

T. Austin-Sparks:

It is important, for obtaining the full value of the content of this chapter, that we recognize that the opening words throw back to and link up with what has preceded. Really, the narrative ought not to be broken into at this point. The link should be with verses 33-35 of chapter 13. There the Lord had said some most disturbing things, especially disturbing to men who had such a different "Messianic" mentality as to the "Kingdom." He said: "Little children, I am with you for only a little while longer. You will look for Me and I shall be gone. Moreover, for the time being, you will not be able to come where I am."

Then, to Simon Peter's protestation, He spoke of the terrible breakdown which would so soon overshadow all Peter's self-confidence. Surely both of these things called for some words of reassurance that this was not the end of everything. How unstable and insecure everything seemed to be! The ground beneath their feet was giving way like quicksand. There was good reason for their hearts to be troubled. And then - straight on without a break - "Let not your heart be troubled," followed by the statement that there are "abiding-places" in the Father's House. The emphasis is upon "abiding." These words of Christ are commonly regarded as relating to the more or less distant future when He shall "come again and receive us unto Himself, that where He is, there we may be also." That is undoubtedly true, and has in it the comfort which He intended it to have. But is that the whole truth? Is this not in keeping with the whole spiritual teaching of John's Gospel? We have seen in every chapter that Jesus was speaking and acting on spiritual principles, and while we do not desire to spiritualize practical or temporal values out of existence, it is difficult to conclude that this section is essentially different from all that precedes and follows. Hence, we are bound to make room here for all that really did happen afterward and that has obtained during the many centuries since these words were spoken.

Indeed, this Gospel of John is all of one piece, and what we call chapter 14 is but the enlargement of the principle, introduced with the feet-washing as a symbolic setting, in the words: "...his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father."

"In my Father's house are many abiding-places."

So what is introduced here is

(1) Christ in Heaven

The grand and all-governing feature of this dispensation is that Christ is in Heaven.

All the purposes and activities of God in this dispensation are related to that fact.

All government is vested in Christ in Heaven. The headquarters of the Church are in Heaven - it has none on earth; neither in Jerusalem, Rome, nor anywhere else. There can be no center or centralizing of God's work in any earthly place. Everything has to be referred to Heaven, and derived from Heaven.

The world is the place of man's glory; Heaven is the place of Christ's glory. The earth is the place of Christ's emptying; Heaven that of His filling. The earth sees His humiliation; Heaven sees His exaltation. The earth is the scene of His journeys with no place to lay His head. Heaven sees Him entered into His rest: He "sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high." The earth is the realm of Satan's kingdom, Judas being the link (13:2): Heaven is the place of Christ's throne, from which He overrules Satan's kingdom.

And so the comparisons and contrasts can go on, but the inclusive truth is that in Christ in Heaven everything is centered for the believer's and the Church's life, rest, power, direction, government, confidence, and fullness.

That is the explanation of everything in the Book of the Acts from chapter 2 and onward.

But it leads to the counterpart of that, namely

(2) The Church in Heaven

In this chapter everything is future. "In that day" is a phrase which stands over a long section of several chapters. So we see that the Church (everything now being corporate) is not at this point in Heaven, but the day is seen when it will be. John, in the Revelation, sees it there literally at last, but between the position in his Gospel and that at the end of the Revelation all of Paul's ministry has its place. Whatever may be either literal or

symbolical, it is all based upon what is spiritual. For instance, "going to Heaven" requires spiritual, heavenly birth, citizenship, life, nature, walk, and conformity. Paul it is who brings in this counterpart, but the Holy Spirit is one in both and they are complementary.

The explanation of John's recorded words of Christ about the Father's House and the "abiding (or resting) places" is found in Paul's words in his Ephesian letter: "quickened... raised... seated us together with him in the heavenly places." We are regarded as being there now. The "that day" has come. It is the "day" after the Cross. Resurrection, Ascension, and the Spirit's descent. This is the full result of what we have seen as to chapter 13.

Enlightenment as to the Way

Jesus said: "Ye know the way." They said: "We know not the way." But Jesus had only just said: "Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow afterwards" (13:36). This all seems very confusing. Jesus must have been speaking mysteriously, parabolically! He must have been laboring under a definite handicap, some real disadvantage, because of a basic deficiency in them. There are therefore two things to note here.

"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven." "Thou canst not follow... now."

And "Ye know" "Thou shalt...."

Upon what did their knowing rest initially? It rested upon their having come into touch with Him! "I am the way." But this knowledge is shown to be twofold.

(1) Personal association with Christ. Present.

(2) The Holy Spirit's inward revelation of Christ. Progressive.

John's whole Gospel is based upon, or composed of, personal and actual contact with Christ, and an upshot from that. That upshot is that He is acknowledged to be the Son of the Living God. "Thou art the Christ...."

Paul's ministry is based upon: "It pleased God... to reveal his Son in me." "Christ in you."

But the experience and teaching of both John and Paul are based upon a common foundation: the "cannot" of the flesh, the "natural man"; the need to become "spiritual" men, i.e. men of the Spirit; and between these the experience of the Cross. On one side the Cross says "No!" on the other side it says "Yes!" "Thou canst not" - "Thou shalt." How true that was proved to be of the self-confident, self-assured, self-sufficient Simon Peter of 13:37! - but, on the other side of the Cross, how true was the "Thou shalt," the great "afterward." That selfhood was Satan's ground, and it had to be broken. Peter, the restless, feverish, troubled, variable, fretful, questioning, disputing, impulsive, and denying, was emptied out by the Cross. Subsequently, as under the mastery of the Spirit, he entered into heavenly rest, assurance, certainty, persistence, and courage. He followed through, and whatever the Father's House meant for him ultimately, he came, in this life, to the place of "abiding"; to the spiritual meaning of that House. This is abundantly clear from his letters.

Peter's own abiding resulted from Christ coming to abide in him, to go no more away: "with you for ever" (14:16). This will be more fully considered in the next two chapters.

This is the ground and assurance of "peace" (27). If we are entangled with ourselves, we have no peace. If we are entangled with the world, we have no peace. Only the disentangled can have peace; and death with Christ does the disentangling, and resurrection with Christ leads to a life above the world and above ourselves.

This chapter, John 14, really gathers around one word - a Greek word denoting: to stay, remain, abide, continue, endure, be permanent. It occurs in verse 2 - "abiding-places"; verse 10 - "the Father abiding in me"; verse 17 - the Holy Spirit will abide in them; verse 23 - the Godhead: "we will make our abode with" believers.

This stands over against -

The treachery of Judas; the shadow of the Cross; the imminent departure of Christ; the inability to follow Him; the questions arising "How?"

It is an amazing thing to realize that all this perplexity, uncertainty, bafflement, apprehension, is the doorway to the greatest rest: the rest of knowing, of certainty, of finality. This is indicated as being all bound up with a

The Troubled Heart

spiritual union with Christ in Heaven - stronger, deeper, and more abiding than any earthly, temporal, physical, sentient association could ever be. Those who know Him after the Spirit know how superior this knowledge is to any other kind of knowing, for by it their hearts have become untroubled as to eventualities; they are at rest.

There are heart troubles and heart cries here. Jesus has undercut all self-confidence and assurance as to man's ability to go through a severe test of faithfulness. He has practically undercut men's confidence in an earthly relationship with Himself. He has raised the tremendous question and mystery of the life beyond this: Where? How? What? What is the answer? How can we come to absolute rest and assurance? The inclusive answer is: "I am."

Really to know Him as He can be known after the Resurrection answers all questions, settles all doubts, and silences all troubles as to ourselves, our way and our end.