

Nov 20th 2011: Heaven—A Place Where Jesus Wants Us To Be.

John 17:24-26

John 17:24 is for me a window into the heart of Jesus. For in it we find Him praying to His Father on the night before His death on the cross, and He is praying for His followers. For the 11 men who were with Him at that time, and for the vast number of other believers from the beginning of the church age through to the present day. And as He comes towards the end of His prayer He wants the Father to know what He desires for those who choose Him as their Lord and Saviour. What He wants for these whom He loves so very much— →THAT they should be with me in heaven. 17:24 says

²⁴ "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

Does that surprise you? That the one thing Jesus wants for you more than anything else is that you will be with Him one day forever. That out of His immense love for all believers His final prayer is not that we live longer, happier lives on this earth, but that we be with Him in heaven and experience face to face His glory.

And He prays that for us because He knows that such is the very best, the most wonderful, exciting and happy experience that we could ever hope for. There is nothing on earth that could ever give us even the tiniest amount of blessing that we will receive once this life is ended. He knew that it would be the best for those 11 mainly rugged, outdoor types, who gathered around Him, and He knew it would be the best for each one of us too.

There are a host of weird and wonderful ideas about heaven floating around in our world—even, sad to say, amongst some Christians. I was reminded about the confusion in the hearts of many when I heard about a question that one of our youth asked Terry Baker the other night. She is not a church-goer—not a believer, but she has these deep questions about the Christian Faith. And her question on this occasion related to the timelessness of heaven. She just couldn't comprehend a place where time did not exist because she could only think of heaven as a somewhat better continuation of life on earth in a different place. Yet 2 Corinthians 2:9 says of heaven:

***"No eye has seen,
no ear has heard,
no mind has conceived
what God has prepared for those who love him"—***

Or as the CEV puts the same verse:

***"What God has planned
for people who love him
is more than eyes have seen
or ears have heard.
It has never even
entered our minds!"***

As I prepared for this message I read again a book by E M Bounds called "A Glimpse of Heaven", and in it he quotes Samuel Rutherford who wrote:-

"If you saw a man shut up in a small room, idolizing a set of lamps and rejoicing in their light, and you wanted to make him truly happy, you would begin by blowing out all his lamps and throwing open the shutters to let in the light of heaven."

We too often idolize the weak lamps of this world because we fail to realize the utter wonder and beauty and joy of the next. Samuel Rutherford also wrote:- ***"If contentment were here, heaven would not be heaven. I wonder why a child of God would ever have a sad heart, considering what his Lord is preparing for him."***

Jesus knew about heaven more than any other ever could. He had come from heaven to live here on earth as a man and consequently He knew so well the difference between the two. And His great desire was for us to be there with Him.

Also in his book E M Bounds mentions a host of things that will make heaven so glorious. For example he says:-

Heaven is a permanent place in contrast to this earth which is unstable, insecure and fleeting.

We hear so much about the changes in climate that are affecting our existence and that of our global neighbours. We recognize that at any time a natural disaster can absolutely change the face of a city and even a nation, while wars are a constant threat to National and International security. And death constantly stalks.

Yet Hebrews 13:14, in talking about heaven says: ***For here we do not have an enduring city(a city that lasts forever), but we are looking for the city that is to come.***

Bounds writes:

"The contrast between earth and heaven is remarkable! Earth is a pilgrim's stay, a pilgrim's journey, and a pilgrim's tent. Heaven is a city, permanent, God planned and God built, whose foundations are as stable as God's throne".

Heaven is a place of Joyful reunion: He writes:

"Look back over life and imagine the faces of friends once loved, who broke away from us, disappeared from view, and now are "before the throne of God"(Revelation 7:15) Some of these were of our own households. Some whose vacant chairs are but sad reminders of them, "absent from the body but now present with the Lord."

"Will we ever see them again? Yes, if our robes are washed in the blood of the Lamb and if we are faithful in tribulation. Will we know them in that land of light, liberty, and fullness of joy? By all means! For if Moses and Elijah were recognized on the mount of transfiguration—if Stephen knew his Lord as they were stoning him—if the rich man in hell recognized Lazarus and Abraham though far off in heaven—then there is no doubt that we will know one another in that land."

Heaven will be a happy state: He writes:

"Real joys exist in heaven. We do not understand their fullness, but we know listlessness and weariness cannot prevail. Activity is the first and strongest impression given us of heaven, an activity too intent and profound to be joyless."

"No sickness—what an immeasurable bliss! No pain—what endless comfort an ease! No sorrow, no cloud, no night, no weariness, no bitterness, no anguish, no penitence, no remorse, no sighs, no tears, no sad laments, no broken hearts, no death bed scenes, and no dying will be there. We will never find a corpse, a coffin, a hearse, or a grave in all that happy, blissful land."

But of all that Bounds and others may say about heaven there is one thing that Jesus assures us, will excite believers most. We will see His glory. Look again at John 17:24

²⁴ "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

The word glory is used by Jesus often in this chapter and it has different meanings according to the context in which it is used. Here there can be no doubt about what Glory means for Jesus describes it. It is the glory that the Father has given the Son because of the father's overwhelming love for Him before the world was even created.

And the word glory here clearly means splendor, majesty, magnificence, excellence, brightness, absolute perfection, supremacy and whatever 'like' words you can come up with.

Jesus wants us to see and enjoy Him in all His triumphant majesty and awesome position and to do so as His friend—His brother or sister—His object of love and affection.

Some years ago one of Judy's Doctor brothers was nominated by the WA government for the honour of being chosen as Australian of the Year in the senior category. And although he didn't get the actual award I was really proud about his nomination and tried to drop that information into as many conversations as I could. I even thought that if he had been chosen I would have liked to be there wearing a badge that said—"He's my brother-in-law". Somehow wanting to share in his glory.

Well what Jesus wants for us is that we should be there to share in His glory. That the angels will point at us and say, 'that one belongs to Jesus'. They were purchased through His blood and they lived for Him on earth and now they are with Him, and the Father, and the Spirit, forever.

But of course there is another even greater reason why Jesus wants us to be with Him in heaven. He knows too, what the alternative is. Jesus spoke about hell even more than He spoke about heaven. In Mtt 10:28 He said:-

²⁸ Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

It's a terrible thought that there is in reality a place of eternal separation from God and all that is good, and many don't want to believe that or contemplate it. But I firmly accept that such is what the Bible teaches. And that is why Jesus came and gave His life upon the cross. Not to save us from

a figment of our imagination but from a peril that we cannot even begin to grasp.

This morning are you sure in your heart that you belong to Jesus. That you are one who, as the Scripture says, has believed in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead and confessed with your mouth that Jesus is indeed your Lord and Saviour. If you have any doubt about that then you need to talk to me or someone else, because where you spend eternity depends upon your relationship with God the Son.

And if you are confident that you will be with Jesus, then you need to be concerned about others. Concerned about those around you who need the rescue that Jesus offers.

We need to be prepared to pray more for others; reach out more to others with concern for their souls; and be constantly in tune with what God wants us to do with our lives for the Gospel.

There's the story of the little girl taking an evening walk with her father. Wonderingly, she looked up at the stars and exclaimed; "Oh, Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be!"

There is no doubt from what Jesus prayed, that the right side of heaven will be beautiful. Once there we will see Jesus in all His glory. As J Packer wrote:

No matter what life may throw at us, to those who have learned to love and trust Jesus, the prospect of meeting him face to face and being with him forever is the hope that keeps us going.

But as well as being the hope that keeps us going, it needs also to be the motivation that keeps us sharing our faith. Encouraging others to join us on our journey to life eternal. Stirring us to give all we can, do all we can, and endure all we can in Christ, to make sure that others also response to the call of glory.

