

The Mysteries of Heaven – Why Study Heaven? Sign Title: *Why Study Heaven?*

May 16, 2010

I would like to welcome you to Faith Evangelical Free Church. My name is Pastor Kurt and I am one of the pastors. If you are new, you came on the right Sunday. This morning we start our summer teaching series on heaven. Heaven is a topic people want to learn more about. For example:

The Discovery Channel featured a series about the ten greatest mysteries in the world. “The mysteries included the lost city of Atlantis, UFO’s, Bigfoot, Stonehenge, and the Loch Ness Monster. The overwhelming number one mystery audiences were interested in was life after death.”¹

The book *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn sold a hundred-thousand copies in its first months on the market.² Sounds like people are interested in the topic.

Current estimates are that over 90 million people die every year. That means on average, three people die every second, 180 every minute, 11,000 every hour. If the Bible is right, every day 250,000 people enter eternity in either heaven or hell.³ Since I started this message, almost 500 died on planet earth.

A Harris poll discovered 82 percent of Americans believe in heaven and 63 percent expect to go there when they die, yet Americans know very little about it. While Americans are wondering about heaven, many churches are not talking about it.⁴ When asked for details about heaven, most Christians shrug their

¹ Mark Hitchcock, *55 Answers to Questions about Life after Death* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2005), p.9.

² David Jeremiah, *Revealing the Mysteries of Heaven* (San Diego, CA: Turning Point Ministries, 2009), p.11.

³ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), p. xxi.

⁴ Cary McMullen, “Heaven: A Lot of Questions, But No One Really Knows the Answers,” *The Ledger*, 27 March 2005.

shoulders or describe clouds, harps, wings and a white robe. This doesn't make sense to me. After all God displayed incredible creative power in making this planet in only seven days, do you think heaven, which he has worked on for thousands of years, will be boring? It is not just our culture that is interested in heaven, but so is our church family.

I first realized how much interest we had in the topic of heaven when we briefly studied it in our Hebrews series. The message was titled, "One Breath Away." That message became the most requested messages of the entire fifty-two week series. As a church, we are hungry for details about heaven. Our culture is asking questions about heaven, so we are going to talk about it.

This morning, we are going to look at another reason to study heaven. God wants us to study it. The Bible has a lot to say about heaven and talks about it over 500 times. This morning, we will discover three reasons why God wants us to study our eternal home.

Life is brief, eternity is long.

When Billy Graham was in his nineties, he was asked in an interview what surprised him most about life. Without hesitation, he replied, "Its brevity." Life is short. It seems the older we get, the faster the time passes.

The Bible reminds us of how quickly time passes.

How frail is humanity! How short is life,... Job 14:1 (NLT)

You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. Psalm 39:5 (NIV)

For my days vanish like smoke; Psalm 102:3 (NIV)

The New Testament also remind us how quick life passes.

Your life is like the morning fog—it's here a little while, then it's gone. James 4:14 (NLT)

It is sobering to realize that as I speak, more than half my life may be gone. Where did it go? Unless the Lord returns, it is not just me, but my wife and three children that will also be lowered into ground in death as our earthly existence is snuffed out like a candle. Life is brief

Because life passes so quickly the Psalmist teaches us to pray we make wise use of our life.

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Psalm 90:12 (ESV)

Lord, remind me how brief my time on earth will be. Remind me that my days are numbered—how fleeting my life is. Psalm 39:4 (NLT)

Because life passes quickly, the Bible tells us to be careful about wasting our life. When the Bible talks about death, it talks about it to help us learn to live wisely, to help us live keeping our lives focused on eternity. When the Bible talks about being heavenly minded, it talks about heaven so we can do some earthly good.

One of the great and Godly minds of the previous century was the Puritan, Jonathan Edwards. He did incredible good for the fame of Christ and the joy of God's people. In keeping with the Puritan habit of writing resolutions when you are young to guide your life until you are old, Jonathan Edwards framed a number of resolutions. I want to share three with you. As I read them, what struck me is the common theme of life's brevity and the importance of living with our eyes on eternity.

- 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.⁵

Life passes quickly. Scripture is clear, how we live in this life will have everlasting ramifications for the next. You notice that I set Edwards resolutions so you can cut them out. Homework today is to cut them out and either paste them in your Bible or put them on your dinner table and, if possible, read them at family meals this week.

True significance doesn't come from a how large your bank account is when you die, though many of us will spend our entire lives trying to get the biggest one we can. I have never seen a hearse pulling a U-Haul to the grave. Unless we invest our resources for God's work, we leave it all behind. True significance only comes from knowing Jesus Christ, accepting him as the King of creation and the King of our life. Our identity with Jesus is the only thing that sustain us into eternity.

Let me show you the importance of keeping an eternal perspective. How many here know the first and last names of your maternal grandmother? How know the first and last names of your great grandmother? Your great great grandmother? Most people don't remember them. You will die and you will not just be dead, but even your memory will be forgotten.

⁵ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, pg. 5.

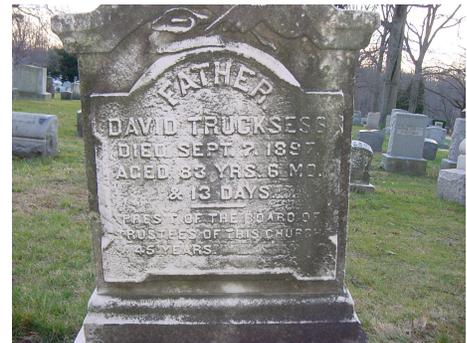
A few years ago my father took me to the Trucksess family grave yard behind a church in the Philadelphia area. It was weird walking among the dead where many of the headstones had my last name on it. We found the grave of the first Trucksess to come to America, seven generations ago. The original

David Trucksess. I learned a few things about my heritage. First of all, my roots are Presbyterian, I am sure Pastor Clint is glad to know that. Second, he was born in 1814 and died in 1897. Third, he was President of the board of trustees of the Presbyterian church he



was buried behind for 45 years. Apparently, he was quite a Godly man, but outside of this grave stone, his memory, money and significance are gone. As far as I know, this grave is the only imprint of his life that remains.

I have good news. According to the Bible, as a believer in Christ, the moment he closed his eyes on earth, he opened his eyes to see Christ and since then he is more alive now than he ever was in the 1800's.



By the way, approximately 1,500 people died since I began talking and opened up their spiritual eyes either to see Jesus or experience everlasting torment. Life is brief, eternity is long, prepare for what matters most.

Studying heaven relieves life's greatest fear.

If you are at a party, and you want to be left alone, start asking people what they think about death. It won't take long until people find someone else to talk to. While death is inevitable, nobody likes the subject. For those who don't know Christ and the good news of his forgiveness, death is a terrifying prospect. Consciences are plagued by the gnawing feeling there might be divine retribution for sin. While advocates of Euthanasia and abortion want us to believe we simply cease to exist, deep inside, each of us knows better.

he (God) has set eternity into man's heart. Ecclesiastes 3:11 (ESV)

The Bible is progressive revelation. That simply means that as time goes on God reveals more and more about himself, his plans for us and eternity. Since God had not revealed much about heaven, hell and eternity in the Old Testament, there was an expected fear of death that existed in that time.

The Psalmist called death a terror.

My heart is in anguish within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me. Psalm 55:4 (ESV)

Job called death the king of terrors.

the king of terrors Job 18:14 (ESV)

Even those who lived under the law were afraid of death. As we learned in the book of Hebrews, the day of Atonement was the holiest day of the Jewish year when all unintentional sin was atoned for. There was no sacrifice for intentional sin! People died in fear of the consequences of intentional sin.

The book of Hebrews tells us that while death is the greatest fear of life. Christ came to take away our fear of death.

and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. Hebrews 2:15 (ESV)

If you know Jesus Christ, know he came to take away the greatest fear you will ever face, the fear of death.

“Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” 1 Corinthians 15:55 (ESV)

Jesus Christ took the stinger out of death. Bible scholars tell us Paul was alluding to the lethal and excruciating sting of a scorpion. The good news is Christ extracted death’s stinger and removed the triumph of the grave. Because of what Christ accomplished on the cross, as Christians, we need not fear death. Christ rose from the dead, because of what he has done for us, we will also rise from the dead and our destiny is to be in heaven with Christ. For Christians, physical death is not the end, but the opening of our eyes to beginning of experiencing life and God in a fuller and fresher way.

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 (ESV)

What God prepared for us in the afterlife is beyond our imagination, beyond pictures and beyond words. But what was once unknown to the people of God in the Old Testament is revealed, by the Holy Spirit, to God’s apostles in the New Testament and it is recorded in the pages of Scripture for us. We can begin to see a little of the incredible things God has for us through Christ in the

New Testament Scriptures. Now, for Christians, death is an event we can anticipate with joy, not fear.

When the apostle John saw Christ in Revelations look how Jesus greeted him.

“Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. Revelation 1:18 (ESV)

In Jesus’ hands are the keys of death. Rather than a fearful thing, look how death is described for the Christian in the New Testament.

Death is a coming home.

Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. 2 Corinthians 6:8 (NLT)

Home represents a place of rest, security and acceptance. As much as Paul loved his earthly home, he knew that when he died, he would be in a place that was even more home, with the Lord.

In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? John 14:2 (ESV)

What a great thought! We are coming home to dad’s house and he is making a room ready for us!

Death is a departure.

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:23 (ESV)

The word *depart* here is used of a ship loosening its moorings to sail away from a dock. Paul desired to set sail for his true home in heaven but he felt he was still needed on earth but the longing for his heavenly home was tugging at

him. The phrase “with Christ” denotes a conscious, intimate, face-to-face fellowship with Jesus that Paul looked forward to experiencing.

By the way, since I began this message over 3,000 people passed into eternity. According to the Bible, it was either the realization of their greatest fear or it was the best moment of their life as they opened their eyes to a welcome home party of face to face with Jesus.

Studying heaven whets our appetite for life’s greatest joy.

Apple computer is a company adept at enticing the public. They recently released the iPad. Amazingly, they sold over a million iPads before the 3G wireless version was released to the public. Almost a million people bought the iPad before they touched the iPad.

How does a company do that? You build anticipation of joy. The more people knew about the iPad, the more people watched videos of one in use on Apple’s web site, the more than could imagine themselves with one. The more they wanted one. They were even willing to buy one, sight unseen.

God wants us to try heaven the same way. He tells us a lot about heaven in the Bible to whet our appetite for it and fuel our imaginations of what heaven is like. The more we know, the more we will long to be there and live wisely to invest for our greatest joy there.

When we lose sight that God is preparing a wonderful destination for those who are his, we will start trying to create heaven on earth. When we stop seeing the biblical heaven, we try creating an earthly one. The problem is we can never approximate on earth what God creates in heaven. If we do not feed

our hunger for heaven with Biblical truth, we will feed it with superficial trifles of this world.

Look with me what is in store for us in eternity.

Our relationships are in heaven.

But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” 2 Samuel 12:23 (ESV)

When David’s infant son died, he was sure he would see him again in heaven.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (ESV)

Those who have passed away in Christ are with the Lord. What a great feeling to know that when we die, we will be in heaven with our brothers and sisters who trusted Christ. Think about the incredible reunion that awaits us around the throne of Jesus. I will finally meet the living David Trucksess. Do you have anyone you are looking forward to meeting?

Our inheritance is in heaven.

to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 1 Peter 1:4 (ESV)

This inheritance cannot lose value, like the stock market. It cannot rust, like your favorite car, it will not fade like the gel coat on your boat. It is an inheritance that will endure in value and last forever. What is this inheritance like? Part of it is described as...

Every spiritual blessing is ours in heaven.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,.. to the praise of his glorious grace. Ephesians 1:3, 6

We have every spiritual blessing in heaven. What does that mean? This text in Ephesians doesn't detail all the spiritual blessings we have but it tells us we are adopted brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ through the forgiveness obtained for us through Christ. Part of our purpose in eternity it to be *for the praise of God's glorious grace*. While we deserve the same wrath and punishment prepared for the devil and his angels, instead we receive incomprehensible mercy through Christ. In heaven, we are the poster children for every other spiritual and physical being of God's creation of just how lavishly loving forgiving and merciful God can be. In heaven, through Christ, we are the recipients of the grandest display of God's mercy and love that has ever been expressed in the universe.

If you think real happiness and joy is found in this world, you got another thing coming. Nothing can approximate the joy of enjoying God's glorious grace for eternity.

and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2:6-7 (ESV)

The term *seated* here means to joined together like you join a group sitting around a camp fire. It is the same term used to describe Peter sitting around the camp fire when Jesus was in the court of the high priest. We are seated *with*

Christ in the heavenly places. We are grandest display of God's immeasurable love and kindness through Jesus.

By the way over 5,000 have entered eternity since I began talking. Death is either the realization of our greatest joys or our greatest fears.

Conclusion

One thing is clear in the Bible. The only way anyone is in heaven is through Jesus. Nobody will be in heaven unless Jesus is their savior, their king and their joy. If you have not done that, why don't you do so right now? Heaven is not a place you want to miss.

Prayer

Heavenly father, I ask your son's death on the cross to pay for my sin. There is a lot I don't know about heaven, but I know enough to want to be there. I ask Jesus to be my savior for sin, the king in charge of my life and the joy in my heart. Amen.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the EFCA. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics of study are ancient rhetoric and preaching.

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