Heaven – Its impact now!
II Peter 3; Matthew 6:19-21; Hebrews 12:28

Over the past 2 months we have been talking about heaven and what life in heaven will be like. We have 2 more messages after this week – next week looking at the eternal Son of God coming down from heaven which is the reason we celebrate Christmas and the following week we'll look specifically at the 1,000 year millennium as we head into the New Year. But this week we want to look at how an exciting picture of heaven positively impacts our life today!

I hope each of you have the privilege of being with a Christian who loves Jesus & is excited about heaven when they die. Tears come down our eyes as we face the reality of this beloved one leaving us, but inspiration comes with how they faced the greatest enemy any of us will ever face – death! Now, not all Christians face their own death triumphantly nor is this a requirement to get into heaven. But there is something awe-inspiring about the very genuine & authentic words and attitudes of those who are excited to be with Jesus and consider death a door to a much richer future with God and with others in heaven. Our view of the greatness of God and His heaven greatly influences how we face death!

I also hope you have the privilege of walking through a hard time with a Christian who loves Jesus & is excited about heaven – situations like battling cancer, unexpectedly losing a job, being spoken of unfairly, having a wayward child or divorcing parent. Again, the tears will flow as you hear and feel their pain, shock and confusion. But then another voice comes up from deep inside them. It is faith – faith in Jesus. It starts simply with the faith God is not going to abandon them. Then it grows to believing God will bring something good out of this hard time including being able to enjoy heaven more. And it concludes in the months or years ahead with this rich worship and appreciation of God in the midst of major problems. There is something awe-inspiring about the very genuine & authentic words and attitudes that come out of a hurting soul who is also confident of their future with Jesus for eternity! Our view of the greatness of the Lord & His heaven greatly influences how we face difficult situations.

So what difference can a right belief in heaven make in our life right now – How then should we live? A proper view of heaven has a profound effect on the way we live now. Let’s start in II Peter 3 which you have already turned to.

PROPOSITION: A proper view of heaven has a profound effect on the way we live now.

I. Pure or holy lives II Peter 3
How then should we live? The first answer we will see is that we should live pure or holy lives. When we rightly understand the wonders of heaven in store for the Christian believer, it encourages & empowers us to live purer and more God honoring lives here on earth. We want to honor God with our lives. As to context, II Peter 3 starts out with a call for Christians to wholesome thinking (v 1). This is in a difficult time, where people around them are laughing & mocking them for thinking Jesus will return, stop the world as we know it
and judge everyone for what they have done with their lives (v 3-7). Peter continues in v 8-9 to explain that God’s delay in bringing justice is simply to provide the opportunity for more people to repent and be able to go to heaven. Finally, in v 10 Peter shares how the end time will come on us suddenly like a thief in the night. And all the physical things around us will be destroyed. We’ll only have ourselves left.

A. Said negatively

II Peter 3:11-12

It is in this context we read v 11-12. READ. Call this the negative way to show us the important of living holy and godly lives now. All the stuff you long for around you – none of it will survive. All the stuff you accumulate, it will all be destroyed. Every word you have said in private will be made known to everyone. Every thought will be unveiled and every excuse we have made will be examined. Think about that very much and it will smack you in the face – in a scary sort of way. We know we have said and thought things we shouldn’t. We know we have striven at times for possessions or comfort rather than for God. When we think about Jesus coming back and the judgement that will happen to make this world right & just again, we naturally want to put more effort into living rightly now. Holiness, purity and godliness are important!!! After all, if we are unwilling to make these priorities in our lives now, why would we think heaven will be a great place since everyone and everything there will be pure, holy and godly? How then should we live? Purely, holy, godly.

B. Said positively

II Peter 3:13-14

In v 13-14, the apostle Peter says the same thing in a positive way. READ. God wants us to have exciting thoughts of the new heaven and new earth – He wants us to positively imagine the perfection & paradise, closeness to God & reunion with other believers – the Lord wants us to dream of the adventures in heaven as well as the hominess that will be there for us. When we do, then “we want to make every effort” to live holy and pure lives. We want to use all of our energy to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with Jesus. Do you see the picture here? God is offering to bring us to the best place ever. When we begin to understand that, there is this natural desire to WANT to please God! How then should we live? Purely or holy

C. A proper view of heaven gives us greater power over sinfulness today.

It doesn’t matter if we look at what won’t survive of this world or what future blessings we will have, a proper view of heaven gives us greater power over sinfulness in our lives. If we have wrong habits, continuously bad thoughts, or are tempted by some wrong action, we will have greater strength to overcome these, if we can picture the special place heaven will be as we’ve shared this past two months. God still expects us to use all our effort as v 14 mentions but there is a greater motivation to change, a greater strength to persevere and a greater encouragement to buck the culture around us simply by being overwhelmed with the greatness of God & heaven. God built this great encouragement to do right into our lives, but less and less Americans seem to be positively affected by it. WHY?
Today in the US the vast majority of Americans think they will go to heaven, while a very small percentage in our state will take a couple hours once a week to join other Christian believers to learn about, pray to, be challenged by and honor the God who made that heaven. We don’t see the transforming power of a compelling vision of heaven because people assume they should go there no matter what they are doing. People can’t be saved unless they first know they are lost. We know none of us can be good enough for heaven and that it is only by surrender and faith in Jesus Christ that we can go to heaven. While we teach this part well, many of our day have forgotten Jesus’ words that it is only those who persevere to the end who will be saved. A key part of our coming together is to encourage each other to stay faithful to Jesus. So we have effectively neutered this transforming power over sin in our lives by our general population thinking everyone will go to heaven and by the born-again population thinking everything is finished once we pray the initial prayer of faith.

II. Meaningful lives

Matthew 6:19-21

Please turn in your Bible to Matthew 6. How then should we live? Purely. A second answer we want to add is meaningfully. When we have a true, compelling picture of heaven it helps us to live a full and meaningful life. We are more likely to make decisions that will make a real difference now and in eternity. READ v 19-21. Jesus is quite countercultural here.

A. Challenge to over-emphasizing temporal stuff & achievement

v 19 challenges us not to put our focus on achievement and possessions in this life. READ. This is almost heretical for our culture because we are consumed by getting the next toy, the next gadget, the next promotion, the next novel, the next car, the next smart phone and the latest popular clothes. But what happens shortly after we purchase something we think will make such a difference in our lives – another new desire for something else captures our mind. Jesus challenges us that if we live that way, it will NOT lead to a meaningful life! All that we are working hard for in this life will decay, be lost or stolen. None of it will go on into eternity with us. There is no “u-haul trailer” on the back of a hearse. When we were renovating the beer & wine warehouse into this church building, someone gave the church a bunch of shares of Enron stock. We sold it and it was an invaluable part of us being able to make this facility which has been used in so many ways for the advancement of God’s work in this world. Less than ½ year after that gift, Enron went bankrupt and everyone who worked hard for their stock thinking it would give them a better life were left with nothing. Had this person kept that stock for themselves, nothing of value would have come from all their work to get it. How then should we live? Meaningfully!

B. Unleash our desire to strive & achieve on the eternal

Jesus is just as counter-cultural in v 20. READ. Jesus challenges us to use our energy and talents to store up riches in heaven. It is not that we shouldn’t be striving and achieving – but we need to apply those energies to making our eternal future so much richer. At this point some Christians get a look of horror on their face and say
“No, we shouldn’t seek rewards – we should simply serve God out of love in our hearts.” Unfortunately that attitude contradicts our Lord. Jesus knows we were created to strive and achieve – if we aren’t striving for the things of eternity, we will certainly strive for far less meaningful things now. So powerful is this striving after riches in heaven, that v 21 says it will build devotion, affection and commitment deep inside us now. READ. Do you feel you are not close enough to Jesus? Do you feel like your heart seeks the things of this world so much more than the Savior of your soul? Start striving after rewards in heaven. God has designed life so our commitment to Jesus will grow in time through this. **How do we store up treasures in heaven?**

- Every time we sacrifice time, work or comfort for Jesus, we store up treasure in heaven.
- Every time we give generously to God’s work we store up treasure in heaven.
- Every time we give up something to help the Kingdom of God grow, we store up treasure in heaven.
- Every time we help someone in Jesus’ Name we store up treasure in heaven
- And every time we are attacked or spoken of badly because we are Christians, we store up treasure in heaven.

There are many ways we store up treasures in heaven but they always involve some kind of sacrifice we make now for the advancement of God’s Kingdom in this world.

C. A proper view of heaven prods us to be sacrificial with our time, talents & treasures

What a proper view of heaven does for us is prod us on to be sacrificial with our time, our talents and our treasures for God now, because we know we will gain so much more in the future. A proper view of heaven is a powerful antidote to combat selfishness, greed, coveting and materialism. It helps us get to the end of our life and know we have done something eternally meaningful with our lives. **How then should we live?** Meaningfully!

III. Bring God’s optimism into our lives

Please turn in your Bible to Hebrews 12. **How then should we live?** Purely & meaningfully. A third answer we want to add is optimism – an optimism based on God and His wonderful plan. When we have a true and compelling picture of heaven, it helps us keep **key positive perspectives** in difficult situations.

A. Biblical realism is optimistic

When Reggae songs say, “Don’t worry man, be happy”, when motivational speakers crisscross the country doing seminars on positive thinking, when so-called Christians teachers promote a healthy/wealth/wise promise for the here & now and when books claim to show you how to become rich and famous in 4 easy steps (just send them $29.95 so they can continue to be rich without relying on their own 4 easy steps) – these can make us feel good for a short time, but it won’t last. It is simply too weak a foundation to hold us up when we get old, lose abilities, get a terminal illness, have relationships break, or die and head to hell for a Christ-less eternity. Ultimately, this
kind of temporal optimism is an illusion – there is no solid, long-lasting foundation to it.

However if we build our lives on what Jesus did by dying on the cross for us and rising bodily from the dead, then we always have a valid reason for hope. That is, we have a lasting foundation for optimism – an optimism based on the true God & His plan! Even the most painful set-backs in life are only temporary in light of eternity. Our pain may or may not be relived in this life, but it most surely will NOT be there in the next life. We may or may not be able to work through broken relationships in this life, but we are going to experience far richer and more lasting ones in heaven and on the new earth. All those pains and frustrations will be totally gone!

Let’s read the words of Hebrews 12:28. READ. The first part looks forward to heaven. We are going to be ruling and reigning with Jesus Christ for eternity, we will be developing, doing and making things. We will be learning, having great times of celebration and we’ll see God face-to-face. “We are receiving a kingdom that can’t be shaken!” WE, TOGETHER, are going to be in a wonderful place filled with glory and grace! Notice the response that this naturally produces. READ v 28.

- Thankfulness – that is very optimistic. Thankfulness for what is coming overcomes frustration of what is here. Truly understanding God’s plan for us in the future leads to many thoughts now of “Wow God that’s going to be incredible.”

- Worship, reverence and awe – that quiet amazement which sees God for the awesome powerfulness & love that He is. Self and worry are pushed aside – no problem can be bigger than the God who is over all. A right view of the future naturally takes SELF completely out of the middle and it puts God in the center of our perspective. That’s true realism because it is what is really true.

If this optimism doesn’t grab hold of us, if it doesn’t become a regular part of our life, then we either haven’t grasped the greatness of what God has for us on the new heavens and earth, or we willfully are refusing to let go of some self-focus now.

It was early Sunday morning and a pastor (who will remain unnamed & it is not Mark or I) had just gotten a call in the early morning – it was a marital conflict situation. The one person was telling how awful the other person was. It was the third type call that weekend. This pastor hung up the phone and just yelled out, “Give me a break people, can’t you even give it a break this morning.” In other words, can’t you just set aside your differences and your self-focus for this one Sunday morning and focus on God instead of yourself. Sunday is God’s day – there is always something we can be thankful for right now. In our frustrations, we can let self-focus blind us so we can’t see God or let Him break-in with a different perspective.

(Give out instructions ahead of time to 6-10 people)
Contrast that with 5 year old Emily Kimball. She was hospitalized and then heard she was going to die – 5 years old. Her response was the natural one – she cried. Even though she loved Jesus and wanted to be with Him, she didn’t want to leave her family behind. *Then her mom had an inspired idea.* She asked Emily to go through the doorway into another room and closed the door behind her. Then one at a time, the mom had each family member open the door and go in & join Emily. (*Act this out with the people with instructions.*) When the whole family was together, the Mom explained that is the way it is going to be. Emily would be the first to go through the door to heaven. Then one by one, each of the other family members would join her. Emily understood. Now how did she face her final days — better than most adults, because she *“got it”* — she could picture heaven in a clear and compelling way – and that brought a real solid optimism into her life greater than even facing death at age 5. It was an optimism based on eternal truth. *How then should we live? Optimistically.*

B. Anticipating heaven doesn’t eliminate pain, it lessens it and puts it in perspective (Luke 6:22-23; I Peter 4:13; James 1:2)
Now anticipating heaven does NOT eliminate pain. It can lessen it and it gives those problems a different perspective! Emily still didn’t want to leave her family, but it was no longer seen as the hopeless end. I don’t believe a true Christian can be a continual pessimist without having a whole lot of unbelief and disobedience in their lives. Now I am naturally a cynic – my optimism all comes from my faith. Actually it is the dynamic Christian with a wonderful picture of Heaven who are the proper realists – Biblical optimism is combined with the reality of pain & brokenness in this life. Listen to these verses from scripture …

- Luke 6:22-23 *“Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you … Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven.”*
- I Peter 4:13 *“Rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when His glory is revealed.”*
- James 1:2 *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds.”*

These are not the natural way we humans think or speak – but it is the way God empowers & encourages His spiritual children to think and speak. So God has built in some things in life to help us do that because it’s not natural! A proper view of heaven gives us greater optimism and joy TODAY no matter what the frustration. *How then should we live? Optimistically.*

C. A proper view of heaven gives us greater optimism & joy today no matter

IV. Excited lives
*How then should we live?* Pure, meaningful & optimistic lives. A fourth answer we want to add is excited – there is an excitement in life that comes from having a true and compelling
picture of heaven. And when we are excited about something, we want to share that with others! God never meant for sharing about Jesus to be something we have to go to classes to be able to do – God just wants us to get excited about Him so we do it naturally. This glorious, fun, joy-filled, significant, future He has planned for us with deep relationships with God and others is worth getting excited about! A proper view of heaven really gets us excited about God and His plan. How then should we live? **Excitedly** – purely, meaningfully and optimistically. God has built certain helps into our lives that are triggered by a true and compelling picture of the future He has for us. Let’s be counter-cultural and follow God in this. Afterall He doesn’t want us to be so earthly minded we are of no heavenly good. To God be the glory – AMEN!