

**THE  
BON AIR  
PULPIT**

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**Scripture: John 14: 1-6**

**Sermon: Is There A Light at the End of the Tunnel**

There are many individuals who have literally been pulled back from the very experience of death. Many of these individuals have come back describing all kinds of things they have seen and experienced. Some have been brief and others have been so long that actually best selling books have been written about them. All of them describe in essence the same thing and that is there is a tunnel and you seem to come out of the tunnel into a light of warmth and a light of love. The question that people, of course want to know is that when we pass through the experience of death, is there a light at the end of the tunnel?

Jesus, the last night that He was alive, was talking with His disciples about that. He was trying to give them hope and assurance and they were wondering what all of this was going to mean and what it meant to them. Let me read for you this passage of scripture that many of you almost know from memory. *“Do not let your heart be troubled, trust in God, trust also in Me. In my Father’s house are many rooms, if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you may also be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”*

The most popular show on television is “Who Wants to be a Millionaire?” As you know, that show was created in England and one of our networks brought its format, its stage and its music to America. Those who watch the show are aware that there are multiple choice questions and if you answer enough of them, you can win a million dollars. In the show, part of it is what you call life lines. A life line is, if you don’t know the answer to the question the first time you can ask the audience and maybe they will know. For the more difficult questions, you have the opportunity to call a friend. What happens is that all of the contestants find all of the smart people that they know, begin to call on friends, and say to them “If I get stuck, I am going to call you and you give me the answer.” They call their friends and read the multiple choices and in thirty seconds the friend has to give the correct answer. If you have watched that show, you have noticed that almost all of them will say to their friends after they give the answer, are you sure. The reason is there is usually a lot of money involved and if you are wrong I am going to be wrong and I am not going to win a million dollars. Are you sure? You know, we live in a life that is full of deceptions and ambiguities, uncertainties and mysteries but there are some things we really want to be sure about. We really want to know, is this the correct answer. Can I know that I can build my life on this?

This is the last night that Jesus was alive, He has already told them that tomorrow He is going to be dead. Here they are with all of their fears, grieves and all of their uncertainties and they turn to Jesus and say, “Lord, now can we build our lives on what You have said?” Hear it again. Don’t get upset. *You believe in God, you can believe in Me. If it were not so I would have told you* and here is Jesus trying to reassure His disciples that what He has taught them is literally true. The answer to the question is, are you sure?

It is a question that all of us ask and I wanted to go through this passage of scripture again to remind ourselves that some things that are so sure that you can build your life and you can build eternity on. You can be sure that what Jesus taught us about eternity is true. The question which we all need to ask is, does God want us to know where we are going. Does God have a smile on our uncertainty or does God want us to hope, guess, wander or to live our life not knowing really where we are going when we die? When Jesus said I want you to know that where you are going is to the Father’s house, that you are not leaving but you are going home. You

can have an assurance that this is the direction, the place that God has prepared for you. I have wanted to know that for a long time. I have wanted to know it because I have to answer that question for lots of folk.

G.P. Williams and I were good friends. G.P. was chairman of our deacons and he took retirement and he came to me and said, "I want to spend the rest of my life working around the church. If you will just tell me anything that needs to be done, then I will do it." He used to come to me every Sunday morning and put his hand on my shoulder and say, "I want you to know I am praying for you." He would come by on Monday morning and say, "I know it is tough on preachers after a busy day on Monday and I want to know if it will be all right for me to pray for you on Monday." Then he came by and said, "Why don't we go over to our chapel and you and I just pray together." Some of my fond memories of G.P. are those times on Monday morning when he and I would pray together. One day he called me and said, "I have just returned from the doctor and the doctor has said I have three months to live". I walked with him through that difficult time and saw him as he was deteriorating. About three o'clock one morning his wife called me and said, "The doctor has just left and said G.P. will not live till morning. We would like for you to come over." I went by his house, back to his bedroom, and all of his family and children were there. We talked for a few moments and his wife turned to me and said, "I would like for you to lead us in prayer." G.P. and I prayed together so many times, it was a natural thing for us to do and I don't know whether G. P. could hear me or not but I knelt down beside the bed and reached out for his hand. We just prayed together. I said, "Dear God, this is your servant. He has known You and lived with You and now he is getting ready to come be with You and I want You to take now, this one of your children, home to be with You and I want you to give comfort to the family." This is the question I wanted to ask you. Suppose Mrs. Williams called me and suppose I went to G.P.'s house and suppose she said, "Lets pray", and I had to pray something like this. O Lord, I hope. O Lord I guess. O Lord I want. Isn't it wonderful that I could turn to the Lord and say, O Lord, I know.

What Jesus was saying to His disciples was in my Father's house there are lots of rooms, a loving Father and he has space for you and if it weren't so I would tell you. I want you to know that for sure you can build your life on what I have taught you about eternity. The wonderful good news is that when you begin to read through the rest of the New Testament, how the writers of the Bible begin to build literally their whole life on that. One of the writers in the Bible was a physician. His name was Luke. Luke was writing about the first man who ever became a mourner for the Christian faith, Stephen. I want you to hear again what he says. Stephen was being stoned and he said, "and Stephen laid down and went to sleep." The word is a medical word which simply means that now he is resting. All of his pain is over, he is resting, and now he is going to get better. He is not resting, a newspaper reporter would write. He is being stoned to death. But the doctor wrote and said "no." He has gone to sleep. He is resting because he has gone to the Father's house. Paul was a tent maker. One day he said, "All of us live in tents. All of us live in temporary structure. Storms come and blow it down. We all get holes in it". But he said, "I know that when this tent that I live in is taken down, I have a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven." He had an assurance. Simon Peter was a fisherman. They used to always fish with nets and fish would get in and tear their nets. You would see a common sight They would sit on the shore and put their nets back together. When Simon Peter talked about dying, he said, "Dying is like a fisherman mending his nets." These men understood that what Jesus taught us was truth. You can literally build your life in eternity on what Jesus taught us about the next life.

All of us are aware that England has had many religious wars. Those wars have stretched all the way up to Scotland. In 1666, there was one of those wars and one of the men who was called a coventer was taken to jail and then to court. The court said you have four days to live. His name was Hugh McPhail. Hugh McPhail was taken from the court house to the jail and while he was there members of his congregation were there crying. Hugh McPhail turned to them and said, "Trust in God, trust in God." Then he saw one of his best friends, a fellow pastor. Hugh McPhail, twenty-six years old, turned to his best friend and said, "Smile, in four days I am going to see Jesus." You can build your life and eternity on assurity, on what Jesus taught us about eternity as truth. The second thing you can be sure of is that there is a place in the Father's house for you.

I have been to lots of homes of famous people. Castles and mansions and last fall my wife and I went with some friends over to Ashville and went in the Vanderbilt's home. I told her that on the ticket it said, "Visitors welcome from 9-6." That simply meant that if you are not a member of the family, you will please leave. You see, to say there is a Father's house, but if I don't have a place there, what good does it do me. Jesus said I want you to know there is a place just for you. Heaven is not complete till all of His children are there. The word that is often used is, *I go to prepare a place*. Unfortunately that has a different meaning for different folk. I remember a pastor in a service that I was in say, "He has gone to prepare." He said, "Just think about it! God created all the world in six days and Jesus has been in heaven for two thousand years. Can you imagine how beautiful heaven is?" I know what he meant but I want to tell you, Jesus is more than an interior decorator. What the word means is, I have gone to secure a place for you. That is, that when you go and you say why should I be here. He turns and says on my authority. I secure a place on my authority, you are able to come here.

This became very real to me years ago when I came back from living in Germany. I was pastor in Eastern North Carolina and a friend of mine from Memphis called. He said, "Our pastor has retired and we are looking for a new pastor and some members of the pastor search committee are going to be in your church on Sunday morning." He said, "If you have a good sermon, preach it Sunday." You know how the Baptist work. You meet the committee and if they like you they bring you to the church. If the church likes you, they vote to call you. That had all worked out. Then I began to get down to the nitty, gritty, stuff. I said, "Where is the parsonage?" In other words, where am I going to live.? The chairman of the committee said, "We don't have a parsonage. You just buy a house anywhere you want to." You must understand that I grew up in the era that all churches had parsonages. I lived in a parsonage all my life, which simply meant I had never owned a home. I had three kids and I had never owned a house. I said to him, "That sounds wonderful except I don't have money for the down payment." He said, "Just go on and look and see what you can find." We were able to find a house and I finally asked the man how much he wanted. He said this amount and I realized what the down payment was. I called the chairman of the committee back and I said, "We found a house. I still have the same problem. I don't have any money for the down payment." One of the greatest layman that I have ever met, who was chairman of the committee, named Wilward Sarden, said, "Tomorrow I will wire the money to your bank and you pay me back when you can." Next day I walked into the lawyers office and I said, "Where are the papers." I signed that with a flourish and the lawyer looked at me and said, "Where is your check." I wrote it out and signed my name on Wilward's money. I go to secure a place for you. You don't have the resources to go, you don't have the resources to be there, but on my authority, there is a place for you.

The third thing you can be sure of. You don't have to try and get there by yourself. Listen to what he said. *After I get it all ready, I am going to come back, and I am going to take you there myself.* The wonderful good news is that death is not a leap into the dark. Death is not going to a strange country. Death is being taken by the hand of Jesus and escorted to your Father's house. How wonderful to know that today you can have an assurance that the transition is secure and comfortable because He is there to take you. Often when people call me and say that a loved one has died, I will say to them, "The good news is Jesus came back to Richmond this week." He came back to take them and to take them to the Father's house.

Remember I mentioned Stephen awhile ago. Listen to Stephen when he is being stoned to death. "Do you see what I see? Heaven is open and I see Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father." Time and time again people have been able to write and to tell us that they have seen the very presence of our Lord. Jesus has escorted them to the Father's house. There is a strange passage over in John 8:51. It says this, "*Whosoever believes in me shall not see death.*" I have often wondered about that passage of scripture because all of us are going to die. But I think this is what it means. He that believes in me will not have his eyes on death. You will have your eyes on me. So that you will not see death, you will see me. How wonderful to know you can build your life knowing He is going to be there for you. The last thing you can build your life on. You can build your life that you are going to be with Him. The very essence of heaven is not a place, not pearly gates and golden streets. The very essence is, it is going to be with Him. Here He is, the night before He dies talking to his

befuddled, frightened disciples saying to them, *I want you to know one day we will be together again. You will be with Me.*

There have been a lot of famous people who have lived in Richmond. Some of them have their names on plaques at Brown's Island. If you have ever walked around it you have seen those plaques that over-look the James River.

One of those plaques and one of those famous people who have lived here is a man by the name of John Jasper. John Jasper was a freed slave. He was called as pastor of a Baptist Church and people have recognized him as one of the greatest orators and one of the greatest preachers who have ever lived. A book is written about him called Rhapsody in Black. If you have ever tried to go I-95 North, you will recognize that just about the Coliseum, you are going to take a curve and then go out. The reason the highway department takes a curve is you have to go around what is still called today, John Jasper's church. John Jasper's most famous sermon was entitled, The Sun Done Stood Still based on that passage of scripture in the Bible where the people of Israel were at war and the Bible said "*the sun done stood still.*" Everybody knows that couldn't have happened, they thought. Now we recognize even scientifically it did. Scientists in Richmond used to come down and listen to John Jasper preach about the *sun done stood still*. It came down to argue with him and by the time he was finished, they were pretty well convinced. The sun did stand still. One of John Jasper's most famous sermons is about being with Jesus in heaven. He said, "One day John Jasper's going to die. John Jasper is going to the Father's house," and he said, Let me tell you what I am going to do in the Father's house. First thing I am going to do is look up all of my children." John Jasper had had six children who had died in child birth. "What I am going to do is pick up those children and I am going to hug them and I am going to say you were taken away from me and now we are together." Then John Jasper said, "Oh no, John, you are not going to do that. That is too selfish and heaven is not a place for selfishness." He said, "You are going to look for all of those people in the church that loved you, cared for you and ministered with you." Then he began to tell story after story of great laymen and lay women in his congregations. He told stories about them and then he said, "Oh, John Jasper, you are not going to do that. He said, What you are going to do is look up all of those people who have come to faith in Christ and you are all going to rejoice that both of you are there together." Then after he had been preaching for awhile, with great flourish John Jasper said, "John Jasper, shut your mouth." He put his hand over his mouth. "You know John Jasper, when you get to heaven, you are not going to look up your children. First thing you are going to do is not look up your deacons. First thing you are not going to do is look up those who have come to faith in Christ. John, you know the first thing you are going to do is go straight to the feet of Jesus and spend the first thousand years praising Him."

Let me tell you what you can know, what you can be sure of, that one day you will be with Him. Several months ago in the congregation there was one of the greatest sermons preached that I have heard in awhile. Interestingly enough it was not preached by me. In the last several months in our congregation, there have been mothers and daddies who have had to have memorial services for their children. One of those was held here in this sanctuary and we had gone through the service and the family was here. One of the sons of the mom raised his hand and said, "Can I say something?" That is always kind of an unnerving thing because you never know what people are going to say. You don't know if they can say it. This young man stood up, who is in the military, came and he said, "I would like to tell you something about my mother." He said, "I would like to tell you my mother was a Christian. I would like to tell you that there is no doubt about where my mother is. My mother is in the presence of Jesus." He talked about his mother and her faith and how he was sure of where his mother was. Then he closed by saying this. "Two days ago the doctor called me and said your mother is being kept alive by life support systems. We can't keep doing this. I want you to make the decision about whether you want her to stay on there a day or two longer or whether you want her to come off." Then he turned to the people at the memorial service and this is what he said. "Do you know what it is like to pull the plug on your mother?" Then he turned with this question. "What if I had to pull the plug and I didn't know she was a Christian?" Then he turned and said. "If someone had to pull the plug on you, would you know that you would be with Jesus?" Then he went and sat down.

It is not a million dollars, it is eternity. Are you sure? Do you know if this were it, that you would be with Jesus. I have often said to people, "If I didn't know that, I would be scared to go get in my car. I would be afraid to leave because I think the most important question you need to know is, everything is all right and on His authority I can be sure.