They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise.” But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

Mark 9:30-32 (NIV)

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

John 14:1-3 (NIV)

The End of Our World
I am not an alarmist, and I am not a long-haired, robe-and-sandals doomsday prophet. I’m not stating a prediction, just a fact: The world will someday end. I don’t know when, nor does anyone else who is not All-Knowing and able to see the future perfectly. Astronomers and cosmologists affirm that the universe is not static but in constant flux and change. It was announced a month ago that telescopes and measuring devices have detected—1.5 billion light years away—two dwarf stars drawing together by their mutual gravitational fields; at some point they will merge or explode. Planets form
and planets break apart; interstellar collisions occur. Our planet had a beginning point, and eventually it will end—or be radically changed. Will it be a thermonuclear war? A volcano that spews so much ash that the atmosphere is changed or obliterated, eliminating life? A direct hit from a large asteroid or comet? An act of divine intervention? No one knows.

The New Testament gives us tantalizing but only partial hints of what is sometimes called the Second Coming or the Apocalypse. They are like scattered pieces of a puzzle. We’re told that life on earth is not eternal, and that God will intervene at some time in some way. People have performed elaborate calculations and offered guesses, but there is no consensus on what might come or when. Put a dozen theologians in a room and you will have 15 theories of the end times.

Moving immensely closer to home, your world and my world will come to an end someday. I don’t know when my end will come, and you don’t know yours. There could be many potential causes. I might develop a fatal cancer; your heart might fail; one of us might be a victim of an accident. The end may come suddenly or after a long time of warning and decline. Whatever the circumstances, and whether it comes six months or 60 years from now, our worlds will end.

**A Stunning Promise**

Today I am going to tell you about a stunning promise that was once made, and was intended not just for its original hearers but also for you and me. A man named Jesus of Nazareth made a bold and improbable guarantee: He would one day return for each of us, and would take us to a new type or category of existence. It is possible that some people living at this moment will personally experience the end of human history, when everyone remaining will come to their culmination together. It is more likely that, one-by-one, we will come to our personal culmination, at a date and time appointed for each of us. And when that occurs, our end can become our beginning. Let’s think about this promise.
It’s certainly not the only time that a promise of return has been given, and then kept. Over a century ago a rugged British explorer named Ernest Shackleton recruited volunteers to accompany him on an attempted journey to the South Pole. In January 1915 their ship became trapped in ice, and was eventually crushed. The men journeyed for months over ice floes to an uninhabited spit of rock called Elephant Island. Leaving 22 of his men in a cave, Shackleton and five others set out in their lifeboat to cover the 720 miles of open ocean to the whaling station on South Georgia Island. He promised he would return for his men and rescue them. It was a grueling journey, but nearly five months later he did return with a rescue ship—and every single one of his men was delivered. A promise kept. Shackleton gained universal acclaim and renown for doing what he said he’d do.

Nearly 80 years ago, in March 1942, General Douglas MacArthur was evacuated from the besieged island fortress of Corregidor in Manila Bay in the Philippines Archipelago. He promised to our Filipino allies, then facing cruel occupation by the invading Japanese, “I shall return” [to liberate them]. Over two years later he waded ashore from a landing craft as the American army hit the first beachhead. MacArthur’s promise was kept, and he became a great military hero in the eyes of his own nation and the Philippines.

The Resurrection and Its Implications
Nearly 2,000 years ago the most dramatic and unlikely return in human history occurred on that first Easter morning. A few weeks earlier, as we read in our text from Mark chapter 9, during the trip towards Jerusalem, Jesus knew what lay before Him. He prepared His closest friends for the tragedy that was about to come, and then the triumph that would follow it. “I shall return,” He assured them. He explicitly said He would rise from the dead. But the disciples were puzzled by His statement. And let’s not be too hard on them. After all, as everyone knows, when somebody dies they stay dead. Nobody before that moment had ever come back from the dead in their own power, with no help or medical intervention whatsoever. It seemed to be literally impossible.
The resurrection of Christ is supported by overwhelming historic evidence. The fact that His enemies could never produce His body (which would have aborted the Christian Church before it was born) is a strong confirmation that there was no body to produce. The fact that numerous eyewitnesses reported multiple personal contacts with Jesus after His resurrection, and that the fearful disciples who had all scattered at His arrest became emboldened to fearlessness, are further powerful confirmations of the resurrection. As unprecedented and unlikely as it was, billions of people today (and for the past twenty centuries) have become convinced that this Man actually kept His promise to return to life from the grave.

There are two dramatic implications. The first: the initial rays of a sunlight of hope dawned on the human race that Easter morning. Our ultimate enemy, Death, had now been defeated. The second implication: if Jesus demonstrated His ability to make and keep such a remarkable promise, can we not believe Him and trust Him with another promise He made? If He said He would return once, and He did, then can we not place our trust in His other promised return?

And that second promise is what we hear in John chapter 14. A few hours before He would die on a cross, as the innocent substitute for the sins of a guilty world, He pronounced His second promise: “I will return for each of you.” This is not the same as His promise to return from death to life (which would be accomplished three days later). It is a guarantee of eternal life for you and me. He is betting His credibility and trustworthiness on this promise to return for each of us and to take us to be with Him forever.

**The Message of Easter**

There are hundreds of credible accounts of people whose bodies died—they were medically “flatlined”—and yet they retained a real personal consciousness. Many of them caught a glimpse of indescribable wonder and beauty and glory in an existence utterly unlike our material world. And then they somehow returned to their physical bodies and tried to communicate to others what they had experienced. There are enough of these “after-life” or “near-death” accounts, with
dramatic similarities, to gain the attention of serious scientists and medical professionals. Some of them are convinced that life after death is possible—even likely.

This is the dual message of Easter: It proclaims a fact and offers an invitation. The fact: Jesus Christ, after being wrongly murdered on a cross, became alive again by the power of God and thereby gained authority over death. The invitation: All men and women and children are called to place their faith and confidence in Him, who was the greatest of all men, and so much more. You can claim the promise that He, the great Promise-Keeper, made to each of us. He said that when your time comes, He will return for you and take you to be with Him forever. Will you accept His offer? If you do so, you can face your final breath with confidence rather than fear. When your eyes close for the last time, the next thing you will see will be Him. We shall behold Him, face to face.

The song you’re about to hear, entitled “We Shall Behold Him,” expresses the joyful expectation that Christ will return in His time at the end of human history. But it also expresses the personal faith that, if our time arrives earlier, He will return for us—and we will see Him as He truly is, in His glory.

We Shall Behold Him
Dottie Rambo

The sky will unfold preparing His entrance.
The stars shall applaud Him with thunders of praise.
The sweet light in His eyes shall enhance those awaiting.
And we shall behold Him then face to face.

We shall behold Him. We shall behold Him face to face in all of His glory.
We shall behold Him. We shall behold Him face to face, our Savior and Lord.

The angel shall sound the shout of His coming.
The sleeping shall rise from their slumbering place.
And those who remain shall be changed in a moment
and we shall behold Him then face to face.