

ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO HEAVEN?

II Corinthians 5:1-9

(NIV) "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now the One who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. ⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it."

INTRODUCTION

There are many ways to understand what happened as a result of that first Christmas day over 2,000 years ago. Bill Keane's comic strip, *Family Circus*, was on the right track. As the children were setting up their nativity set, little Dolly held up the baby **Jesus** and declared, "Here's the star of Bethlehem!" Here is how God Himself explains the earth-shattering significance of Christ's birth in **John 1:1, 3, 4, 14, 18**: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ³ All things were created through Him, and apart from Him not one thing was created that has been created. ⁴ Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. The One and Only Son—the One who is at the Father's side—He has revealed Him." A young boy on his deathbed in a foreign land received a visit by a missionary. The missionary sought to clarify any shallow concept of salvation and Heaven the boy might have, because his time on earth grew short. The lad spoke of the happiness he felt and his longing to be with **Jesus**. "I am going to Heaven soon and then I shall see Jesus and be with Him forever," said the little fellow. "But," asked the missionary, "if Jesus were to leave Heaven, what would you do?" "I would follow Him," said the boy. "But suppose," said the missionary, "Jesus went to hell; what would you do then?" With an intelligent look and a smile on his face, he instantly replied: "Ah, sir, there is no hell where Jesus is. The presence of Jesus is Heaven." Heaven's King came to earth on Christmas Day. By some incomprehensible miracle He became one of us, a human being, but a human being in whom Heaven's God is present. He came to fully reveal God's plan to open to us a doorway to Heaven's everlasting life and to save us from the ruinous and killing power of our sins. As **Jesus** explained in **John 10:9**, "I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved." On another occasion, **Jesus** announced in **John 5:24**: "I assure you: Anyone who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come under judgment but has passed from death to life."

Last Sunday, we celebrated the believers commended in **Hebrews 11**, who, in the words of **vss. 13-16**, "aspire to a better place—a heavenly one" (a land free of disease, destruction, decay, and death). They "confessed that they were foreigners and temporary residents on the earth." "Foreigners" refers to people living in a country that is not their own. "Temporary residents" describes visitors who are not permanent residents of a community. Cyprian, born around A. D. 200 in North Africa of pagan parents, became a prominent trial lawyer and teacher of rhetoric. He crowned Christ as Lord of his life in A. D. 246 and was chosen Bishop of Carthage two years later. During the persecution of Christians instigated by the Roman Emperor Valerian, Cyprian was arrested, tried, and finally beheaded in A. D. 258. In his essay, *Mortality*, he declared, "We are living here now as aliens and only for a time. When the day of our homecoming puts an end to our exile, frees us from the bonds of the world, and restores us to paradise and to a kingdom, we should welcome it. What man, stationed in a foreign land, would not want to return to his own country as soon as possible? Well, we look upon paradise as our country, and a great crowd of our loved ones awaits

us there, a countless throng of parents, brothers and children longs for us to join them. . . . O the delight of that heavenly kingdom where there is no fear of death! O the supreme and endless bliss of everlasting life!" Faithful believers through the ages have viewed all their lives as a journey to and preparation for Heaven. From the moment we embrace the Christ of Christmas as our personal Lord and Savior, our birth-right is found in **Philippians 3:20**: "[O]ur citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Do you echo the Apostle Paul's words this morning, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."⁹ So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it"? Are You Looking Forward to Heaven? Our two Outline points today are What Will Not Be in Heaven, and What Will Be in Heaven.

I. WHAT WILL NOT BE IN HEAVEN

Do you recall the words of the third verse of the Christmas carol, *Joy to the World! The Lord Is Come?* "No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow Far as the curse is found, Far as the curse is found, Far as, far as the curse is found." Isaac Watts, who wrote this hymn, knew his Bible. One way to understand what will *not* be in Heaven is to "reverse the curse"; to envision life as it would have been on this planet had the disruptions associated with rebellion against our Creator never happened. In the Apostle John's vision of our future Heavenly home recorded in **Revelation 21:1** and **22:3-4** (NASB), we find these words: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, . . .³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him;⁴ they will see His face."

When Adam and Eve severed their harmonious life in union with their Creator Lord, as described in **Genesis 3**, their lives on earth were affected morally, psychologically, and physically. "Hostility" and self-seeking relationships replaced the cooperation and love that had reigned between us and God and between us and others. The ground became infested with "thorns and thistles" and would only yield needed food by "painful labor." We, and all living creatures, became subject to decay, disease, and death. Can you imagine life without ever again being separated by death from a loved one; without bodies that wear out and decay; without illness, disease, birth defects, spousal or child abuse, or starvation; without insects or prickly or weedy growth whose sole purpose for existing seems to be to torment you; without dishonesty or lying, muggers or thieves, murder or war, divorce or broken homes; without suffering temperatures of extreme heat or cold, or the fury of destructive storms; or without loneliness, or feeling useless or unloved? These are but glimpses of all we can look forward to never again having to experience in Heaven! Hear now the voice of Scripture, from **Revelation 21:1-5, 14-15** (NASB): "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, . . .² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.¹⁵ Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying." "Dogs" refers to those who pervert what the Bible teaches about how we gain access to Heaven through the Christ of Christmas alone, or who pervert our Creator's moral guidelines for how we should live (**Philippians 3:2-3, 18-19**).

II. WHAT WILL BE IN HEAVEN

David Lloyd George (1863-1945) dominated British politics in the early decades of the 20th Century. He was rated among the 100 greatest Britons of all time in a poll taken in 2002 across the United Kingdom. He professed himself a follower of **Jesus Christ** at a young age and remained active in a Baptist Church until his death. But young David was but 17 months old when his father died. His mother moved her

family in with her brother, Richard Lloyd, who was both a shoemaker and a Baptist minister. This uncle became a towering figure in David's life, who guided and encouraged much of his success. But living with a Baptist minister must have seemed confining to David as a young child. He once confessed, "As a boy, the thought of Heaven used to frighten me more than the thought of Hell. I pictured Heaven as a place where time would be perpetual Sundays, with perpetual services from which there would be no escape."

We can chuckle over unfounded fears about Heaven based upon childish ignorance. But Randy Alcorn, author of a series of books on Heaven, believes something more sinister is at work. **Revelation 13:6** (NIV) describes the activity of the Satanic Antichrist, who will one day rule this world and be worshiped as a god, by stating, "It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander His name and His dwelling place and those who live in heaven." This is our clue Satan is already fiendishly at work to promote distortions about God's person, God's people, and God's place—namely Heaven. Biochemist Isaac Asimov (1920-92), a Russian-born Jew whose family emigrated to the U. S., displayed a vivid imagination in his famous books on science fiction. Yet, Asimov allowed his atheism to blind him to envisioning anything worthwhile about Heaven. He wrote, "I don't believe in an afterlife, so I don't have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse." Clever distortions have a remarkable way of motivating us into foolishly avoiding what is good for us or to foolishly pursue actions that are worthless or even harmful.

When God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (**Genesis 3:8**), Earth was Heaven's backyard. The New Earth we are promised in Scripture will be even more than that—it will be Heaven itself! The new Jerusalem will be the capital of the New Earth and the worship center of the universe. What will we do there? We will assemble for special worship times, joined by the countless angels who will dazzle us by the brilliance of God's creative beauty they display (**Isaiah 66:22-23; Revelation 5:8-14; Revelation 15:1-4**). But everything Adam and Eve did in Eden was an act of worship, whether rejoicing over the blessing of each other, swimming the pristine lakes, marveling over the majesty of the mountains, relishing the delightful foods brought forth by God's nature for their pleased nourishment, caressing and playing with the animals or being inspired by the music and colors of the birds—all of whom were their pets—or as they worked in Eden's Garden. **Genesis 2:15** (NIV) tells us, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." The Hebrew word here translated "work" is translated "worship" in **Exodus 3:12**, where God told Moses, "when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will all worship God at this mountain." When we make use of creative abilities with which God invested us by responsible *service* toward Him and our fellow man, this is an act of worship of our Creator and Lord. Work, by itself, is not a curse; only work under God's curse is a curse! Of course, some people will need to find new professions in Heaven. There will be no need for doctors, nurses, or dentists; funeral directors, police officers, insurance salesmen, accident lawyers, pest control, repairmen for what wears out, drug manufacturers, or rehabilitation therapists, to name a few. But most professions will find their creative talents energized as never before. Gardeners, engineers, architects, builders, scientists, craftspeople, artists, musicians, and writers, among others, will be free of the myriad of constraints now imposed on us.

If we would envision Heaven as the grandest, warmest, and most exuberant homecoming we could ever imagine, knowing we have at long last arrived where we have dearly longed to be, this would enhance our understanding of Heaven. Paul made this very point in **II Corinthians 5**. He chose two Greek words in **vss. 6-9** that are opposites, meaning to be in one's proper home or homeland or to be away from it, which appear nowhere else in the New Testament. They emphasize that when we depart the "home" of our "body", our own people, and our earthly country, we will find ourselves "at home with the Lord" in our new body and in our new country. Paul thus sought to impress upon us God wants us to view our departure from this life on Earth as a homecoming in Heaven! Paul's words in **vs. 9** testify to the doorway between life on Earth and life in Heaven being much nearer and much thinner than many of us realize. We ought to live on earth as though we might step across into Heaven at any time. In A. D. 125, a Greek believer

named Aristides wrote to a friend about the Christian faith to explain why this "new religion" was so successful: "If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God, and they escort his body with songs and thanksgivings as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby."

CONCLUSION

How would you become a good travel agent? By reading about and experiencing all you could about the places where you hoped your clients would want to go.

I could be a travel agent for the Blue Ridge Parkway. I first heard about it in 1977. It runs 469 miles along the upper edge of Appalachian Mountains and connects the Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina to the Shenandoah National Park in Virginia. I purposely saved exploring this marvelous roadway until after I married. By the time Loretta and I received our Lord's approval to tour the Blue Ridge Parkway in 2009, I'd learned a lot about the best things to see and do. I did not take the approach, "Let's just drive and figure it out along the way where we'd like to stop." We'd have missed out upon most of the best parts of our trip had we done this, like the almost unbelievable splendor of the Luray Caverns of Virginia. Anticipation of seeing the special places along the Parkway became half the fun of going and gave us a lot of excitement over planning our adventures. Thus, for years before we actually went there, I became one of the best advertisements for the Blue Ridge Parkway.

I am also a travel agent for Heaven. We all should be. The more we learn about Heaven's wonders and the more we have Heavenly experiences, the more we can excite others about what they'll miss if they don't go! We can tell them a Heaven where God promises the best blessings of this life are abundant and everlasting, and a Heaven where God promises the cursed aspects of this life are absent and neverlasting, is our true Home by invitation of the Son of God, the Christ of Christmas!