

## COMING HOME, PART 6: PEACE AND ALL

John 14:27-31 (NASB)

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The 1996 film, *Sommersby*, is about a Southern plantation owner during the Civil War who went off to war and ended up in a prison camp in Elmira, New York. He had left behind a wife and friends who did not hear from him for six years. Both his plantation and town had fallen on hard times. Then Jack Sommersby hiked back home. The town was ecstatic with Jack's return home. Their hope for the future had returned.

Then reality set in. Jack was home, but he had returned with nothing but the clothes on his back. The plantation was mortgaged to the hilt, there was no money, no tools, and no mules to work the farm. But Jack had an idea. He calls a town meeting and paints a vision of the town's future prosperity based on the growing of a crop of burley tobacco. Questions fly: How will they buy seed? How will they work the land without tools? Sommersby looks them all in the eye and says: "We're all sittin' on a little something." He appeals to them to buy into the future with their last small valuables they had hidden from the northern army when it had marched through and stripped the town clean. The logic of their position is inescapable. The future vision of prosperity and blessing cannot happen unless they buy in with all their hearts and worldly possessions.

Sentiment in the meeting runs against the plan until Sommersby's wife, Laurel, stands up and gives a speech. Even though she is Jack's wife, her position is no different than theirs. She has saved an heirloom brooch worth a thousand dollars, and she is casting it into the pot. Even she has to commit her all before the future of blessing with Jack would become possible.

Her impassioned speech succeeds, and one by one the townspeople bring their silver, jewelry, paintings, rugs, and other valuables to Jack where they are all piled on a wagon to be taken away and sold. Even Sommersby's young son catches the idea, and before his dad leaves with the wagon he offers up his two most treasured possessions, a prize snake skin and a trusty pocket knife. Off drives Jack with the wagon full of valuables, carrying the hope of an entire town with him. [Be advised that this is a PG-13 film. There is also a plot surprise which I have not revealed.]

So it is with our present and future blessing with Jesus Christ. It is not enough for him to have come to us. It is not enough for us to hear and understand the vision of unthinkable blessing he holds out. This vision will not become a reality for us until we buy in. Verses 27-31 conclude this section of Christ's teaching with a set of four precious realities of life in the Father's house followed by the indispensable key that opens the door to the future.

## THE REALITY OF PEACE

Does the Messiah of Israel and Savior of the World promise things which he cannot perform? It cannot be so, for he is also the King of kings, Creator of All, and Master of the Universe! You and I have heard every lie under the sun, many of them mediated to us through false marketing campaigns. You've been told that there is a toothpaste which will make members of the opposite sex attracted to

you. You been told that having them attracted to you is what makes life worth living. You've been promised relief of every sort if you will only fork over your money for some product. So when Christ promises peace, we all automatically feel dubious about it! And you can tell that he knows that you and I feel this way. Listen to how he speaks in verse 27: **"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful"** (John 14:27).

Do you want peace? I do! Notice that Christ does not place limits on when we can have this peace. Many world religions use the intense desire we all have for peace to manipulate their followers into certain behaviors. And how many times have we heard false teachers making the same appeal to that desire? If we will only ante up the bucks and perform a certain ritual we are promised healing, prosperity, and peace. It's a lie, and Christ is telling us that his peace is not like that. He offers us the reality that our battle with God over sin can be over. That hostility is ended the moment we receive the atonement for our sins which Christ purchased through his death on the cross. We then enter an objective state of grace filled with peace. No earthly difficulty is more important than our need for peace with God.

This does not mean that everything in life becomes easy, but as the apostle Paul explained: **"And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus"** (Philippians 4:7). This peace which only Christ can give provides a shield around our hearts, our inner person, so that anxiety and fear can be driven far from us.

## JOY IN HIM

The second feature of blessing in the Father's house in our text is the opportunity for real joy. We are surrounded today with a vast array of confused and downright deceptive claims about how to find joy. Christ provides the only bulletproof path to genuine joy in verse 28: **"You heard that I said to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved Me, you would have rejoiced because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I"** (John 14:28). The short explanation is that true joy in this life is found only in God and what he gives. The long explanation is that we find that joy by loving Christ and his glory--by having our passions resonate with his own.

Let us clear away a confusion. When Christ said: **"...for the Father is greater than I,"** he did not mean in his essence. Christ was, for a little while, lower than the angels in his incarnation (cf. Hebrews 2:7). But what specifically is the reason that it would have been right for Jesus' disciples to have overflowing joy that he was going back to the Father? Hebrews 1:2-3 explains: **"...in these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high..."** Christ's return to glory in the presence of the Father in heaven, where he is seated at his right hand, is the greatest joy to him, and when we become shaped by his heart we rejoice at the same things he does.

Why should this make our joy bulletproof? Because it is no longer hitched to earthly things which always have the sorrow of the fall upon them. Every earthly joy, as innocent as it may be, is overshadowed by sin and death. Years ago I remember watching the joy of the parents of a new baby

get cut short. At seven months old, even in our day of advanced medicine, their baby died from influenza. So even when things are going well, the possibility of sorrow is always present. Only in the joy of the Lord shall we renew our strength and gain the ability to rejoice when everything is falling down around us. Christ's glorification and accomplishment of all that he purposes is a reason to rejoice every day.

## A LIFE OF EXPECTANCY

Thirdly, what do you expect in life? I have, over many years of ministry, observed people who arrive in their senior years having used up their hopes and dreams. They have done what they were able to do in their lives, and they believe that they have lost the rest. So they don't really care about a well-cooked meal, a beautiful piece of music, good fellowship, or much else. They just exist, marking time until their end.

Christ offers, in stark contrast, a life of hopeful expectancy on many levels. Just prior to Christ's teaching in our text he had been speaking to his disciples of his impending crucifixion and resurrection. They seemed not very able to live in the hope of his resurrection at that moment. So he was prepping them to be blessed beyond belief when, after his terrible suffering, he would, in fact, return to them by rising from the dead: **"Now I have told you before it happens, so that when it happens, you may believe"** (John 14:29).

It is important that we catch the flow of events here. Christ was telling them about his resurrection so that they would trust his words implicitly. Once he established his reliability to perform all that he said by rising from the dead, he then delivered the number one reason that believers can live every day in hopeful expectancy instead of sad resignation. When it was time for Christ's post-resurrection visits to be over, he departed in what we call the ascension: **"And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven'"** (Acts 1:9-11). Christ left them at his crucifixion, then returned as he promised in his resurrection. Now he leaves at the end of his post-resurrection appearances with a similar promise that he is coming back the same way they saw him leave, namely, in the clouds! Those who love the Lord today have the most powerful reason to live in hope. He is coming again, and we will be reunited with our Lord, never to be separated again.

## VICTORY OVER THE DARKNESS

Finally, as Jesus was finishing this section of teaching he was becoming overshadowed in his heart by the soon approach of the Prince of Darkness, the Father of Lies, who has been a murderer from the beginning. Very soberly, yet with great significance, Christ spoke: **"I will not speak much more with you, for the ruler of the world is coming, and he has nothing in Me..."** (John 14:30). Satan was preparing his attempt to stop the accomplishment of redemption and the Scripture says that he entered Judas Iscariot for this express purpose. Christ's unequivocal statement, **"...he has nothing in me,"** means that the Devil can gain no grip on Christ in any way.

There is a marvelous logic to this fact. Sin is what gives Satan his hold on people, Jesus Christ has no sin, and so Satan has no hold on him whatsoever. A second bit of logic tells us why this means victory for those who trust in Christ. A little earlier in this teaching session Jesus had made a stupendous statement: "**After a little while the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you**" (John 14:19-20). So if Satan can get no purchase--no grip--on Christ, and we are, spiritually speaking, in him, then Satan can get no grip on us! We have victory over the darkness by being folded into Christ's victory.

It is incumbent upon each one of us to live in that victory. That is what the Scripture means which says: "**And do not give the devil an opportunity**" (Ephesians 4:27). Other translations say that we should not give the devil a "place," meaning any ability to get even the slightest grip on us. Sin is what gives Satan a hold on people, and even though believers can never be under his power again, we invite suffering and demonic harassment by sinning willfully. When we do sin, we run to our Advocate, Jesus Christ the Righteous, and his shed blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness. Thus everyone who is in Christ, puny humans who had all been under the thumb of the Ruler of this World, can now live in victory over the Devil, over sin, and even over death.

### THE *SINE QUA NON*

At this point I need to teach you a Latin phrase if you do not know it already. The term *sine qua non* means an essential term or condition. The Lord Jesus Christ, by incorporating people into the Father's house, brings them the realities of peace, joy, expectancy, and victory. But there is a *sine qua non*, an essential requirement without which we cannot enter the Father's house, and so neither can we enjoy the blessed spiritual realities found there.

In the greatest possible display of humility, Jesus Christ finished this teaching not with a command of what his disciples would have to do, but with a display of his own example. His own life would become the greatest possible teaching tool for the *sine qua non*. "**...But so that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me. Get up, let us go from here**" (John 14:31). Throughout this entire teaching Christ emphasized the necessity of love for God and obedience to his commands. What was Christ willing to do out of love for his Father and obedience to his commands? He was willing to be whipped into a bloody mess, spiked to a rough cross, mocked, and asphyxiated.

And that was the easy part! Love and obedience drove our Lord and Savior to accept upon his person the wrath of God over the sins of every person who had ever lived or would live. The Holy One of Israel would be made sin so that we might live. No greater price could be paid by anyone for anything.

Love for our heavenly Father and obedience to his commands are the *sine qua non* for membership in his house. No one dwells there without these. It is not possible to have faith without them. And so the many blessings of membership in God's house can only be known and enjoyed by those who have embraced love and obedience. Beyond that, Christ said, our display of these things is how the world will know that we are actually children of God. Love is meaningless without the deeds of obedience which display the investment of ourselves. And obedience is dead without love.

Have you made that investment? Jack Sommersby knew something about the people in his town: "We're all sittin' on a little somethin'." Are you, instead of giving yourself over to love God above all else, holding on to a little something? It may be very dear to you. It may not be a sin at all, but a good thing. The blessings of the Father's house are given only to those who hold nothing back from him.

Laurel Sommersby saw the people of a whole town who would rather hold onto their little somethings than embrace the hope of a better future. She said "I've got this brooch, it's worth a thousand dollars, but I can't eat it!" The blessings of a prosperous future were hanging in the balance at that moment. The fact of Jack Sommersby's return was not enough to guarantee their future. Every last one of them would have to decide to invest their whole selves.

This is what our Lord asks of us. Don't let anyone say about Christianity: "Oh, I went to church for a bit but it didn't work for me." No, Christianity is only tried when we stop loving ourselves first and love God first. And as Christ said with his whole life and teaching, we only love God when we follow his commands in joyful obedience.

There is potential for great sacrifice in such loving obedience. But are you prepared to face even the simple things of devotion? Will you say with me: "I will participate in worship every week. I will read my Bible and pray every day. I will confess every sin to God and ask his forgiveness. I will love my neighbor. I will share my faith as God gives me opportunity. I will give my time, abilities, and resources to the Lord as he leads me?"

Finally, will you throw your brooch into the pot, your Oriental carpet, your silver tea set? That last little something you do not wish to release into his hand? Your Lord and Savior promised: "**For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it**" (Matthew 16:25). The life you were meant to have, for which your heart yearns, is in the Father's house. He is calling out to you: "Come home!"

[clip from *Sommersby* DVD (1996), 0:36:07 to 0:38:12, Sommersbys\_plan.avi, 2:05]