

Why Focus On Heaven?

HEAVEN #1 – Pastor Gary Combs – April 14, 2024 – Colossians 3:1-4

INTRO: Good morning church! We're beginning a new 6-week sermon series today entitled: "HEAVEN: It's Better Than You Ever Imagined."

Vision: But before we begin, I want to talk to you about God's faithfulness on Easter Sunday. Had it not been for the faithfulness of God to give us a vision and for the faithfulness of God's people to give towards that vision to Rise Up and make room for more to come as they are and be forever changed by the love of Jesus, there would have been many people who could not have attended services here on Easter Sunday. We had so many at both services that without the Gathering Place, we would've had to turn people away. We think this is a sign of things to come. Our church is growing. And we want to thank God for His faithfulness and challenge ourselves to continue being faithful to Jesus and to our ministry in the city! Yay God!

Now, back to our sermon, the next 6 weeks we hope to address questions like: "What's heaven like?, Will we know one another in heaven?, What will we be doing in heaven? (I had a member of my CG pull me aside when he heard about this series to ask, "Will heaven be like a long worship service?" I could tell by his tone he was worried about that. Like church is great, but an eternal worship service?!? Thousands of years wearing white robes, playing harps and floating on clouds surrounded by fat, flying, baby angels. Actually, that may have been a TV ad by Angel Soft toilet tissue. ;) So we're going to look at what the Bible really says about the activity of heaven.)

We'll discuss questions like: Who goes to heaven? (I heard Dr. David Jeremiah tell a funny story about this question. A Sunday school teacher was trying to teach her 5th graders about heaven. Quizzing them she asked, "If I sold everything I owned and gave it to the church, would that get me into heaven?" The class yelled, "No!" "Well if I cleaned my house everyday, mowed the yard and planted flowers would that?" "No!" "What if I was kind to animals and loved everyone, would that?" "No!" "Well then how can I get to heaven?" Then a little boy that was new shouted from the back, "You have to be dead!" — The truth is that everyone faces death. The death rate is 100%!

That leads to more questions like: "Do Christians immediately go to heaven when they die?, What kind of body will we have in heaven?, What about hell?, What about the near death experiences people have reported about visiting heaven? What about the new heaven and the new earth? And so on...

So over the next 6 Sundays, we have a lot to cover concerning heaven. But today we want to get started by answering, "**Why Focus On Heaven?**" Why should we as Christians seek after it, desire it, set our hearts and minds on heaven? Why indeed?

ILL: As the late the sci-fi author, well known atheist, and professor of biochemistry, Isaac Asimov once said: "I don't believe in an afterlife, so I don't have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse." — Issac Asimov (1920-1992)

Or as the brilliant British physicist and atheist, Stephen Hawking said, "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail... There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark." — Stephen Hawking (1942-2018)

Sadly, neither of these brilliant men had any knowledge or faith in what God has revealed about heaven. If they had, it would've changed the way they lived and thought here and it would've changed the eternal destiny they're experiencing now.

Need: And just as sadly, it's not just atheists and agnostics who doubt and know nothing of heaven. Many Christians today seem to doubt and know nothing of heaven either. What about you? What do you know about heaven? What do you believe about it? Are you focused on heaven?

ILL: I've been focused on heaven since I was 8 years old when my dad died. I had two questions for the preacher: 1) Where is my daddy now? 2) Can he see me? Preacher Fred Potter replied, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord" (2 Cor. 5:8) and "Today, you will be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). Your daddy is with Jesus in heaven. And then he told me about the "great cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1) who watch us run life's race and said, "Yes, I think your daddy can see you. I don't how much he sees, but he is able to witness how you run life's race for Jesus." **Trans:** Now I'm 65 and I'm more focused on heaven than ever before!

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BODY: In the apostle Paul's letter to the Colossians, he called believers to focus their hearts and minds on heaven. We are called to focus our hearts and minds on heaven. Why are we to focus on heaven? The text gives **three reasons** to focus on heaven.

Today's text: Colossians 3:1-4 (ESV) ¹ If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

WHY FOCUS ON HEAVEN?

1. Because we are called to seek it.

EXP: (1) Circle the word "seek." Since you are raised with Christ, seek after, desire, delight in the things of heaven where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

"If then" (1) (Εἰ οὖν, *ei oun*) - If - then, therefore, accordingly, consequently, these things being so.

"Seek" (1) (ζητέω, *zēteō*) (PAM) - to seek [in order to find out] by thinking, meditating, reasoning, to enquire into; strive after, to crave, to desire after. In the present tense implying continuous action.

"Things that are above" (1-2) (ἄνω, *anō*) - up, upwards, above, on high, of heaven. Strive for, seek after heavenly things where Christ is. What are these "things?" They are things related to Christ's rule.

"Right hand of God" (1) - "The command called the Colossians to focus on matters related to the rule of Christ in the world. Since he is the sovereign one, his concerns should occupy the Christian... Believers' values and loves were to be focused on the rule of Christ, and consecrated energies were to be devoted to making that rule a reality on earth" (Melick, *NAC* #32, p.281).

ARG: **We are to seek after heaven first and trust the Lord for our earthly needs.**

Matthew 6:33 (ESV) But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

"Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither." — C.S. Lewis

But some say, "Doesn't the Bible say heaven is beyond our imagination?" No. Read the whole.

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 (NKJV) ⁹ But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"— ¹⁰ these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit...

The prominence of "heaven" in the Bible: The word "heaven" or "heavens" is in the ESV 692 times; 426 in the OT and 266 in the NT. Psalms has the most in the OT with 76 occurrences. Matthew has the most in the NT with 75 and Revelation has the second most in the NT with 46.

ILL: How did Jesus teach his disciples to pray? "Matthew 6:9-10 (KJV) Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven..."

APP: Seeking the things of heaven means praying and doing all things to bring them into alignment with heaven's rule under King Jesus. It means organizing your life, your time, talent and treasure in such a way that they are focused on our future in heaven and taking as many with us as we can.

2. Because it's where Christ our true home is.

EXP: (1) Keep looking at v.1. Notice the word "where." Where is heaven? It's where Christ is. And wherever Christ our Lord is, that's our true home! We've mentioned that heaven is in the Bible 692 times. In the OT, it's "שָׁמַיִם, *šhāmayim*," which means lofty, high and above, up. In the NT, it's "οὐρανός, *ouranos*," which means the same. It's the same as the name of the 8th planet, Uranus. Both these words are translated "heaven" in the Bible, but they may be used to describe three different heavenly realms. Let's look at this account of Paul's visit to the "third heaven." What does Paul mean?

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2 Corinthians 12:2-3 (ESV) ² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the **third heaven**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into **paradise**—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—

1st heaven (atmospheric heaven): Genesis 1:20 (ESV) And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the **heavens**.”

2nd heaven (stellar heaven): Genesis 1:15 (ESV) And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the **heavens** to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years

3rd heaven (paradise, present heaven): The word “paradise” is in the NT 3 times: 1) 2 Cor. 12:2-3, as we already read, 2) Luke 23:43 when Jesus promised the criminal on the cross and 3) Rev. 2:7 when Jesus described it in His letter to the church at Ephesus:

Revelation 2:7 (ESV) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the **paradise** of God.’

Paradise - lit., “a planted garden.” Of the “garden of Eden” which God planted (Gen. 2:8). Now, a description of present heaven, which is where God’s throne, Christ, the angelic host and all the saints of God now dwell. Also, the current location of the “tree of life,” which God “placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard” (Gen. 3:24) after man’s fall. Consider the arc of the Bible: In the 1st two chapters of Genesis, God creates and communes in paradise with man, then in the last two chapters of Revelation, God creates a new earth and a new heaven and dwells with man.

ARG: Heaven is a real place, a prepared place, it’s our future home in the Father’s house.

John 14:1-3 (NKJV) ¹ “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. ² In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.

It’s the home for which your heart longs.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God’s work from beginning to end.

“If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world.” — C.S. Lewis

ILL: When I visit my family home, it’s not the same. My mother isn’t there.

APP: Have you felt this longing for home, your true home? For Christ is our true home and where is He? He is in heaven.

3. Because we are called to set our minds on it.

EXP: (2-3) Notice the phrase “set your mind on things above.” Why? Because your true “life” is already “hidden” there “with Christ in God.”

“Set your minds” (2) (φρονέω, *phroneō*) (PAM) - to interest oneself in, to feel, to think; to direct one’s mind to a thing, to seek, to strive for. To be heavenly minded. “Set your affection” (KJV).

“Not on things on earth” (2) (γῆ, *gē*) - the earth as opposed to heaven. Not on “worldly” or temporal things. We’re not to be preoccupied and anxious about worldly matters.

“For you have died” (3) (ἀποθνῆσκω, *apothnēskō*) - of the natural death of man; to perish by means of something. The old man is dead, the new has come

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“Your life is hidden” (3) (κρύπτω, *kruptō*) - to hide, conceal, to be hid; escape notice; metaphor to conceal (that it may not become known); like encrypted.

ARG: Those who set their minds on the things above, or of the Spirit, experience life and peace now.

Romans 8:5-6 (ESV) ⁵ For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶ For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.

“Heaven is more than a destination; it is a motivation. Knowing that we shall dwell in the heavenly city ought to make a difference in our lives here and now.” — Warren W. Wiersbe

Setting our minds on heaven means living like strangers and exiles here. (Note the names for heaven here: a homeland, a better country, a city)

Hebrews 11:13-16 (ESV) ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

This means having the wisdom to “number our days,” knowing they are short, making them count.

Psalms 90:10-12 (NIV) Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away... Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

ILL: We recently had to “set” our clocks to DST. When I’m headed to a foreign land, I usually “set” my time to their time in advance to start preparing myself for arrival.

APP: Have you the wisdom to number your days? What time is your mind and heart set to? Worldly time or heavenly time?

4. Because it’s where our true and future life is.

EXP: (4) “When Christ... appears” - This is either Christ’s rapture of the Church or His Second Coming. But Paul’s point here is that our real life, which is now hidden, will on that Day be revealed, made manifest!

“Life” (4) (ζωή, *zōē*) - life real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, abundant (as in John 10:10).

“Appear” (4) (φανερόω, *phaneroō*) - to make manifest or visible or known what has been hidden or unknown, to manifest, whether by words, or deeds, or in any other way.

“Glory” (4) (δόξα, *doxa*) - splendor, brightness, magnificence, excellence. We will share His glory.

ARG: What we’re becoming is hidden now, but will soon be revealed. We will be like Jesus!

1 John 3:2 (NLT) Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.

ILL: David Jeremiah calls us to consider how precious heaven is. He says first, “our Redeemer is in heaven. Then our relationships, our loved ones are in heaven. Our riches and reward is in heaven. But most importantly, our reservation is in heaven!”

Revelation 21:27 (ESV) But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

APP: Do you have a reservation? Is your name in the Lamb’s book of life? God is still accepting reservations.

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CONCLUSION: Will you decide today to get your focus on heaven? What's the way to heaven? There's only one way. After Jesus told His disciples about going to prepare a place for them in heaven, He said, "You know the way to where I am going" (John 14:4). But Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? And Jesus answered,

John 14:6 (ESV) Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

There's a hymn my mother used to sing entitled, *I'm Bound for That City* by Jack Brumley. She recorded it on her solo album in the late '70s. I can hear her voice singing it now...

I'M BOUND FOR THAT CITY

There's a city of light where there cometh no night
for the sun never sets in the sky
In the bible we're told that the streets are pure gold
and a cool gentle river runs by

I'm bound for that city, God's holy white city, oh yes I am
I'll never turn back to this world anymore any more
No matter how rough may be the way
No matter how oft I stop to pray
I'm bound for that city on that evergreen shore

Have you given your life to Jesus? Do you have your reservation? Are you bound for that city?

Let's pray.