

Sermon Text for November 13, 2022

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Colossians 3:1-4, Matthew 6:19-21

“Heaven clarified”

Last week we got some clarity on heaven. We looked at Revelation which describes the walls being priceless jewels, each gate being a pearl, the streets of translucent gold. It isn't a fairy tale, the Bible actually gives us this physical description. But we also said that the point of understanding heaven is not what it looks like but rather what will it be. We said that the most important aspect of heaven is Emmanuel, God is with us, that's the most important aspect of heaven. It is interesting because not long ago we heard a sermon on nothing can separate us from God and here I am today and last week again emphasizing this truth that in heaven, and on earth, God is with us. This presence of God in our lives is the most important concept that we can understand. If you don't get anything else about your walk with Jesus, if you get at least that God is with you, well, that's the strongest foundation upon which to build.

But you are curious about heaven. Last week just scratched the surface. At Bible Study on Thursday somehow the floodgates opened and we weren't able to get out of our study in time without me basically cutting it off. People wanted to know because we have a lot of ideas about heaven and the vast majority of those ideas are based upon our feelings and our sanctified imaginations and not on Scripture. We like to base our beliefs on Scripture. Today we are going to address some of the questions that were raised at the Bible study as well as look at our two Scriptures which address another consistent theme. The questions that were raised were: can you talk to your loved ones who have died, will we know each other in heaven, can you pray to Mary and the saints, what about our pets, what is purgatory and what role does that play in heaven.

Both of our Scriptures for today address heaven by telling us that we are not to focus on the things of the earth but rather concentrate while we are on the earth on that which is eternal, or in heaven. Don't pile up treasures here on earth while disregarding and overlooking the eternal things. Our call is to ensure that our time, our efforts, our thoughts and energies are directed to the kingdom of God and not to this earthly realm.

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Last week we looked at heaven identified and we said last week that we would probably have more questions after last week than we did going into it. So this week we are going to look at heaven clarified starting with Colossians 3. Look at vs.2 and this is going to be our Scriptural

theme for today before we get into a shotgun approach of answering the questions about heaven that were raised in Bible Study and which I assume many of you have as well. Look at vs.2 in Colossians which commands us: “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”

As you read this passage it becomes very clear that each and every single one of us has been claimed by Christ. In Jesus we find our value and in Jesus we find our worth. If you walked in here this morning and were questioning your value, your purpose, your worth, if someone at some time in your life said you had no value, I am here to tell you this is a lie. You can't find your value in your job, in your family, in your ability to please or be pleased, how much you have. Your value comes from Jesus who says I love you so much that I will never leave you or forsake you. When you set your minds on Jesus, this I setting your mind on heavenly things that have an ultimate reward and that no one can mess with.

It is twisted how we assess value here on this earth. Think about it. I heard a story on NPR the other day about if we do get to the place where carbon energy is going to decrease exponentially, so if we continue to move in the direction where oil and gas usage declines to the point where it is fairly insignificant, then that means that those OPEC countries, those countries which are wealthy now and call the shots are going to be left with something that has very little value. While those countries that are involved in the mining and production of lithium, which tend to be very poor African countries, will become the new OPEC and the value of what is being generated out of their countries will all of a sudden increase to the level of where Saudi Arabia and those other countries are today.

What we value on earth changes and is fickle. Another example of that is this crypto currency where within a week FTX and that which was valued in the billions of dollars has overnight gone to zero. What we value one day becomes disposable the next. What we read in Scripture is that in heaven no one thing has more value than anything else. The streets of gold that are described sound incredibly valuable to us here on this earth, because gold is important to us, but in heaven, no thing has value, no person has more than anyone else. Think about that. Every single person in heaven will be the same, you won't be more important than anyone else and you won't be any less important than anyone else. That is what it is supposed to be here on earth, but it isn't, but it will be in heaven.

On earth our value is measured in what kind of treasures we possess. One of the most unique characteristics of humans is that we like to collect things just for the sake of collecting.

They are necessary for our survival. Squirrels like to collect acorns but not so that they can put them on their shelf at home and say isn't that a beautiful acorn. No, animals collect things so that they can then eat them or use them. We just collect because, well, we like to collect things. Our family collects bells. We try to buy a little bell in every country where we have lived or spent some significant time. Not just a flyover in the airport. I counted 13 bells yesterday, we had 12 but then we just added one from Iceland. We collect nativity sets because each culture portrays the birth of Jesus in a different way and that is important to me.

Paul Allen one of the original founders of Microsoft he like to collect art. His private art collection just sold for nearly 2 billion dollars. The value of these assets here on this earth are staggering. In a larger context people are judged and even valued based upon what we have collected and specifically what treasures we possess. But our worth, Jesus says, is not the value of our earthly treasures but what we have done to advance God's kingdom. Then it becomes less important how much money we have and more important how much we have reached out to the poor and the needy with the saving knowledge of Jesus and the material help that we can.

Go to our Matthew Scripture. We find ourselves right in the middle of the sermon on the mount. This is significant. We have said before that if you want to know who to vote for then look for that person who most exemplifies the teachings of Jesus on the sermon on the mount. In these chapters in Matthew our Savior lays out for us a moral code that is grounded not on earning our salvation but striving to instill the kingdom of God out of a response to a gratitude based upon a salvation of grace. Jesus' question to us today is are we putting our time and our effort into that which is eternal?

The treasures of earth are subject to the fickleness of a lived life. The treasures of heaven are subjected to the constancy of a loved life. Your goal, or what you consider important will determine your activity and your commitment. If you are striving using the philosophy of the one who dies with the most toys wins, well, that is not going to make you happy and it certainly is not going to put you in the quadrant of a Jesus follower. Without a doubt that is putting your mind on earthly things, not heavenly things. Hear the words of I Peter 1:3-4 and follow this example: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you." That's our hope.

I need to cover some random topics that came up in the Bible Study just so that you can experience what I understand as a biblical perspective on heaven and things of heaven. The question came up someone said I find myself sometimes during the day talking to my dad or my mom or a loved one who has passed and it provides me with great comfort. Is that okay? If you are anything like me I will periodically talk to myself from time to time and psychologically it helps me focus it helps me to accomplish a task that is before me. There are times when I acutely miss my dad who is no longer around. I will even say I wish you were here dad so that you could help me decide on whatever it might be because he was wise and he knew things of the church and he was good at things of the church.

There is nothing wrong in missing your loved ones. But if you are speaking to them in a way that you want them to intervene and affect the present and bring about some change. If you are praying to them so that they will answer, no, that is not okay, the dead have no power over you or over things of this earth. You are praying and speaking to the wind. But I understand the sharp pain of not having a loved one around, that is okay, that is normal. But only Jesus is able to intervene in our lives to affect change.

In a similar way the question came up regarding Mary and the saints and is it okay to pray to them. Let's start out by being clear that the Roman Catholic and the Orthodox Churches are Christian churches. They are not a different religion, they are brothers and sisters in Christ. But we are different. Praying to Mary and the saints is seen as a window of accessibility to God, an intermediary between us and Jesus and also Mary and the saints, or venerating the icons is understood as being much more accessible and something that we as common people can relate to. So there is a belief in these Christian churches that as a window to God they help our faith and they help our walk. We do not believe that. We believe that there is nothing that exists which is more accessible than Jesus himself. We don't need an intermediary between us and God because Jesus himself is God. He is well within our reach and he died on the cross exactly for the purpose of us not needing anyone or anything between us and God. Jesus is common enough for us common folk.

Will we know our loved ones in heaven? If you want to read on your own time, this is where you can take a note in that note section of your bulletin, Luke 16:19-31 where Jesus tells the parable of an evil rich man who goes to hell and asks a righteous poor man who is in heaven to serve him. They recognize each other and God denies him the ability to reach out to him for help. He then asks for the righteous poor man in heaven to go to his family on earth to warn

them to be more righteous but that is also denied. Beyond a shadow of a doubt I believe we will know each other and love each other in heaven.

What if someone is married 7 times when they get to heaven whose spouse will they be? You can go to Matthew 22:23-33 and you see that there is no marriage in heaven. But what is more, and this is what is important about this, we will all be completely satisfied without that civic earthly claim. All that is good will be present in heaven. We saw that last week. There is no pain, no crying, no divorce, no anger, no resentment, no quiet treatment. Whatever spouses do to each other to get back at each other, that won't happen in heaven, you will be the perfect wife and you will be the perfect husband. Now, you don't have to wait until you get to heaven to strive to be that, but that is what it will be like in heaven. We will be with the ones we love and only experience the love that we have for each other.

What about pets? If you look at Ecclesiastes 3:20 we read that at the end of the day both humans and pets end up physically in the same place: "All go to one place; all are from the dust and all turn to dust again." But there is a question mark there for it states in vs.21 the question: "Who knows whether the human spirit goes upward and the spirit of animals goes downward to earth?" Where there is a question mark it leave room for us to be creative but to claim that creativity as our own and not as being blessed by God. So, if you want to believe that animals are in heaven, you can, but you can't back it up with Scripture. The statement who knows, leaves room for imagination but not room for Scriptural truth.

That's a lot about heaven, remember the most important truth that we know about heaven is Emmanuel, God is with us. The most important truth about heaven which impacts us here on earth, is that we ought to spend our time focusing on that which is about the kingdom of God and not about collecting those things that when we die will be meaningless. Let me leave you with I Corinthians 2:9 – "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him." We don't know, but we do know Emmanuel and so our lives ought to be a reflection of the grace that we experience on a daily basis. Amen.