

What No Eye has Seen, Nor Ear Heard, Nor the Heart Imagined

1 Corinthians 2:1 ESV And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. **2** For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, **4** and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5** so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. **6** Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. **7 *But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory.*** **8** None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **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.*** For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11** For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.

- I. There are few things that capture the imagination of a believer like the thought of what is next for us. By that I mean: What will the life that is waiting for us at the end of this life be like?
 - A. Humanity in general, and Christians specifically, tend to think about it a lot! For many of us, it is the primary concern that we have when we begin to consider following Jesus. We approach God already thinking about where we will go when we die, and what we must do to arrive at the preferred destination.
 - B. I believe that this is because of an innate awareness of our mortality, and how it looms over each one of us, so we do what we can to seek comfort from that unpleasant reality.
 1. From early on, most of us have a sense that we came into this life with an expiration date.
 2. Also, fairly early in life, we also begin to notice that the people around us, people we love, will experience pain, deterioration, and sickness that ends with their deaths.
 3. I distinctly remember standing in a funeral home as a 5 year-old-boy trying to grasp the reality of what my parents were telling me; I would never see Grandpa here, but I would see him one day in heaven.
 - C. It's easy recognize as we grow up that this life has a lot of beauty and wonder (from seeing the Grand Canyon to your first kiss); but none would deny that there is also a lot of pain and grief to which we are exposed.
 - a) Because of this, we look for something that is:
 - (1) Permanent; someplace that won't fade or end, a reality where there is no more need for the word "goodbye".
 - (2) Pleasant; someplace that is defined by joy and not sorrow; peace and not pain.

- (3) Pure; someplace where sin, and sickness, and hatred and strife are banished forever.
- D. We find comfort in the midst of our grief and loss by reminding ourselves that a world that meets all of those qualifications is awaiting us.
1. This is a good thing! Paul, after describing to the Thessalonian Church what the last days would look like for believers who had already died, gives them a very distinct instruction.
 2. **1 Thessalonians 4:18 NKJV** Therefore *comfort one another with these words*.
- E. So our joy in the prospect of what comes after this life, and the comfort that emerges from the Bible's assurance of that reality, are a very good thing.
- II. But there is a part of the problem. What exactly does the Bible tell us about what happens to us after this life is done? Oddly, the answer is very little.
- A. For example, if I were to ask you to describe the physical properties of Heaven to me, what would you say?
1. Would you describe a city in the clouds? A place where we are transformed into angels with wings and harps and halos?
 - a) This Idea of heaven has no basis whatsoever in scripture!
 - b) It comes more from medieval art and Saturday morning cartoons than from scripture.
 2. Would you describe a place where Saint Peter stands guard at the gate, letting only those who answer specific questions and pass silly tests are admitted?
 - a) Again, you will find no reference to these things in the Bible.
 - b) This comes more from Catholic tradition and a series of often retold jokes.
 3. Would you describe for me the streets of gold? Gates of pearl?
 - a) These descriptions are valid because they are found in the Bible.
 - b) However they are specifically found in the Bible's description not of Heaven as we know it, but as a part of the New Jerusalem that comes down out of Heaven at the end of the age, when Jesus sets up headquarters right here on earth.
- B. So if all of this represents misinformation on one level or another, can we even know that Heaven is a real place? Absolutely we can!
1. **Isaiah 66:1a ESV** Thus says the Lord: "Heaven *is my throne*..."
 2. **Matthew 6:9b KJV** "Our Father *which art in heaven*..."
 3. **1 Peter 3:22a ESV** (Jesus Christ) has *gone into heaven* and is at the right hand of God...
- C. These passages (and many others) assure us that Heaven is a real place, that it is the throne room of God (the seat of his power), that the Father is to be found there, and that Jesus Christ now dwells there in his resurrected and glorified body, and is seated at the right hand of God.
- D. But we are also taught that God is omnipresent!
1. **Psalms 139:7 ESV** Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? **8** If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol (the place of the dead; the grave), you are there! **9** If I take the wings

of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,**10** even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

2. So, since it's true that God is everywhere, when we say that his throne room is in heaven and that both the Father and Son are there, we do not mean that Heaven is the place where the presence is confined, but that it is a place of a particularly meaningful manifestation of God.
 3. Wayne Grudem says it better, "Heaven is the place where God most fully makes known his presence to bless."
- E. So how do we know that we will one day enter that wonderful place?
1. We have already established that scripture is clear: Christ now dwells (resurrected, glorified, and ascended) in Heaven at the right hand of God.
 2. Paul speaks in 2 Corinthians 5:8 of being "away from the Body" (dead) that he might be "at home with the Lord".
 3. This means that when we die, we go to where Christ is, and his home in heaven becomes our home!
- III. And this brings up a new question. What makes heaven, heaven? What gives it its glory? What am I hoping to find there?
- A. Escape from pain, corruption and death? Yes. Reunion with departed loved ones? Yes. Unparalleled beauty and peace? Without a doubt.
- B. But focusing on these things (as well as others) can make us miss the point of heaven.
1. Every benefit of heaven that is clearly promised in scripture, or is generally held as consistent with Christian belief, or that is the figment of your imagination, is rendered meaningless if not for the fact that it is where we will be eternally united with Jesus Christ.
 2. Stated differently, you could take away the streets of gold, the angelic choirs, my grandma and grandpa, and place my eternal home in a third world country somewhere, and if Jesus is there, it's still heaven, and I won't be disappointed!
- C. When I was growing up, we sang a lot of songs about Heaven in church. One of the songs in our hymn book was called, "Beulah Land". The title refers to a verse in Isaiah 62 and a passage from John Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress", envisioning our lives as a borderland where we find ourselves before we enter heaven. Anybody remember that song?
1. The chorus said, " O Beulah Land, sweet beulah land, as on thy highest mount I'll stand, I look away across the sea, where mansions are prepared for me, and view the shining glory shore, my heaven, my home forevermore."
 - a) Sweet, beautiful sentiment. But can anyone tell me what is missing from the message? Jesus!
 - b) Except for one brief reference in the second verse, there is no mention in the entire song of the fact that Christ's sacrifice is what makes heaven **even possible** for us, or that **he** is what makes it beautiful and glorious.
 2. The song is really nothing more than a celebration of an all-expenses-paid retirement village in the sky. But I think that sells the Bible's vision of the life to come short!

- a) Heaven is where, **because** of the resurrection life of my Savior, I am granted life and a reservoir of strength that I never even knew was possible!
3. Heaven is not where we we hang up our spurs and lounge by God's pool drinking Mai Tai's all day! It is where we are united with God, face to face, to worship him eternally, join with him in his work without the hindrance of sin, and bring glory to him throughout the universe forever and ever. It's not an end, but rather an everlasting beginning!
- IV. And that brings me back to our text today. Paul says something in that passage, that I never recall hearing in church growing up, except at funerals. He says, **1 Corinthians 2:9 ESV** 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"
- A. This was a go-to verse for every funeral I went to ask a kid. The idea is that Heaven is so wonderful, so beautiful, so satisfying,,and it's all been made just for you!
- B. But is that what the context of that verse is saying? And if not, what is it saying? And is the message of the verse, if different from what was preached at the funerals of my childhood, better and more satisfying than the message of a glorious, all-satisfying heaven prepared with you in mind?
- C. Today as we continue our series called, "What's the Message?", we will take a closer look at this verse and what it teaches us about Biblical interpretation. In order to do that, let's take another look at the entire passage.
- D. **1 Corinthians 2:1 ESV** And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you **the testimony of God** with lofty speech or wisdom. **2** For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. **3** And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, **4** and my speech and **my message** were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **5** so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. **6** Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. **7** But we impart **a secret and hidden wisdom of God**, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. **8** None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. **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. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. **11** For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.
- E. So what is Paul celebrating that is beyond what the eye has seen, beyond what the ear has heard, beyond what the heart has imagined?
1. Is it not the testimony of God, the message he preached, and the secret and hidden wisdom of God?
 2. In short, Paul is celebrating the Gospel! This is an important point!
- F. You see if we are to properly interpret the Bible, we must realize that its message is not about **my mansion** just over the hilltop (or my power, my ministry, my

wisdom, my limitations, etc.), but rather it is solely about **his glory** filling the whole universe! And how does he accomplish this? Only through the gospel; the story of Jesus triumphing over sin, death, hell, the devil and the world and taking his place and the only rightful King.

- G. Proper interpretation sees the gospel on every page; pointing to it in the Old Testament, revealing it in the gospels, and explaining it in the rest of the New Testament.
- V. Paul says in 1 Corinthians that the testimony of God (the Gospel) is not defined by “lofty speech” or earthly “wisdom”, but simply by “Jesus Christ and him crucified”. This means that the message of the Gospel, is not improved or limited by human skill or eloquence, but the basis of its power is totally found in Christ!
 - A. Neither the message of the heaven awaiting us, nor the gospel that saves us is essentially about us! It’s all about God!
 - B. The Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 that God’s purpose in the Gospel will reach its full culmination when God becomes “all in all”.
 - 1. The thing you must understand is that you can never really enjoy or appreciate anything (your own life, success, etc.) as long as you are the focus!
 - 2. But you will be satisfied and content in everything as long as God is the focus.
 - C. Paul describes his own ministry with words like “weakness”, “much trembling”, and lacking “plausible words of wisdom”. But he says it was effective because it was done in “demonstration of the Spirit and of power”.
 - 1. Why was this so? “...so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.”
 - 2. Power of God to do what? To raise Christ from the dead! To make sinners righteous! To heal the sick! To set at liberty those in bondage! To build a church that will be a global worshipping community from every tribe, language and nation of the world!
 - D. But watch how he describes the Gospel next! He says it is “a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory”.
 - 1. Some have gotten hung up on the word “secret”; thinking we can’t know what God has said or intended. Others have used this word to control and exploit people; implying that they had some secret insight into God. This is called “gnosticism”.
 - 2. But verse 10 makes it clear that these things that were kept veiled during the day of the Old Covenant as the psalmists sang of the Messiah, and the prophets prophesied about him, and the Kings and Priests provided analogy to his coming ministry, have now been revealed!
 - 3. “these things **God has revealed to us** through the Spirit.”
 - E. He has revealed to those of us who have believed in his name, what previously “no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”.
 - F. What has he prepared? The good news of reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, mercy and grace through Christ! It is yours for the asking!

- VI. So how does this all come together? The shameless purpose behind every message you will ever hear me preach is put the beauty of Jesus Christ and his gospel on display. If I can accomplish that, I am happy.
- A. In the book of 1 Kings, The Queen of Sheba (Yemen) came to visit Solomon because she had heard of Solomon's fame and otherworldly wisdom as well as the incomparable glory of his kingdom. When she saw it all for herself she said...
 - B. **1 Kings 10:6b ESV** "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom, **7** but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. **And behold, the half was not told me.** Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard. **8** Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom! **9** Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness."
 - C. Solomon in this story represents Christ. When people come to hear of him, their response to the news should always be the same; "...the half was not told me!"
 - D. His wisdom and prosperity surpass anything we thought we knew about him! And it will always be that way! We will never exhaust everything there is to know, experience and enjoy about Jesus!
 - 1. It's true that our heavenly reward will be great. Paul mentions a crown of righteousness, James a crown of life, and Peter a crown glory that is awaiting us.
 - 2. It is true that we will have our mind blown by the glories that we will behold in that place when we arrive and throughout all eternity!
 - E. But if we really need evidence that the treasure of heaven isn't mere treasure that we can stockpile and boast in, we need look only to Revelation chapter 4.
 - 1. **Revelation 4:10 ESV** the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. **They cast their crowns before the throne**, saying, **11** "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."
 - 2. We do not find these eternally-worshipping elders boasting in their crowns, or comparing them to one another. We see them casting them down at the feet of the only one worthy to wear them. They sing songs affirming God's worthiness to receive glory, honor, and power!
 - F. I'm not waiting for some payoff for all my hardship in the sweet by-and-by! Jesus is the payoff! He is everything I want, everything I need, and He is my eternal reward! Not some mansion or crown!
 - G. **Psalm 73:25 ESV** **Whom have I in heaven but you?** And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.