

Between Two Worlds: The Hope of Heaven

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. **When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**"
Colossians 3:1-4

Paul is combating the hyper-spiritualists or uber-spiritualists who downgraded the sufficiency and the work of Christ. These false teachers told the young church at Colossae that their acceptance before God was determined by: a harsh treatment of the body, angelic mediators or guides, and personal visions. But the end result of this type of "spirituality" was losing connection with "the head from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through the joints and ligaments, grows with the grow that is from God," Colossians 2:19.

In this section, Paul tells the church how they can continuously defeat the paralyzing effects of sin. This involves understanding our union with Christ and the hope of heaven.

"It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world (heaven) that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth "thrown in": aim at earth and you will get neither...Most of us find it very difficult to want "Heaven" at all-except in so far as "Heaven" means meeting again our friends who have died. One reason for this difficulty is that we have not been trained: our whole education tends to fix our minds on this world. Another reason is that when the real want for Heaven is present in us, we do not recognize it. Most people, if they had really learned to look into their own hearts, would know that they do want, and want acutely, something that cannot be had in this world."

Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis, 3-10

"When they need to stop acting as if Heaven were a myth, and an impossible dream, a relentlessly dull meeting, or an unimportant distraction from real life, we need to seek Heaven for what it is: the realm we're made for. If we do, we will embrace it with contagious joy, excitement, and anticipation...Anticipating Heaven doesn't eliminate pain, but it lessens it and puts it perspective. Meditating on Heaven is a great pain reliever. It reminds us that suffering and death-they are but a gateway to eternal life and unending joy."

Heaven, Randy Alcorn, pg. 459-460

"We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ... for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

1 Thessalonians 1:3, 9-10, NIV

Personal Longing and the Hope of Heaven:

1. The Fool's Way. -He puts the blame on the things themselves. He goes on all his life thinking that if only he tried another woman, or went for a more expensive holiday, or whatever it is, then, this time, he really would catch the mysterious something we are all after. Most of the bored, discontented, rich people in the world are of this type. They spend their whole lives trotting from woman to woman (through the divorce courts), from continent to continent, from hobby to hobby, always thinking that the latest is "the Real Thing" at last, and always disappointed.

2. The Way of the Disillusioned "Sensible Man."-He soon decides that the whole thing was moonshine. "Of course," he says, "one feels like that when one's young. But by the time you get to my age you've given up chasing the rainbow's end.". And so, he settles down and learns not to expect too much and represses the part of himself which used, as he would say, "to cry for the moon." This is, of course, a much better way than the first, and makes a man much happier, and less of a nuisance to society. It tends to make him a prig (he is apt to be rather superior towards what he calls "adolescents"), but, on the whole, he rubs along fairly comfortably.

3. The Christian Way-If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other; never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same. (Mere Christianity 3-10)

"God is the highest good of the reasonable creature. The enjoyment of him is our proper; and is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Better than fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of any, or all earthly friends. These are but shadows; but the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams; but God is the sun. These are but streams; but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean." The Works of Jonathan Edwards

Issues re heaven:

1. What is Heaven like?
2. Heaven/sanctification and the expectation gap this side of eternity.
3. "Don't let it get snowed under or turned aside."

Questions for Discussion:

1. What did C.S. Lewis mean when he wrote "Aim at Heaven and you will get earth "thrown in": aim at earth and you will get neither"?
2. How do we "expect too much in a fallen less than perfect world," how do we often settle for too little (as children of God who are filled with the Holy Spirit)?
3. How does the 80/20 rule in marriage (80% of the time our marriage will be good if not outstanding while 20% of the time there will be times of miscommunication and misunderstanding etc.) help us joyfully embrace life in the "already but not yet"?
4. What will Heaven be like?
5. How does the hope of Heaven take away the obliterating sting of death?

Biblical verses to meditate on and memorize for the month of November:

"He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit." Titus 3:5

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20