


What Must We Do to Prepare for Eternity?

HEAVEN #6 – Pastor Gary Combs – May 19, 2024 – John 6:25-40

INTRO: Good morning church! We're concluding our 6-week sermon series entitled: "HEAVEN: It's Better Than You Ever Imagined." In today's sermon, we will be asking, "What Must We Do to Prepare for Eternity?"

We learned in our first sermon, "Why Focus On Heaven," that God's Word calls us to "Seek and set our hearts and minds on the things of heaven." Then we talked about "What's Heaven Like?" and we learned that believers in heaven are: With Christ, Fully Conscious, Actively Engaged, and Eagerly Waiting. Week three we asked, "Will We Know One Another in Heaven?" And we learned that "Yes," we will know and recognize one another in heaven. We asked, "Should We Care About Heavenly Rewards?" And we learned that the Scripture commands us to "take care" how we build our lives upon the free salvation we have in Christ Jesus, so that we receive a reward in heaven.

Last week we asked, "What Will Our Eternal Home Be Like?" We learned that God's ultimate plan for His redeemed people is that we live forever with Him in a new heaven and a new earth as a new you! This has always been the arc of God's plan for redeemed humanity (Explain chart. Explain that the consummation of God's plan for redeemed humanity is the new heaven and new earth where we will dwell forever in our new resurrection bodies! Our ultimate destiny is this new reality where God will dwell with man!) 

Now in the final sermon in our Heaven series, we'll be looking to see what the Bible says about "What Must We Do to Prepare for Eternity?"

Need: What we're really asking is "What must we do to prepare for what comes after death? How can we prepare for the ultimate journey? It's a journey that most of us don't want to think about, but it's a journey that everyone must take! As the book of Hebrews says:

Hebrews 9:27 (KJV) And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment

ILL: Are you prepared for this journey, for eternity? If I'm taking a journey to the store, I don't have to prepare much. I make sure I have my wallet and maybe make a list, but it's just a quick run to the store. It doesn't take a lot of preparation.

But if I'm leading a mission trip to Uganda or Indonesia as I've done in the past, that's a whole different matter! I have to start preparing a year in advance. Make sure I have my passport, be in contact with our partners in-country, arrange airfare, room and board, arrange ground transport, visit a doc to get shots needed and meds like malaria meds, antibiotics..., raise a support team, pack appropriate clothes and ministry tools needed for the work, have monthly meetings with my team to prepare them for the trip and finally, leave the US and go!

Yet even with all this preparation, on my first Uganda trip, I had to borrow a jacket. I hadn't really understood that the geographic region of Kisoro, Uganda, wasn't the hot and humid African Savannah I had envisioned. No. It got quite chilly in the evenings and early mornings. There were other surprises, but that one I should've prepared for.

Trans: So a mission trip to a foreign country takes a lot of preparation. But how much more must we prepare for the trip that everyone will face one day... the trip to our eternal home!

BODY: In the gospel of John chapter 6, Jesus told His hearers what they must do to be prepared for eternity. We can be prepared for eternity. What must we do to prepare for eternity? The text gives three

Today's text: Revelation John 6:25-40 (ESV) ²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?" ²⁶ Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷ Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal." ²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." ³⁰ So they said to him, "Then what sign do you do, that we may see and believe you? What work do you perform?" ³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus then said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." ³⁵ Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

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WHAT MUST WE DO TO PREPARE FOR ETERNITY?

1. Come to Jesus for Kingdom entry.

EXP: (25-28, 35-37) The 5,000 that Jesus had miraculously fed the day before “found him on the other side” (25) of the Sea of Galilee at Capernaum. They left where they were and had “come” to find him. They asked when Jesus had “come” there, but Jesus ignored their question for the deeper issue: Why had they come? Why were they “seeking” (26) him? His answer? Not for him, but for the free bread. Instead, come to Jesus! **“Food that perishes”** (27) (ἀπόλλυμι, *apollumi*) - to destroy, abolish, render useless. There is

Matthew 6:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁹ “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

“Endures” (27) (μένω, *menō*) - to remain, abide; to endure, not to perish.

“Seal” (27) (σφραγίζω, *sphragizō*) - to set a seal upon, to confirm, or attest a thing. God’s seal of approval.

“What must we do” (28) - What must we do to receive this eternal life bread?

“I am” (35) (Ἐγώ εἰμι, *egō eimi*) - I ... I am. Emphatic use of *egō*. One of 7 “I AM”s. Jesus is God.

“Bread of life” (35) (ἄρτος, *artos*) - bread, loaf. The Hebrew symbol of life. Jesus is life. “I AM Life!”

“Whoever comes to me” (35,37) - Whoever means whoever, anyone. Coming, one must leave where they are and come to where they are going. Repent and come. Those who come will never be **“cast out”** (37).

“Hunger ... thirst” (35) - This is spiritual hunger and thirst. We desire something we cannot find in this world. “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

ARG: **Jesus invites those who need rest for their souls to come to Him.**

Matthew 11:28-29 (ESV) ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Jesus says we must enter through the “narrow door.”

Luke 13:23-29 (ESV) ²³ And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, ²⁴ “Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. ²⁵ When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ ²⁶ Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ ²⁸ In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. ²⁹ And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.

Jesus is the Narrow Door. He is the only way to enter the Kingdom.

John 10:7 (ESV) So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

ILL: I’m on my 4th US Passport. You have to renew every 10 years. The first one I applied for I noticed they required proof of US citizenship, namely, a US birth certificate with a seal or stamp from the state which issued it. The copy my mother had given me, that had gotten me into elementary school, little league, high school and college, didn’t have an embossed seal. So I wrote to the state of VA for one. They had no record of me. Then I remembered that the hospital I was born in was on the TN side of Bristol...

APP: Jesus is our passport to the Kingdom of Heaven. He is the only entry. Leave your self-directed, sinful life behind and come to Jesus for salvation from sin and death and entry into God’s Kingdom!

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2. Believe in Jesus for Kingdom life.

EXP: (29-40) Look at v.29. What must we do for eternal life? “Believe.” In what? Wrong question. In Whom! “Believe in Him whom God has sent.” That’s Jesus!

“Believe” (29, 30, 36, 40 - 5x) (πιστεύω, *pisteuō*) - to place confidence in, to trust, to place one’s faith in.

“Eternal life” (27, 40 - 2x) (ζωὴν αἰώνιον, *zōēn aiōnion*) - life without end, everlasting life. Not only quantity of life, but also quality as *zōēn* suggests.

“Sign” (30) (σημεῖον, *sēmeion*) - a sign. John called Christ’s miracles “signs.” For they proved His divinity.

“Heaven” (31, 32, 33, 38 - 5x) (οὐρανός, *ouranos*) - Here the third heaven where God dwells.

“True bread” (32) (ἀληθινός, *alēthinos*) - real, true, genuine. Jesus is “true” life (bread = life).

“Always” (34) (πάντοτε, *pantote*) - at all times, always, ever

ARG: Jesus promises life that is both eternal and abundant (full and overflowing).

John 10:10 (ESV) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

Paul said we should live a life now focused on our identity in Christ as “citizens of heaven.”

Philippians 3:13-21 (ESV) ¹³ ... one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. ¹⁶ Only let us hold true to what we have attained. ¹⁷ Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸ For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹ Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰ But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

ILL: Dallas Willard believed that the one who received Kingdom life was now “in training for reigning.” When asked, “Why we exist?” Dallas Willard was known to respond, “We are in training for reigning.” (Dallas’s understanding of the call of God on each person’s life, and their potential, first given in the Genesis charter to rule, subdue, or establish “dominion” over the earth. It is also what he believed Revelation 5:9–10 describes as a prophetic reality.” (Gary Black, Jr., *Preparing for Heaven: What Dallas Willard Taught Me About Living, Dying, and Eternal Life*, p. 64).

Revelation 5:9-10 (ESV) “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

[Dallas believed that] “we enter heaven perfect, meaning without sin, but we are not complete. We are not finished, nor is God finished with us. As an example, Dallas would say often that a small tree sprout could be perfectly developed at every stage of its maturation while remaining incomplete. Likewise, as we learn to choose to live and walk with Jesus in the intermediate state of paradise, he is able to complete the work he first began in us, bringing us to our fullness in Christ. Eventually God will finish the work he started in us (Phil. 1:6; 1 Thess. 5:23–24). But this will take some effort, time, and grace.” (Black, *Preparing for Heaven*, p. 23).

APP: Believing and trusting in Jesus is more than, “Ok. I’ve got my passport to heaven now. I can live as I want.” No! That isn’t Kingdom Life! Believing in Jesus, is to live the life of Jesus now, which prepares us for heaven. As Paul said,

Galatians 2:20 (ESV) I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Preparing for a journey the passport is just the start. You have to get everything lined up to go.

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3. Look to Jesus for Kingdom hope.

EXP: (40) What is God’s ultimate plan, His will? Verse 40 tells us: “Everyone who looks on the Son” and “believes” will have “eternal life” and more than that, they God “will raise him up on the last Day.”

“**Seen me ... looks on**” (36,40) (ὁράω, *horaō*) - to see with the eyes or the mind, to perceive, know.

“**Raise him up... last day**” (36,40) (ἀνίστημι, *anistēmi*) - to raise up from the dead, the promise of resurrection. “God’s kingdom” in the preaching of Jesus refers not to postmortem destiny, not to our escape from this world into another one, but to God’s sovereign rule coming “on earth as it is in heaven...” “Salvation, then, is not “going to heaven” but “being raised to life in God’s new heaven and new earth” (N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*).

“Without an eternal perspective, much of human existence simply will not make any sense at all... This is not to suggest that we become so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good. In fact, we are to be heavenly minded in order to do earthly good.” (Black, *Preparing for Heaven*, p.89, 116).

ARG: Paul spoke of our “**confident hope**” of heaven.

Colossians 1:4-5 (NLT) ⁴ For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God’s people, ⁵ which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.

ILL: In Peter Kreeft’s book, *Heaven: The Heart’s Deepest Longing*, he proposes three questions of ultimate importance for every human being to consider: “What can I know? What should I do? And what may I hope for? The three questions correspond to the three “theological virtues” of faith, hope, and love. Faith in God’s word is the Christian answer to “What can I know?” Love of God and neighbor is the Christian answer to “What should I do?” And hope for God’s Kingdom, the Kingdom of heaven, is the Christian answer to “What may I hope for?” Just as faith fulfills the mind’s deepest quest for truth and as love fulfills the moral will’s deepest quest for goodness, so the hope of heaven fulfills the heart’s deepest quest for joy” (Peter Kreeft, *Heaven, the Heart’s Deepest Longing*, p.11)

APP: As someone has said, “The three grand essentials of happiness are: Someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for.” Jesus gives us all three. We can look to Jesus for Kingdom hope!

CONCLUSION: As we conclude this sermon series, I’m reminded that we began back before Easter with Jesus’ promise to the thief on the cross, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). This is the promise to all who 1) Come to Jesus, 2) Believe in Jesus, and 3) Look to Jesus.

ILL: Dr. Gary Black had the privilege of sitting at Dallas Willard’s bedside in his final hours. He writes: “The discipleship Dallas had chosen in life had already begun to prepare him for his life reigning with God as a citizen of heaven. ...At times, when he would look at me, it was as if his eyes weren’t able to see what he was looking at. Yet on this occasion I could tell he was able to focus on me directly. He said, “I need to tell you what’s happening so you can be prepared.” He started by saying he was in a hallway—in between this life and the next. And in this hallway, there were people who love us more than we can imagine. He said that he really couldn’t quite understand what to believe about the Bible’s description of the great “cloud of witnesses” (Heb. 12:1). “But now,” he said, “now I do . . . I really do believe. I know they are here.” He also said his eyes were being opened and that he was seeing things... He realized that he was going through a doorway from this earth to glory and that in the “between” space, in “the hallway” that connects this world to the next, there was much for him to learn that was captivating his mind. “What are you seeing?” I asked. “It isn’t a strain,” he responded, and after pausing to cough for a moment, he continued, “It isn’t an effort . . . or a strain . . . to believe what Jesus said, ‘He that keeps my word will never taste death.’” After that he slept for a few hours before waking to ask for help adjusting his pillow. His last words to me were, “Thank you.” A few hours later, he was gone. It was a good death” (Black, *Preparing for Heaven*, p.57).

Are you prepared for death? For eternity? Let’s pray.