

SETTING OUR AFFECTION ON THINGS ABOVE – LESSON FOUR

COL. 3:1-3; REV 4:1-11; 5:8-9, 13; 7:9; 19:7-8

“FIVE MINUTES INSIDE OF ETERNITY I BELIEVE EVERYONE OF US WILL WISH THAT WE HAD SACRIFICED MORE, PRAYED MORE, LOVED MORE, SWEATED MORE, WEPT MORE ...”

-LEONARD RAVENHILL

Review:

Over the past few weeks we have introduced and considered the importance of having an eternal perspective of setting our affections on things above. We have seen that, for the most part, this concept has been lost to a vast majority of professing Christians in our nation, if not the world. There are many reasons for this. We will mention just a few:

- *Many professed believers are not true believers at all*
- *Materialism has swept, not only through our land, but through our churches as well*
- *Pragmatic preaching has replaced biblical preaching*

As we have mentioned previously, one of the great tragedies in many churches today, especially in America, is our lack of an eternal perspective. In his book *Whatever Happened to Heaven* Dave Hunt writes:

*Unfortunately, too many persons—even dedicated Christians—find such a topic (eternity) of only minor interest because they consider it to be largely irrelevant to the challenges of this present life. ... **Nothing is more important** in shaping how life on earth is lived and what is accomplished both for time and **eternity** than a person’s attitude about **the life to come**.*

The Bible speaks much of this matter of heaven, eternal life and everlasting life. In fact, heaven is mentioned 583 times in 530 different verses. Heaven is a real place. Hunt continues with these words:

*What Jesus had to say about this present life and **the life to come**, and the particular promises he made about **heaven**, gave the early church a **hope** unknown to the followers of any other religion. That hope ... is so unreal to the average Christian today that it has lost its transforming power. ... One cannot read the New Testament without seeing its **heavenly** orientation. **Heaven** was continually on the heart of our Lord and was the context for everything He taught His disciples. He made it clear that He was calling them to turn their **attention** and **affection** and interest from this world to **heaven** ...*

Let’s take a few minutes to consider the topic of heaven. As we begin, let’s make a few introductory comments:

I. Heaven is our Home

As God’s children we often sing songs like the following:

This world is not my home; I’m just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue; The angels beckon me from heaven’s open door, And I just can’t feel at home in this world anymore.

Another songwriter wrote:

I’m kind of homesick for a country to which I’ve never been before; No sad goodbyes will be there spoken for time won’t matter anymore. Beulah Land, I’m longing for you, and someday, on thee I’ll stand; there my home shall be eternal.

Vance Havner once said,

“Christians are not citizens of earth trying to get to heaven but citizens of heaven making their way through this world.”

The story is told that when **Theodore Roosevelt** was president, he went on a hunting safari to Africa. On the return to the States, a missionary who was retiring after over forty years of service in the jungles of Africa happened to be on the same ship home. When the ship docked, cheering throngs greeted the president, but not a single person was there to welcome the missionary. Momentarily the man of God was filled with self-pity. He thought, “When a president comes home after a short hunting trip, hundreds come out to greet him. But, Lord, when one of your missionaries comes home after a lifetime of service, no one is there to meet him.” Immediately it was as if the Lord whispered, “But My son, you are not home yet?”

II. Heaven was Hope of the early church

What Jesus had to say about this present life and the life to come, and the peculiar promises He made concerning heaven, gave **the early church a hope unknown to the followers of any other religion or philosophy**. That hope, though still retained as a doctrine we believe, is so unreal to the average child of God in the year 2010 that it has lost its transforming power. As one man has rightly noted: “Heaven remains the place that everyone hopes to reach someday, but which almost no one wants to be taken right now.”

Heaven was the believer’s hope:

- It wasn’t a career –it was Heaven!
- It wasn’t a new car – it was Heaven!
- It wasn’t making money – it was Heaven!
- It wasn’t a new home, or a bigger home – it was Heaven!
- It wasn’t getting married – it was Heaven!
- It wasn’t getting a promotion – it was Heaven!
- It wasn’t retiring comfortably – it was Heaven!

It wasn’t anything this world had to offer – the hope of the early church was Heaven!

III. Heaven as our Hope Should Keep us from becoming too comfortable here

Of course, the reason for this is that we have been, for many years now placing far too much emphasis on the here and now and far too little emphasis on heaven; and in placing the wrong emphasis upon this world we, not only rob ourselves of true joy and rewards in the world to come, but we rob the next generation of the reality of Jesus Christ. The degree of service and sacrifice we make for the kingdom of our Christ is greatly determined by our perception or vision of that kingdom. The reality of our revelation of that kingdom!

What really makes heaven heaven?

- Is it the pearly gates?

What makes heaven heaven?

- Is it the streets of gold?

What makes heaven heaven?

- Is it the walls of Jasper?

What makes heaven heaven?

- Is it the mansions that we are having prepared for us?

What makes heaven heaven?

- Is it the pure river flowing from the throne?

What makes heaven heaven?

- Is it the fact that there will be no sickness or pain?

What makes heaven heaven?

- Is it the fact that there will be no sad goodbyes (no more death)?

What makes heaven heaven?

- Is it the fact that there will be no sin (or temptation to sin)?

These are all wonderful benefits that are available to the citizens of heaven, but they aren't really what make heaven heaven. What makes heaven such a wonderful place to look forward to going and living eternally is that Jesus Christ will be there. Concerning heaven **Paul Rees** wrote:

"We talk about gates of pearl and streets of gold and walls of jasper, and we are thrilled; but those things would not be attractive if Jesus were not there. His presence is what will make heaven such a grand place."

In his book *And the Life Everlasting* John Baillie tells of a Scottish physician who was attending to a close personal friend in his last hours of life. The man asked the physician, who was a believer, "Tell me, you are a believer. What will it be like after I die?" There was a moment of silence. Suddenly there was a scratching at the bedroom door. The doctor turned to his friend and said, "Did you hear that? It's my dog. He's been waiting patiently for me downstairs and has become impatient. He has never been in this room. He has no idea what it is like. He knows only one thing about it and that is that I am here. And that's all I know about the future and heaven ... He's there!" The greatest thing about heaven is that we will be with Jesus Christ!!! If that doesn't excite us it is simply because we don't love Him as we should. Someone once said to **Fanny Crosby**, "Too bad that you are blind. With all of your gifts it's too bad that God withheld your sight." To which she replied,

"My first request at birth would have been that God would remove my sight. Because when I get to heaven the first sight that I will behold will be that of my Savior's face."

As one pastor/author wrote:

*"Today – as in every generation – it is stunning to watch the shift away from God as the all- satisfying gift of God's love. It is stunning how seldom God Himself is proclaimed as the greatest gift of the Gospel. ... The supreme demonstration of God's love was the sending of His Son to die for our sins and to rise again so that sinners might have the right to approach God and might have the pleasure of His presence forever. ... The critical question for our generation – and for every generation – is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you have ever had on the earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, **IF CHRIST WAS NOT THERE?** And the question for Christian leaders is: Do we preach and teach and lead in such a way that people are prepared to hear and answer that question and answer with a resounding No?"*

Readiness for heaven, in all reality means more than simply having my sins forgiven. True readiness for heaven means taking pleasure in beholding the Lord Jesus, and while beholding the glory of the Lord we are changed into His likeness. A great preacher of the past, **J.C. Ryle** once preached a sermon called "*Christ is All*" based on Colossians 3:11. In this message he said:

"But alas, how little fit for heaven are many who talk of 'going to heaven' when they die, while they manifestly have no saving faith, and no real acquaintance with Christ. You give Christ no honor here. You have no communion with Him. You do not love Him. Alas! What could you do in heaven? It would be no place for you. Its joys would be no joys for you. Its happiness would be a happiness into which you could not enter. Its employments would be weariness and a burden to your heart. Oh, repent and before it is too late!