

THE CHRISTIAN AND HEAVEN

Philippians 3:20-21

Intro: With this message tonight I am concluding this present series on “the Christian life.” But I want to emphasize the words, “this present series,” because as long as I live I want to be speaking on how we as Christians should live. In one way, this is the theme of Scripture because all of the Bible, both OT and NT, deal with this theme – how we are the people of God should live. But it is especially prominent in the epistles of the NT. The Christian life is not what we think it should be unless our thinking is a reflection of the teaching of Scripture. It was Francis Schaeffer in our generation who called attention to that all-important question in Ezek. 33:10, “How should we then live?” While it had to do with Israel in her rebellion against God, it is a question for every child of God in every generation to answer. The Bible makes it very clear that, if we know the Lord, it should be evident in the way we live. The Bible knows nothing of a salvation which does not change both the character and the behavior of the one who is saved.

That is very apparent when we come to the subject of heaven. The Lord Jesus came from heaven, and he returned to heaven, and before He left He told His disciples in that Upper Room, that He was going back to His Father to prepare a place for them so that they could come to be where He is. Our final destination is heaven.

I think that I can truthfully say that there never has been a generation of the Lord’s people that has placed a stronger emphasis on the coming of the Lord than our generation, and at least the couple of generations before us. This has been good, but it has also produced some problems for us. We have been so anxious to put all of the details together that prophetically the church has become very divided, and not just into two groups, but into several groups. The result has been that we have become so involved with the details, and the differences that we have, that we have lost the real blessing of talking about heaven. The very mention of heaven should make us excited. It definitely is to produce a greater desire in our hearts to live holy lives so that we will be ready for that moment when the Lord returns for us. But even if it is not the Lord’s will to come before we die, it is to be the greatest source of our comfort when the time comes for us to die that we are going to heaven. So it is a truth that God intends to affect our lives profoundly. If the Christian life is a life of knowing and believing the truth, that is, the truth of the Word of God,

heaven is one of those subjects which we are to know about, and to believe, and to anticipate every day that we live. It was certainly a vital part of the teaching of the writers of the NT, and it should be a vital part of our teaching and our living today.

Isn't there a line in a negro spiritual which says about heaven that everybody's talking about it, heaven, "ain't goin' there"? Well, the situation today is that we are all going there, but not much is being said about it, and what it is going to mean to all of us. So tonight I want us to think about heaven, and a little about what it ought to mean to us now. In past generations they may not have concentrated on the details, but heaven was what they talked about, what they lived for, and it kept them from getting too attached to this world and made them long for the day when they would be in heaven.

There are many texts I could have chosen for my message tonight, and I am going to be referring to more than one text, but for our starting point I have chosen the last two verses of Philippians chapter 3 – verses 20 and 21. (Read.)

The first thing that I want you to notice about these verses is that they begin with the word, "For." And so this requires that we look at:

I. THE CONTEXT.

Often in reading our Bibles we are inclined to slip quickly past a word like "for" to get to the other words of a verse, or group of verses. It is a word, when used like it is here, which suggests an explanation. It tells us why the Apostle Paul (in this case) has been writing what he has written. Of course the best way to start the study any verse or group of verses, is to read the whole book of the Bible in which it is found. That will really give us the context, especially if we read the book more than once. But we live in such busy times that we really don't read and re-read Scripture the way we should.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan was the predecessor of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at the Westminster Chapel in London, England. And Dr. Morgan was a great Bible teacher. I read about him that when he began the study of any book of the Bible he would read that book over as many as forty times before he began to study it. I have several of his books in my library, and you find insights into many passages in his books that you don't find in

other books. So often preaching can become a compilation about what others have said about a passage, but not what the speaker has discovered from his reading. Now there is nothing wrong about quoting other writers, but every preacher, every teacher, needs to go to the Bible for himself, and then he can consult others for confirmation, or correction, of what he believes the Word teaches from whatever text he may have chosen.

So it ought to be a rule for all of us who read the Word that we do not lift verses out of their context, and then try to explain them, but we leave them where they are, and seek to understand them in the light of the verses which surround any text.

So, when we find that word “for” standing like it does here at the beginning of verse 20, we need to go back at least a few verses to catch the thought of the writer which led him to say what he has said in the verses we are seeking to understand.

The larger point that we need to understand about Philippians is that the Apostle Paul was a prisoner of Rome when he wrote this letter to the church at Philippi. His speaking ministry had come to a halt. He could not travel like he had done previously going throughout the Empire to preach the Gospel. And so he had turned to writing. He couldn't go to see the Philippians, so he wrote this letter to them. That is what an epistle is, a letter.

But as you read through this epistle, you don't get the impression that he is depressed, worried, and restless. Instead, it seems clear that His heart was at perfect peace. And so he was writing a most encouraging letter to the believers at Philippi.

We need to remember that Paul was an ordinary human being like we are, and that he was learning throughout his life as we are, or ought to be. I want to keep learning as long as I live, and I mean learning about God, and about Christ, and about the Bible, and about the ways of the Lord, and I know most of you feel the same way. In fact, this epistle to the Philippians tells us that there were certain things which became even more important to Paul during his imprisonment. And when we move backwards to the verses before our text, we see one thing that was especially important to him. And this was *the Christian life*. Paul wasn't just marking time in his confinement. Notice what he said in verse 14.

(Read.) He had a goal in mind. He was running a race. He was moving ahead.

And from verse 15 on he addressed himself again (as he had previously in his letter) to the believers in Philippi. So note what he said in verses 15, 16, and 17. (Read.)

But then he reminded them of the world in which they were living. (Read verses 18 and 19.)

I believe that our translators were correct in making these two verses a parenthesis because we do need to join verses 15-17 to the last two verses of the chapter, and his exhortations were especially important in the light of the condition of the world in which they lived, and in which we live today. We can't afford to live like the world does. We have been saved out of all of that. We have to live differently because "we are citizens of heaven."

II. CITIZENS OF HEAVEN.

The NKJV corrects this, as do the other recent translations. Paul was saying that we need to be very careful about our lives because we are citizens of heaven! We have never been there, but that is where we are going. We are not naturalized; we are citizens of heaven *by birth – the new birth!* We once belonged to this worldly order, but now we are citizens of heaven.

Do you remember the expression that became very prominent a few years ago when people in foreign countries began to talk about Americans who visited their countries as *ugly Americans*. Americans in their countries were so arrogant, and demanding, and often disgustingly immoral, that they gave our whole country a bad name. If I get the gist of what the Apostle Paul was saying in this passage, he was saying that we must not give people a bad idea of what a citizen of heaven is by living in a way that is inconsistent with what we are.

All of this does not affect our American citizenship, or Canadian citizenship, or whatever our citizenship might be, but it places the highest obligation upon us to live as citizens of heaven.

And one of the marks of a citizen of heaven is that we are *looking for* "the

Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The verb “we look for” is a present tense, and so it means continually looking for, fully expecting, constantly and patiently waiting for Him, not knowing when He will come, but absolutely certain that he is coming, and can come at any time!

It is not just a point of doctrine that we hold, but we are looking for a Person, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that which should comfort us as we face death, and that which should console us for the future, is that we are going to see our Lord Jesus Christ for the first time. 2 Thessalonians 4:13-18 tells us, not that He will be there when we get there, but He is personally coming after us. And if we die before that day comes, “to be absent from the body” is “to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8).

But what else is heaven going to mean for us?

It is going to mean that we are changed. This body which has been our earthly home is going to be changed. No longer will we be able to sin. There will be no more sickness, no more death. But what is best of all, “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). Our bodies which now are characterized by lowliness and weakness, and also by sin, will be made like our Lord’s glorious body. We are inclined to think that we are so great, but when we see ourselves as God sees us, we realize that we are not all that we claim to be. The Apostle Paul described this change in 1 Cor. 15:51-58. (Read.)

Concl: There are many other things that could be said about heaven, but I am going to conclude with this tonight: If we really believe in the coming of the Lord, and that either at death, or when the Lord comes, we are going to be in heaven with Him, and like Him, and forever with the Lord, then how can we show now here on earth that we are citizens of heaven?

Read Paul’s letter to the Philippians if you want more of a complete answer, but Paul has already told us earlier in chapter 3 what we should do, and what we should be, and then he went on in chapter 4 to tell us more. Let me tell you tonight what I am sure all of you realize if you will only give it a moment’s thought. It is this: We are closer to the coming of the Lord than any generation of the Lord’s people has ever been. And if any generation of the Lord’s people should be looking expectantly for

the Lord that generation should be us! So let us remember who we are, and live like citizens of heaven should live. It may be that the Lord will use the focus of our lives as a part of what He is doing to turn others to Himself. I do not believe in setting dates for the Lord's return, but the way things are shaping up in the world, it may be, *it may be*, that we are soon to hear the trumpet sound which will herald our departure from this world, and our glorious transfer from earth to our heavenly home. Let our prayer be the prayer that the Apostle John prayed as he closed his writing of the book of the Revelation, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."