

The Hope of Heaven

Sign Title: The Hope of Heaven

August 29, 2010

I want to welcome you to Faith Evangelical Free Church. My name is Kurt and I am one of the pastors. This summer we are in a teaching series entitled, “The Mysteries of Heaven.” This morning, we finish the series. At the end of the message, I have some exciting things to share with you about the next series that begins two weeks from today.

In this series, we learned a lot about heaven. We learned about the amazing joys that await us in heaven and about the conscious, eternal punishment of hell. We discovered the beauty of the new creation, where heaven and the new earth are combined and we live on a real tangible earth with God for all of eternity. We learned about our resurrection bodies; bodies characterized by strength and power, not aches and pains. We tackled the millennial maze and learned about the earthly thousand year reign of Christ. We learned many mind expanding truths about heaven.

I know some were thinking, “Pastor, why did we spend a whole summer on the topic of heaven? We should have studied something more practical. I have real issues on earth. I will worry about heaven when I get there. As Wayne Martindale said, “If you’re thinking about the heavenly streets of gold, aren’t you likely to forget about the potholes in the streets of Chicago.”¹

I understand those concerns. I think they would be reasonable objections; if we didn’t have the New Testament. The New Testament spends significant

¹ Wayne Martindale, *Beyond the Shadowlands: C.S. Lewis on Heaven and Hell*, pgs. 46-47.

time talking about eternal issues. One in every thirteen verses in the New Testament mentions the return of Christ.² Why do you think the New Testament says so much about heavenly things?

What we know about heaven, has everything to do with how we live on earth. Instead of the study of heaven disconnecting us from the way to live life, it teaches us how to live. Our study of heaven should have changed us in many practical ways. In what way did this study of heaven change us? This morning, I want to briefly review a few of them.

It released us from our fear of death.

Imagine, this morning, a terrorist held us hostage as a church. He marched to the front of the sanctuary with his AK-47, a turban wrapped around his head and a strip of large caliber ammunition slung over his shoulder. At gunpoint, he threatens to kill us one by one, unless he receives several million dollars ransom.

While I am not trivializing anyones death, who in the room should be afraid of dying? The terrorist holding the gun! Can you imagine how this might play out? It would be one frustrated terrorist with a room full of people that, while not desiring death, were not held in his grip by their fear of it. Imagine a room of two-hundred people evangelizing the terrorist, urging him to repent of his sin and trust in Christ, before he gets shot by the S.W.A.T. team!

Death is painful and it is an enemy. But for those who know Jesus, death is not a fear.

² Anderson, C. *Opening up 2 Peter*. pg. 105.

He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. Isaiah 25:8 (ESV)

The apostle Paul echoes Isaiah.

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” 1 Corinthians 15:54–55 (ESV)

This summer, while studying heaven, I hope you gained a new perspective on death. In the face of death, we have nothing to fear.

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? Romans 8:35 (ESV)

For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:38–39 (ESV)

Death will not separate us from God’s love, it will usher us into his presence.

It brought purpose to our lives.

This summer, as we studied heaven, did you find yourself reconsidering how you spend your time? Did you begin to make a purchase and think, “In light of eternity, this is pretty foolish?” I found myself thinking that. Knowing the truth about heaven and how our earthly choices make an eternal difference, brings a sense of purpose to how we make choices in our life. It changes the way we spend our time, money, and energy. It brings clarity to our choices as we begin making them in light of how we can make an eternal difference.

I am not saying the study of heaven should lead us to avoid all earthly pleasures, we just begin to think with greater clarity about the eternal value of our choices.

After all, if we believe we will spend an eternity in a world of unending beauty and adventure, how can we be content to think that real joy is spending our evenings in front of the television watching sitcoms and football games? Even if you keep your eyes off the impurities, knowing that heaven is just around the corner, and that every sacrifice and investment we make will be paid back by Christ in a way that eclipses earthly sacrifices, that changes us. It gets us up out of our Lazy-Boy recliners, it prompts us to turn off the television and it compels us to live for things that make an eternal difference. What are those things?

God's Word and people. Spending time in God's Word and investing in people will pay off in eternity and bring us an eternal joy that outweighs the difficulty of earthly sacrifice or the half-baked happiness of a television rerun.

This is the purpose and drive that motivated Paul as he lived his life.

Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 3:13–14 (ESV)

What are you living your life for? What are you seeking? I hope our study of heaven brought focus and clarity to your life. I hope it taught you how to live for greater things.

It motivated us for purity.

While heaven motivates us for rewards, knowing that we will stand before Christ, the audience of one, and give an account for how we lived, that motivates us for purity.

If you are struggling with a secret sin, I can tell you one of the fastest ways to break sin's grip. Confess it to someone who cares about you and ask them to hold you accountable. That sin will scatter like a cockroach when the lights go on. Knowing we are accountable to Christ and we will stand before him to give an answer for how we live is a powerful motivation for purity.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God." So then each of us will give an account of himself to God. Romans 14:10–12 (ESV)

While we are forgiven of our sin, we learned we will still give an account of our lives to God. Peter also talks about how the anticipation of the return of Christ and standing before him motivates us for purity.

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness... But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. 2 Peter 3:11–14 (ESV)

Anticipating standing before Christ is what motivates us to live spotless lives. It is what empowers us to stick through a difficult marriage, it keeps us persevering in the hard task of caring for an ailing parent or child, it keeps us at a demanding job. That is why Moses stuck with the tough job God gave him of leading the Israelites. He was living thinking about eternity.

He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. Hebrews 11:26 (ESV)

Knowing where we are going and before whom we will stand provides powerful motivation for purity. After all, if we really believe we're going to live forever in a realm where Christ is the center of all things, and that will bring us joy, and if we believe righteous living will bring happiness, why wouldn't we choose to get a head start by Christ-centered righteous living today?

And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:3 (ESV)

Randy Alcorn has a great illustration of this.

If my wedding date is on the calendar, and I'm thinking of the person I'm going to marry, I shouldn't be an easy target for seduction. Likewise, when I've meditated on Heaven, sin is terribly unappealing. It's when my mind drifts from Heaven that sin appears attractive. Thinking about heaven leads to holiness and purity. Our high tolerance for sin testifies of our failure to prepare for Heaven.³

I hope you found this study of heaven giving you a greater passion for holiness and purity.

It motivated us to seek greater joy and delight.

Following Christ is not a call to abstain from joy and delight but it is a call to, by faith, delay joy and delight now for a much better joy and delight later. The better we comprehend the pleasures that await us in eternity, the greater our ability to forego the lesser pleasures we are offered now. The more clearly we conceive, through the eye of faith, the possessions that will be ours on the new heavens and earth, the more gladly we can give away our possessions now to store up for our future. When we realize the power that will be ours as rulers in

³ Randy Alcorn. *Heaven*. pg. 471.

God's Kingdom, a power we could not handle in our sinful nature but a power we can only handle with perfected natures, we will gladly forgo the pursuit of power now as we anticipate the power entrusted to us then.

Studying heaven doesn't discourage us from pleasure and joy, it teaches us to live for greater pleasures and joys than anything this world can offer.

I hope this summer, you have learned to seek greater pleasures and joys than anything this world can provide.

It gives us hearts filled with thankfulness.

Studying heaven vitalizes our spirits with an attitude of thankfulness in spite of our circumstances.

Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, Hebrews 12:28 (ESV)

The more we study heaven, the more thankful we become for what God gave us through Christ. This world is not our home. We have a home in heaven with Christ that will last forever. How can our hearts not overflow with thankfulness? Rather than hitching our happiness to our finances, our health, or our success, all of which rise and fall like the ocean tide, everything about us is shackled to Christ, his love for us and our eternal home. None of those things change. We can always be thankful because no matter what hand we are dealt in the card game of life, through Jesus, we win in the end. How much better could it get?

I hope this summer, as we studied heaven, you developed a thankful heart.

It taught us to live wisely.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:19–21 (ESV)

We covered this last summer and we covered this a few weeks ago. The choices we make in this life will have eternal ramifications. The money we give to God’s kingdom is laid up in heaven as an eternal investment. It is our eternal retirement account that always has a better rate of return than any earthly one can offer. As we studied heaven, we learned how to wisely live for it and invest for it.

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life. 1 Timothy 6:17–19 (ESV)

This is the same idea. The generous living and giving of our earthly lives now, will always provide us with a much greater eternal reward then. If that wasn’t true, why would it be called a reward?

The same is true when it comes to turning away from sin. When we are tempted by sin, it looks enticing. Before we studied heaven, we told ourselves we would turn away from sin because it was the right thing to do, it was the pleasing thing to do. If we chose to sin, it was not right, but, of course, Christ would forgive us.

In this series, we learned there is much more to this equation. God promises to reward us for our righteous living. He *desires* to reward us when we

turn away from sin. When we choose to give in to sin, we forfeit a measure of our eternal reward, a reward that would be much more satisfying than any temporary earthly pleasure that sin can provide. If this wasn't true, eternal rewards wouldn't be rewards. Choosing to turn away from sin will always be rewarded by Christ in a way that far exceeds any price we pay now.

Every choice to honor Christ is never a choice for less joy but for more. It is never a choice for a boring, drab existence. It is *always* a choice for a better one.

When we started this series, I shared with you three resolutions Jonathan Edwards had about how he would live his life. As I read them this week, I noticed they were resolutions to live wisely. Resolutions to make wise earthly choices based on what is true about eternal realities.

- Resolved, to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can.
- Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.
- Resolved, to endeavor to my utmost to act as I can think I should do, if I had already seen the happiness of heaven, and hell's torments.⁴

We have seen the happiness of heaven and the torments of hell. Let us also choose to live wisely now that we know them.

Conclusion

This morning, we began by talking about how the study of heaven can feel so irrelevant to real world problems. We learned the opposite is true. It is by the

⁴ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, pg. 5.

study of heaven and the future that we can learn to live wisely today. I like the way C. S. Lewis put it.

If you have read history, you will find that those Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this world.

To summarize this series, let me remind you of what we learned from our study of the book of Hebrews, we were created for one person, that person is Jesus. In this study, we learned we were created for one place, that place is Heaven. I hope our study of it did you practical good as we seek to live wisely and lay up our treasure in heaven.



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