

Alderwood Community Church
July 10, 2016

GOD IS: THE DOCTRINE OF GOD (GOD REWARDS)

It's Not about Now! (Part 2)

Matthew 6:19-24; Luke 16:1-13

Intro: Far Side Cartoon of man sitting on a cloud...*wish I'd brought a magazine*

Gary Larson captured a common misperception of Heaven.. this man has angel wings and a halo sitting on a cloud, doing nothing, with no one nearby. He has the expression of someone marooned on a desert island with absolutely nothing to do. A caption shows his inner thoughts: "*Wish I'd brought a magazine.*"

"An overwhelming majority of Americans continue to believe that there is life after death and that heaven and hell exist," according to a Barna Research Group poll. But what people actually believe about Heaven and Hell varies widely. A Barna spokesman said, "*They're cutting and pasting religious views from a variety of different sources – television, movies, conversations with their friends.*" The result is a highly subjective theology of the afterlife, disconnected from the biblical doctrine of Heaven.

Our fascination with heaven:

The sense that we will live forever somewhere has shaped every civilization in human history. Australian aborigines pictured Heaven as a distant island beyond the western horizon. The early Finns thought it was an island in the faraway east. Mexicans, Peruvians, and Polynesians believed that they went to the sun or the moon after death. Native Americans believed that in the afterlife their spirits would hunt the spirits of buffalo. The *Gilgamesh epic*, an ancient Babylonian legend, refers to a resting place of heroes and hints at a tree of life. In the pyramids of Egypt, the embalmed bodies had maps placed beside them as guides to the future world. The Romans believed that the righteous would picnic in the Elysian fields while their horses grazed nearby. Seneca, the Roman philosopher, said, "The day thou fearest as the last is the birthday of eternity." Although each description is different, the unifying testimony of the human heart throughout history is belief in life after death. Anthropological evidence suggests that every culture has a God-given, innate sense of the eternal- that this world is not all there is.

The Roman catacombs, where the bodies of many martyred Christians were buried, contain tombs with inscriptions such as: "In Christ, Alexander is not dead, but lives." "One who lives with God."

One historian writes, "Pictures on the catacomb walls portray Heaven with beautiful landscapes, children playing, and people feasting at banquets."

In AD 125, a Greek names Aristides wrote to a friend about Christianity, explaining 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 thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another.”

These early Christian perspectives were rooted in the Scriptures, where the apostle Paul writes, *“To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain...I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.”* Philippians 1:21, 23 He also wrote, *“As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord... We...would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”* 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8

Heaven! The very word is synonymous with beauty, comfort, peace, satisfaction, and contentment. The adjectival form is often used to describe something wonderful, as in “The view on top of Hurricane Ridge is heavenly.”

But heaven is far more than an adjective or an attitude. It is a place, a real place, where God dwells, where Jesus is at his right side, where the saints of the past currently dwell and where all believers will go after they die.

When Jesus told his disciples, *“In my Father’s house are many rooms...I am going to prepare a place for you,”* he deliberately chose common, physical terms (house, rooms, place) to describe where he was going and what he was preparing for us. He wanted to give his disciples (and us) something tangible to look forward to- an actual place where they (and we) would go to be with him.

This place is not an ethereal realm of disembodied spirits, because human beings are not suited for such a realm. A place is by nature physical, just as human beings are by nature physical. (We are also spiritual.) What we are suited for- what we’ve been specifically designed for- is a place like the one God made for us. Earth.

God never gave up on his original plan for human beings to dwell on Earth. In fact, the climax of history will be the creation of new heavens and a New Earth, a resurrected universe inhabited by resurrected people living with the resurrected Jesus.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’”

Revelation 21:1-5

What will heaven be like?

Discussions about heaven tend to be either hyper-imaginative or utterly unimaginative. Bible believers tend to be unimaginative. What we need is a biblically inspired imagination.

The capital of Heaven will be the new Jerusalem described in Revelation 21. It will be a city with all the vibrancy, interdependence and relationships of a city – one without crime, racism, smog, sirens, or poverty. Christ promised we would eat and drink with him, along with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and a host of others (Matt. 8:11). We will meet and converse with other inhabitants of heaven, with men like Noah, Abraham, Joseph, David, Paul, the Apostles of Jesus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, George Mueller, C.S. Lewis and your family and friends who have preceded you there.

While heaven will be a place of much needed rest to the weary (Rev. 14:13), heaven will offer activity and productivity like Adam and Eve's work in Eden before sin brought the curse on the ground. In heaven we're told, *"his servants will serve him"* (Rev. 22:3). This means we'll be active, because "to serve" means to have work and expend effort, to do something. Service includes responsibilities, duties, effort, planning and creativity to do work well. God will surely not give us less creativity in heaven but more, unmarred by sin, unlimited by mortality. We will compose, write, paint, carve, build, plant, grow, and play softball.

Christ will be the focus of all. Worship will be sweet and we'll be overcome by God's magnificence and glory. We will experience the greatest joy. Our worship will include singing and words of adoration as well as all of our activity and creativity as we "do things" and "serve him with our efforts." We will exercise authority in heaven and reign with him. Reigning implies specific delegated responsibilities for those under our leadership (Luke 19:17-19). We'll rule over the world and even over angels (1 Cor. 6:2-3)

And get this, Murphy's law will finally be nullified. In heaven, whatever might go wrong, can't! There will be no more sin. No more wars, fighting, quarrels, divorce or bitterness. *"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain."* No hospitals, No cemeteries. No evil. No fear. No abuse, rape or murder, drugs, drunkenness, bombs, guns or terrorism. Heaven will be a place of perfect peace and of relentless joy.

Think with me for a moment about the pleasures of heaven.

"You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." Psalm 16:11

How do we experience the pleasures that God has given us in this life to enjoy? Through our senses. Think of the most beautiful sights you have experienced in this life. Heaven is described as a place of breath-taking beauty. It will surpass anything in this life. Senses, emotions, relationships... imagine it.

The best of our spiritual experiences here are only small samples of heaven. The sweetest fellowship with other believers, the most incredible joys that we experience, the most transcendent moments of worship where we are so touched that we literally “feel” the presence of the Lord and our hearts are warmed, are simply a taste of what is to come.

We cannot anticipate or desire what we cannot imagine. What we need is a biblically inspired imagination. We should ask God’s help to remove the blinders of our preconceived ideas about Heaven so we can understand Scripture. We should pray as the Psalmist in Psalm 119:18 “*Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.*”

James reminds us that in this life, “*Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights...*” James 1:17

Yet Paul tells us about God’s goodness and grace in the life to come, “*And God raised us up and seated us in with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.*” Ephesians 2:6-7

Imagine what our relationships will be like without sin.

Last week we discussed: (See notes from July 3 sermon)

1. God promises to reward his children.

Our choices on earth have direct consequence on our life in heaven.
Jesus will reward you in heaven for what you do for him on earth.

2. What does God reward?

- A. God will reward you for seeking him.
- B. God will reward you for submitting to your employer as a faithful servant.

****Pick up here****

- C. God will reward you for serving those in need in his name.

“Jesus said to his host, ‘When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.’” Luke 14:12-13

D. God will reward you for suffering for his name and reputation.

“Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets.” Luke 6:22-23

E. God will reward you for sacrifices you make for him.

“But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.” Luke 6:35-36

“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.” Matt19:29

F. God will reward you for sharing your money and resources to further his kingdom.

“So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.” Matthew 6:2-4

***Open your Bibles to Matthew 6:19-24**

Observations:

1. What is our treasure? While we all value and treasure our family and the significant people in our lives the text is talking about our money our resources. Vrs. 24 You cannot serve God and money.
2. Notice the two-fold command: Do not store up...store up. Storing up or laying up treasure in heaven is God's idea and he commands us to do it. It is a matter of obedience. But it is also a matter of wisdom. He is saying, don't be a fool. Don't horde and stock pile treasure on earth, because after all, it is going to be destroyed or stolen or given to someone else. A wise person invests in heaven. There is a sure reward and a higher yield.
3. Who should you lay it up for? “*Yourselves*”. This seems contradictory to the rest of the NT. Here Jesus is instructing his followers to literally “stock pile” treasures in heaven. Here is the irony. You literally “stock pile” treasure in heaven by giving it away to others as God directs you on earth. When we give to the poor, when we give to brothers and sisters in need, when we give to advance the gospel, we are literally “sending it on ahead.” We are investing in heaven. We'll see that in Luke 12 in just a moment.

4. Where should you lay up your treasures? “*in heaven*” Location matters Jesus is not against storing up treasures- in fact he commands us to store up treasures – he is saying, stop storing them in the wrong place. Jesus is saying that treasures on earth are a poor investment – they cannot escape the coming fire of God at the judgment day and will be consumed with the rest of the world.

You may be thinking, but why would treasure matter to me in heaven? We have to conclude from Jesus’ dramatic statements here and elsewhere that treasure will matter greatly to us when we get there. In God’s kingdom, when the sinful pull of greed, envy and manipulation is absent, we will enjoy our treasure and it will serve a pure and meaningful purpose.

“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Luke 12:33-34

You see here that we are told specifically what laying up treasure in heaven means. Here it is giving to the poor. When we give of our earthly treasures now to take care of the poor, we are actually providing for ourselves something valuable in heaven. Jesus understands what we do not, and that is that treasure will matter to us in eternity and he wants us to have a lot of it there.

5. We also learn that these treasures in heaven will last forever. They aren’t temporary gifts.

Look again at the words in Luke 12, “*a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted.*”

Not only is heavenly treasure not subject to thieves and moths, not only will the heavenly money belt (purses) not wear out, but these treasures in heaven will not be exhausted. They can be used in heaven without ever being used up. These eternal rewards are themselves eternal, imperishable and inexhaustible. That means these are gifts that will keep on giving, and giving all throughout eternity.

When it comes to rewards, treasures, crowns and other promises of what we will receive in heaven, we make a mistake by assuming we will simply lay them all at Jesus feet and that will be the end of them. We base that on a passage in Revelation 4:10 that describes the 24 elders who humbly bow before God’s throne and lay their crowns before him as they worship him. In verse 4 we are told that each of these elders sat on their own throne. Their act of taking off their crown and laying it on the ground before the ultimate king, the Lord God almighty was an act of submission and nowhere does the text indicate they left them there. And besides, what they did, does not mean that everyone else has to or will do the same thing.

In heaven we will not all have the same experience. We will not all have the same level of responsibility (ruling) or the same amount of treasure or rewards. Those who serve faithfully, do good works for Christ and give away their resources to the poor, needy brothers and sisters and to advance the gospel will have more crowns (responsibilities), treasures and rewards in heaven than those who are disobedient, preoccupied with material possessions and pleasure and are selfish with their resources.

Illus: There is a moving scene at the end of Steven Spielberg's movie *Schindler's List* where Oscar Schindler, the Polish Businessman who used a portion of his fortune to put the names of Jews on a work list that would keep them from going to concentration camps. As he looks into the faces of those who escaped certain death because of his action, he has a moment of clarity. Talking with his friend he says, "*If only there could be more. If only I could have done more.*" His friend says, "*There are 1100 people here. There are generations here because of what you have done.*" But Schindler says, "*It could have been more. That car – I could have sold it and it would have meant 10 more people. Then more people on that list. Ten more lives saved.*" He ripped the swastika pin from his lapel and says, "*This pin! It's gold! That's two more people. At least one person this pin could have been.*"

So we need moments of clarity to realize the difference between what we value on this earth and what is valuable in eternity. My prayer is that at the end of my life and yours, none of us will have regrets and wish we had done more. From this day forward. We cannot change the past. We should learn from it. But from this day forward, let's live our lives in such a way that we are setting "*our minds on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.*" (Col. 3:1)

Resources:

Heaven by Randy Alcorn

The Law of Rewards by Randy Alcorn

The Life God Rewards by Bruce Wilkinson