

Sermon 7 May 2023 Proof of Heaven

John 14:1-11

'In my father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?' This has to be one of my favourite verses in the Bible, for the simple reason that Jesus is stating quite categorically that there is a life for us when we move on from life here on earth.

There are two points that can be drawn from this verse. The first I have already mentioned – there is a heaven. Jesus makes that quite clear.

The second is this – it is a spiritual life. Why do I say that in the context of this particular verse, and what are the implications of this? Jesus insinuates there is unlimited space. A house here on earth, no matter how big, at some point will become full. But spirits don't take up any space at all, so there is unlimited room.

Now here's the thing, we don't really understand what this spiritual life is like. Our experience, and therefore our knowledge, is restricted to the world of the physical. Not only do we not understand this spiritual life, it also means we cannot prove anything about it. That, of course, is what faith is – believing in something we cannot verify. What we can do is share experiences, whether they be ours or those of other people, and we can share our personal beliefs.

This brings me to a book I have referred to before. It is a book I have recommended to many people, especially those who are wrestling with this issue of a life after death. The title of the book is 'Proof of Heaven' and it is written by Dr Eben Alexander. Dr Alexander was a highly trained neurosurgeon who had a NDE, a near-death experience. His brain was attacked by a rare illness and the part of the brain that controls thought and emotion shut down completely. He was in a coma for a week. His family had been summoned to his bedside to say their last farewells and all of a sudden he woke up, much to everyone's utter amazement.

During his coma, he experienced the presence of a supernatural Being, which he came to understand was God. This Being was like a living orb that gave out a brilliant light. This in itself is interesting because common to almost every NDE is the experience of a very bright and warm light.

A very important element of this experience was the feeling of unconditional love. I quote from his book, *'The unconditional love and acceptance that I experienced on my journey is the single most important discovery I have ever made, or will make, and as hard as I know it's going to be to unpack the other lessons I learned while there, I also know in my heart that sharing this very basic message is the most important task I have.'*

Now as we know, the basis of the message Jesus brings to us from God is one of unconditional love. So surely, this is further proof of God's presence in Dr Ebert's experience.

This book contains many stories and observations, which all point towards the existence of something very real beyond the bounds of physical life. Time precludes me from sharing some of these with you.

Dr Ebert's journey through the spiritual after-life led him to another journey, the journey from a sceptic to a believer, from one who questioned to one whose questions were answered.

There is another very important point I need to make regarding this life after death. Our entry into this heaven is dependent on what we do with this life here on earth. I would like to give you two quotes. Romans 2:7, *'He will give eternal life to those who persist in doing what is good.'* 2 Corinthians 5:10, *'For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in our bodies.'*

So Paul makes no bones about the necessity to live a good life here on earth if we are to enjoy the fruits of God's love in the after-life. There is the story of a very rich man who dreamed he died and went to heaven. St Peter escorted him down a lovely street on which each house was magnificent. The rich man saw one house that was especially grand and asked who lived there. 'I am glad you asked,' replied St Peter. 'That is actually the celestial home of your butler.' 'Well,' the rich man said smiling, 'if my butler gets a place like that, I certainly look forward to seeing what my new home looks like.'

Soon they came to a very small street where the houses were tiny and unpretentious. St Peter pointed to one of the smallest and said, 'You will live in that hut.' 'What! Me, live in that hovel?' 'This is the best we can do for you,' explained St Peter. 'You see, we can only build from the material you send ahead while you are still on earth.'

I am in no hurry to get to the next life but it is going to happen sometime, as it does for us all. It would be nice when we come face to face with God that we can look him in the eye, figuratively speaking, and say, 'I have done my best.' I guess the rest is up to God.