of the day, as was the case in Eden. Because we're human beings, we desire something tangible and physical, something that will not fade away. We actually long for something very similar to what the Bible describes in the Garden of Eden. And that is exactly what God promises us—a home that will not be destroyed, a kingdom that will not fade, a city with unshakable foundations, an inheritance eternal and incorruptible.⁹

The Bible describes Heaven as a “city” (Hebrews 11:10, 13:14), and we understand cities. Cities have buildings, culture, art, music, athletics, goods and services, events of all kinds. And, of course, cities have people engaged in activities, gatherings, conversations, and various kinds of work.

The Bible also describes Heaven as a “country” (Hebrews 11:16), and we know about countries, too. They have territories, rulers, national interests, pride in their identity, and citizens who are both diverse and unified.¹⁰

If we can't imagine our present Earth without rivers, mountains, trees, and flowers, then why would we try to imagine the New Earth without these features? We wouldn't expect a non-Earth to have mountains and rivers, but God doesn't promise us a non-Earth. God promises us a *New Earth*.

In Genesis, God plants the Garden of Eden on Earth; in Revelation, God brings down the New Jerusalem, with a garden at its center, to the New Earth. In Eden, there's no sin, death, or Curse; on the New Earth, there's no *more* sin, death, or Curse. In Genesis, the Redeemer is promised; in Revelation, the Redeemer returns. Genesis tells the story of Paradise lost; Revelation tells the story of Paradise regained. In Genesis, humanity's stewardship is squandered; in Revelation, humanity's stewardship is triumphant, empowered by the human-and-divine King Jesus.

My friends, God has never given up on the original Creation. Yet somehow we've managed to overlook an entire biblical vocabulary that makes this point clear: *Reconcile. Redeem. Restore. Recover. Return. Renew. Regenerate. Resurrect.* Each of these biblical words suggests a return to

⁹ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2004), p. 78.

¹⁰ Alcorn, p. 78.

an original condition that was ruined or lost. That's why Jesus referred to what's coming as "*the renewal of all things*" (Matthew 19:28).

On the final page of the final book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the children who have been to Narnia lament that they once again must return to their own world—our world—which they have come to know as the Shadowlands. But Aslan (the lion who represents Jesus) tells the children, "**You do not yet look so happy as I mean you to be.**"

"Lucy said, 'We're so afraid of being sent away, Aslan. And you have sent us back into our own world so often.'

"No fear of that,' said Aslan. 'Have you not guessed? . . . There was a real railway accident. Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—*dead*. The term is over: the holidays have begun. **The dream has ended; this is the morning.**'

"And as he spoke he no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after.

But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before."¹¹

Come and go with me to my Father's house,
to my Father's house, to my Father's house.
Come and go with me to my Father's house . . .

There is joy, Joy, Joy, Joy, **JOY!!!**

¹¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 1956.