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A Prepared Place for a Prepared People¹

I go to prepare a place for you.
John 14:2

*Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to
be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.*
Colossians 1:12



My real text is not in the Bible; it is one of those Christian proverbs which are not inspired in words, but the spirit of which is inspired, 'Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people.' You have often heard that sentence; it is familiar in your mouths as household words, and well it may be. Yet I shall have two texts from the Scriptures; the first will be our Saviour's words to his

1. Sermon preached on Sunday evening, 25 May 1879, at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington, London.



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disciples, 'I go to prepare a place for you,' from which we learn that 'Heaven is a prepared place'; and the second will be Paul's words to the Colossians, 'Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light,' from which we learn that there is a prepared people, a people made meet to be partakers of the inheritance which Christ has gone to prepare for them.

I am not going to have any further preface, but I will begin at once to speak upon the *Preparation of Heaven*: 'I go to prepare a place for you.'

It is many months since I began to turn this sentence over; I think I might truly say that, for several years, I have thought of it, and thought of it again, and thought of it yet again, that our Lord Jesus Christ, before returning to heaven, should say to his disciples, 'I go to prepare a place for you.' Is there any difficulty about this passage? Yes, it is very difficult to explain; indeed, I do not think that we really can know here all that Christ meant when he uttered these words.

A father said to his children, when the summer sun had waxed hot, 'I shall go to the seaside today, to prepare a place for you.' His little child asked, 'What does father mean when he says that he will prepare a place for us?' And his mother answered, 'My child, I cannot tell you all that your father means, but you will see when you get there; and now, it must be enough for you that, although you do not know what father will have to do at the seaside in preparing a place for you, he knows what he is going to do.' And, dear friends, there is this consolation for us that, even if we can hardly guess what it is that Christ can find to do to prepare heaven for us, he knows what is wanted, and he knows how to do it; and that is infinitely better than our



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knowing, because, even if we knew what was needed, we could not do it. But, with Christ, to know and to do are two things that run parallel.

He knows that there are certain preparations to be made, he knows what those preparations must be and he is equal to the task of making them; he has not gone upon an errand which he, cannot fulfil; and when we get to heaven, we shall know – perhaps it may take us a long while to find it all out – but we shall know and discover throughout eternity what he meant when he said, ‘I go to prepare a place for you.’

I do not profess to be able to explain our Lord’s words, but I am going simply to make a few remarks upon them; and, first, I ask you to notice that *heaven is already prepared for Christ’s people*. Christ has told us that, when he comes in his glory, he will say to those on his right hand: ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’ So, there is an inheritance which the Father has already prepared for the people whom he gave to his Son, and this inheritance is reserved for them. But if it was prepared from the foundation of the world, how can it be said to be prepared by Christ? The explanation probably is, that it was prepared in the eternal purpose of the Father – prepared by wise forethought – arranged for – predestinated – prepared in that sense – it was provided in the eternal arrangements of Jehovah that there should be a suitable place for his people to dwell in for ever. He made the pavilion of the sun, and he gave the stars their appointed positions; would he forget to prepare a place for his people? He gave to angels their places, and even to fallen spirits he has appointed a prison-house; so he would not forget, when he was arranging the entire universe, that a place would be needed for the twice-born, the heirs of grace, the members



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of the mystical body of Christ Jesus, his brethren who were to be made like unto him. Therefore, in purpose, and plan, and decree, long ere God had laid the foundations of this poor world, and the morning stars had sung together over creation's six days' work accomplished, he had prepared a place for his people; it was not actually prepared, but it was in the purpose and plan of the eternal mind, and therefore might be regarded as already done.

Our Lord Jesus Christ has gone to heaven, he says, that he may prepare a place for his servants, and we may be helped to form some idea of what he means by this expression if we just think a little about it. And, first, I am sure *that must be a very great and glorious place which needs Christ to prepare it.* If we do not know all that he means, we can get at least this much out of his declaration. He spake this world into being. It was not; but he said, 'Be,' and it was at once made. Then he spake it into order, into light, into life, into beauty. He had but to speak, and what he willed was done. But now that he is preparing a place for his people, he has gone to heaven on purpose to do it. He used to stand still here on earth, and work miracles; but this was a miracle that he could not perform while he was here. He had to go back to his home above in order to prepare a place for his people. What sort of place, then, must it be that needs Christ himself to prepare it? He might have said, 'Angels, garnish a mansion for my beloved.' He might have spoken to the firstborn sons of light, and said, 'Pile a temple of jewels for my chosen.' But, no, he leaves not the work to them; but he says, 'I go to prepare a place for you.'

Brethren, *he will do it well, for he knows all about us.* He knows what will give us the most happiness – and what will best develop all our spiritual faculties for ever. He loves us,



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too, so well that, as the preparing is left to him, I know that he will prepare us nothing second-rate, nothing that could possibly be excelled. We shall have the best of the best, and much of it; we shall have all that even his great heart can give us. Nothing will be stinted; for, as he is preparing it, it will be a right royal and divine preparation. If, when the prodigal came back to his father, there was the preparation of the fatted calf, and the music and dancing, and the gold ring and the best robe, what will be the preparation when we do not come home as prodigals, but as the bride prepared for her husband, or as the beloved children, without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, coming home to the Father who shall see his own image in us, and rejoice over us with singing? It is a grand place that Christ prepares, for never was there another such a lordly host as he is. It is a mansion of delights, I deem, that he prepares, for never was there another architect with thought so magnificent as his, and never were other hands so skilled at quarrying living stones, and putting them one upon another, as his hands have ever been. This thought ought to cheer us much; it must be something very wonderful that Christ prepares as a fit place for his people.

And methinks I may add to this, that *it must be something very sweet when it is prepared*. If you go to a friend's house, and just fall in with the ordinary proceedings of the family, you are very comfortable, and you are glad not to disarrange anything; but if, when you arrive, you see that everything has been done on an extra scale to prepare for your coming, you feel still more grateful. It has often happened to an honoured guest that he could not help observing that he was not being treated as his friends lived every day of the week, and all the year round. That guest-chamber had evidently been newly furnished, and everything that was possible had been thought of to do him



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honour. If you were treated thus as a guest, there was pleasure for you in the fact that so much had been prepared for you. Did your husband ever take you to a new house, and point out to you how he had purchased everything that he thought would please you? Had that little room been furnished specially for you, and did he anticipate your tastes, provide this little thing and that that he knew you would like? Well, it was not merely that you enjoyed the things themselves, but they all seemed to you so much sweeter because they had been prepared for you by your beloved. And when you get to heaven, you will be astonished to see this and that and the other joy that was prepared for you because Christ thought of you and provided just what you would most appreciate. You will be no stranger there, beloved: you will say, 'There has been here a hand that helped me, when I was in distress; there has been here, I know, an eye that saw me when I was wandering far from God; there has been, in this place, a heart that cared for me – that self-same heart that loved me, and that bled for me down below upon the cross. It is my Saviour who has prepared this place for me.'

I do not know whether I can convey to you all my thoughts upon this theme, but it does seem to me so pleasant to think that we are going to a place where we shall not be the first travellers through the country; but where *a Pioneer has gone before us* – the best of pioneers, who went before us with this one object in his mind, that he might get all ready and prepare the place for us. Methinks, brethren, that those who will be there before us will say, when we arrive there, 'We are glad you have come, for everything has been prepared for you.' It would be an eternal sorrow in heaven if the saints should miss their way, and perish, as some croakingly tell us; for, then, what about the preparations for their reception? They would all



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have been made in vain – harps prepared, which no fingers would ever play, and crowns which no heads would ever wear. I do not believe it; I have never dreamed that such a thing could happen. I feel certain that he, who prepared the place for the people, will prepare the people for the place; and that, if he gets all ready for them, he means to bring them home that they may enjoy the things which he hath laid up for them that love him.

I know that I am not explaining the preparation of heaven, yet I hope I am draining some comfortable thoughts out of the subject. If Christ is preparing heaven, then it will be what our Scotch friends call ‘a bonnie place’; and if it be prepared for us, when we get there it will exactly fit us, it will be the very heaven we wanted – a better heaven than we ever dreamed of, a better heaven than we ever pictured even when our imagination took its loftiest flights – the heaven of God, and yet a heaven exactly suited to such happy creatures as we then shall be.

Now, however, let us try to come a little closer to the subject, and attempt to explain our Lord’s words. Jesus Christ has gone to prepare a place for his people; does not this refer, if we keep it to its strict meaning, to *the ultimate place of God’s people*? You see, Christ mentions a place, not a state; and he speaks of going to it, and coming back from it: ‘I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself.’ Christ is speaking of himself in his full manhood, without any figurative meaning to his words. He meant that he was going, with all his human nature on him, away from this world; and that he was going to prepare a place for us, intending to come again, with all that glorified human nature about him, to receive us unto himself.





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This does not mean his spiritual coming in death; nor any kind of spiritual coming, as to its first meaning, at any rate. I am persuaded that the clear run of the words involves our Lord's coming, in his second advent, when he will come to receive, not you or me as individuals who, one by one, will enter into rest, but to receive his whole Church into the place which he shall then have prepared for her. After the resurrection, you must remember, we shall need a place to live in – a literal, material place of abode, for this body of ours will be alive as well as our spirit, and it will need a world to live in, a new heaven and a new earth.

I am not going to enter into any speculations about the matter, but it seems to me clear enough, in this, text, that Christ is preparing a place somewhere not for disembodied spirits, for they are already before the throne of God perfectly blest, but for the entire manhood of his people, when spirit, soul and body shall be again united, and the complete man shall receive the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body, and the whole manhood of every believer shall be perfected in the glory of Christ.

I do not know what better world, in many respects, there could be than this, so far as material nature is concerned; it is so full of the beauty and loveliness that God pours upon it on every side; it is a wonderful world –

Where every prospect pleases,
And only man is vile –

but I could not reconcile myself to the idea that this world would be heaven. No; my thoughts rise far above the loftiest hills, the most flowery meads, the rolling ocean, and the flowing rivers. Earth has not space enough to be our heaven. She has too narrow a bound, and she is too coarse a thing,





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bright gem though she is, for perfected manhood to possess throughout eternity. It will do well enough for the thousand years of glory, if it shall literally be that we shall reign with Christ upon it during the millennial age; but it is a drossy thing, and if it ever is to be the scene of the new heavens and the new earth, it must first pass through the fire. The very smell of sin is upon it; and God will not use this globe as a vessel unto honour until he has purified it with fire as once he did with water; and then, mayhap, it may serve for this higher purpose; but I scarcely think it will.

Even now, Jesus is preparing, and has gone away on purpose to prepare a place for us; and he will come again, 'with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God,' and he will catch his people away, and will bear them to the eternal home where their felicity shall know no end. That is what I suppose to be the meaning of our Lord's words. 'But', perhaps you say to me, 'what do you mean by what you have been saying?' I reply, I do not know to the full; I can but dimly guess at the meaning of what my Lord has said – that he is doing something so glorious for *all* his people that, perhaps, if I did know it, I might not be allowed to tell you; for there are some things which, when a man knows them, it is not lawful for him to utter. Did not Paul see a great deal when he was caught up into paradise? Yet he has told us very little about it; for there was a finger laid upon his lip that bade him know it for himself, but not to tell it to others. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him;' and though he has 'revealed them unto us by his Spirit', even the Spirit who searcheth the deep things of God, yet it is not possible for us to tell all that has been revealed to us.



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It strikes me that there is some little light to be obtained concerning this preparation of heaven by Christ, if I leave the direct and literal meaning of the words, and think of the future state as a whole rather than in detail. Do you not think, dear friends, that *our Lord Jesus Christ prepares heaven for his people by going there?* I mean this. Supposing you were to be lifted up to a state which was looked upon as heavenly, but if Jesus was not there, it would be no heaven to you. But wherever I may go, when I do go, if Jesus is already there, I do not care where it is. Wherever he is shall be my heaven; for, as I said in the reading, that is our very first and last thought about heaven, to be with Christ where he is. To be with Christ is far better than to be anywhere else.

Well, then, the first thing that Christ had to do, in order to prepare heaven for his people, was to go to heaven, for that made it heaven. Then were heaven's lamps kindled; then did heaven's heralds ring out their supernal melodies; then did the whole of the New Jerusalem seem to be ablaze with a glory brighter than the sun, for 'the Lamb is the light thereof.' When he comes there, then all is bliss. Do you not see, beloved, that he has prepared heaven by going there? His being there will make it heaven for you, so you need not begin asking what else there will be in heaven. There will be all manner of rare delights to spiritual men, but the chief of them all will be that Jesus is there. As Rowland Hill used to sing, so may you and I comfort ourselves with this thought –

And this I do find – we two are so joined –
He'll not be in glory, and leave me behind.

If I may but be where he is, that shall be heaven to me.

But another reflection is this: that *our Lord Jesus Christ has prepared heaven for his people by the merit of his atonement.*



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Thus hath he opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers. He rent the veil and made a way into the holiest of all for all who trust him; but, in addition to that, he perfumed heaven with the fragrance of his sacrifice. If heaven be the place of the Godhead, as we know it is, we could not have stood there without the Mediator. If heaven be the throne of the great King, we could not have stood there without the cloud of perfumed incense from Christ's meritorious death and righteousness ever rising up before that throne. But, now, heaven is a safe place for the saints to enter.

Now may they tread that sea of glass, like as of fire; and know that it is glass, and that no fire from it will consume them. Now will they be able to come up near to God, and not be afraid. I quote again a passage that often leaps to my lips, a text of Scripture which is often shamefully misused: 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' Why, none of us could so dwell unless Christ had changed us by his grace; but now we may do so.

What is the Scriptural answer to those questions, 'Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?' What saith the Scripture? Listen: 'He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions; that shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from hearing of blood; and shutteth his eyes from seeing evils. He shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munitions of rocks: bread shall be given him; his waters shall be sure. Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty: they shall behold the land that is very far off.'

This is the man who shall dwell there. With God, who is a consuming fire, we, like the holy children in the burning,



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fiery furnace, shall find it safe to dwell, and find it bliss to dwell, because Christ is there. But there would have been no heaven, in the presence of God, for any man that lives, after sin had once come into the world, if Jesus had not gone there as the high priest of old went up to the blazing throne whereon the Shekinah shone, and sprinkled it with blood out of the basin, and then waved the censer to and fro till the thick smoke hid the cherubim, and, for a while resting, spake with God. Even so, has Christ gone within the veil, and sprinkled his own atoning blood upon his Father's throne, and then waved aloft the censer full of the incense of his mercy; and now it is safe for us to have access with boldness to the throne of glory as well as to the throne of grace. Thus hath he prepared a place for us.

Another meaning, I think, is allowable, namely, that *Christ has prepared heaven for us by appearing there in his glory.* I said that his very presence made heaven, but now I add that his glory there makes heaven yet more glorious. How does Christ describe the heavenly state? 'Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory.' It will be their bliss, then, to see his glory; but there would have been no glory for them to see if he had not gone there in his glory. But, now, his presence there, in all his majesty and splendour, makes heaven still more glorious.

Oh, how I long to see him in his glory! Long to see him, did I say? I would part with all the joys of time and sense to gaze upon him seated upon his throne. Oh! what will it be to see him? You have seen how painters have failed when they have tried to depict him. The bravest artist may well tremble, and the brightest colours fade, when anyone tries to paint him even in his humiliation. There is no other



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face so marred as his face was; but what will it be in heaven when it is marred no more? No tear in his eye! No spittle running down his cheeks! No giving of his face to them that pluck out the hair; but, oh, the glory of manhood perfected and allied with Deity! 'The King in his beauty!' Why, methinks, to see him but for a minute, if we never saw him again, might furnish us with an eternity of bliss; but we shall gaze upon him, in his glory, day without night, never fainting, or flagging, or tiring, but delighting for ever to behold him smile, for evermore to call him ours, and to see him still before us. He has gone to heaven, then, in his glory and, surely, that is preparing a place for us!



Besides that, we cannot tell what arrangements had to be made in order to prepare a place of eternal blessedness for the Lord's redeemed. Certain it is that, in the economy of the universe, everything has its place. Men have discovered, as you know, what they call evolution. They think that one thing grows out of another, because long before they were born everybody with half an eye could see that one thing fitted into another; and as one step rises above another step by a beautiful gradation, so do the created things of God. Not that they grow out of each other any more than the stones of a staircase grow out of one another; they rise above each other, but they were so made from the first by the skill and wisdom of God. That a dewdrop should be precisely of the size and shape that it is, is necessary to the perfection of the universe. That there should be insects born in such a month to fertilize the flowers that bloom in that month, and others to suck the sweetness of those flowers, is all necessary. God has arranged everything, from the little to the great, with perfect skill. There is a place for everything with God, and everything in its place.



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It was a question where to put man. He had a place once. When God created this world, he made a pyramid and set man upon the very top of it, giving him dominion over all the works of his hands; but then man fell. Now, it is more difficult to restore than it is at first to place. Often and often, you must have found that, when a thing has gone awry, it has cost you more trouble to set it right than if it had to be made *de novo*. Where, then, was the place for man to be? O matchless love, O sacred wisdom, that provided that man's place should be where Christ's place was and is! Lo, he who came down from heaven, and who also was in heaven, has gone back to heaven. He carried manhood with him; and, in so doing, one with him, his Church has found her place. His union to the Godhead has found a place for his Church at the right hand of God, even the Father, where Christ sitteth; and all is as it should be.

As I have already told you, I do not know much about this matter; but I should not wonder if there has been going on, ever since Christ went up to heaven, a putting things straight – getting this race of creatures into its proper place, and that other race, and the other race; so that, when we get to heaven, nobody will say, 'You have got my place.' Not even Gabriel will say to me, 'Why, what business have you here? You have got my place.' No, no; you shall have a place of your own, beloved; and all the members of Christ's Church shall find a place prepared which no one else shall be able to claim, for nobody shall be dispossessed or put out of his rightful position.

It struck me, as I turned this subject over in my mind, that *our Lord Jesus Christ knew that there was a place to be prepared for each one of his people*. It may be – I cannot tell – that in some part of the society of heaven, one spirit will be happier than it might have been in another part. You know



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that, even though you love all the brethren, you cannot help feeling most at home with some of them. Our blessed Lord and Master had no sinful favouritism, yet he did love twelve men better than all the rest of his disciples; and out of the twelve he loved three, whom he introduced into mysteries from which he excluded the other nine; and even out of the three, there was one, you know, who was 'that disciple whom Jesus loved'. Now, everybody here has his likings; I do not know if we shall carry anything of that spirit to heaven. If we do, Christ has so prepared a place for us that you shall be nearest, in your position and occupation, to those who would contribute most to your happiness. You shall be where you can most honour God, and most enjoy God. You would be glad enough to be anywhere, would you not? – with the very least of the saints in heaven if there 'be any degrees of glory' among their thrones, or at his feet, as long as you might see Christ's face.

But, depend upon it, if there be any association – any more intimate connection – between some saints than among others, Jesus Christ will so beautifully arrange it that we shall all be in the happiest places. If you were to give a dinner-party, and you had a number of friends there, you would like to pick the seats for them. You would say, 'Now, there is So-and-so, I know that he would like to sit next to So-and-so'; and you would try so to arrange it. Well, in that grand wedding feast above, our Saviour has so prepared a place for us that he will find us each the right position. I was talking, this afternoon, with one whom I very dearly love, and she said to me, 'I hope my place in heaven will not be far off yours'; and I replied, 'Well, I trust so, too; but we are not married or given in marriage there.' Such ties and such relationships must end, as far as they are



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after the flesh; but we know that there have been bonds of spirit that may still continue.

I sometimes think that, if I could have any choice as to those I should live near in heaven, I should like to live in the region of such queer folk as Rowland Hill and John Berridge. I think I should get on best with them, for we could talk together of the way wherein God led us; and of how he brought souls to Christ by us, though some said that we were a deal too merry when we were down below, and that the people laughed when they listened to us, and some spoke as if that were a great sin. We will make them laugh up yonder, I warrant you; as we tell again the wonders of redeeming love, and of the grace of God, their mouths shall be filled with laughter and their tongues with singing; and then, —

Loudest of the crowd I'll sing,
While heaven's resounding mansions ring
With shouts of sovereign grace...

and I expect each of you, who love the Lord, will say the same.

I have no time for the other part of the sermon. You must come again to hear about *the prepared people*. But let me just say this to you. The place is prepared, are you prepared for it? Dost thou believe on the Lord Jesus Christ? If so, your preparation has begun. Dost thou love the Lord and love his people? If so, thy preparation is going on. Dost thou hate sin and dost thou pant after holiness. If so, thy preparation is progressing. Art thou nothing at all and is Jesus Christ thine All-in-all? Then thou art almost ready and may the Lord keep thee in that condition; and before long, swing up the gates of pearl and let thee in to the prepared place!

May the Lord bring us all safely there, for Jesus' sake! Amen.