

# Am I Heaven Bound – Then?

Scripture: Psalm 73: 24-26, 2 Corinthians 5: 1-10

Date: March 22, 2020

## UNCERTAINTY

### PROBLEM

This past week has been a busy and an uncertain one for MCRC with the passing of a church member just before we shut life down left us with a dilemma. Do we have a celebration of life – and if yes – how ??

Over the course of this series of sermons we've been looking at the nature of Covid 19 and how it impacts our lives. Now we are getting a glimpse of the fullness of how damaging this has been to so much of our lives. We've done so much to try and stop this disease and more and more people are still getting sick and more and more people are still dying. We don't know how this started and we don't know how it will end. It's all very uncertain

The text today speaks of similar contexts of uncertainty. The apostle Paul has been writing letters to a church in a city called Corinth. The two letters has Paul answering questions that deal a lot with the brokenness within the church and at the end of Chapter 4 it addresses the needs of the people in the midst of a broken world. There are lots in the first century church that is causing uncertainty – especially with regards to the future times.

### PROCESS

There was a elderly man I had been visiting who had been in the church all his life. An educated man but was now asking questions that he couldn't answer. Questions of what was next for Him in life and even in death. He'd been taught (told) all His life about creation, fall and redemption and he'd been living his faith as best he could. Yet – the uncertainty of his own mortality – was causing him grief. What if I didn't do enough? What if I'm not good enough? What if I don't get into heaven?

All of the miscues in his life were creating doubt in his heart and in his mind. He still believed in God but he wasn't so sure in himself !!

There are many in this world that are equally uncertain of themselves in the present and of their fate in the future. Many are concerned with the judgement by Jesus that is mentioned by Paul in verse 10 as if their actions are the only measuring stick. A poll in the mid 1990's found that almost 60% of Americans believed that good works or good character was enough to earn or reward someone's place in heaven.

Many listening to this might see in the depths of their own being this truth clinging to them as well. How much duty, honour, loyalty and code have driven their faith and life as a Christian.

**PLACE**

The opposite is also true that if we fear heaven because we're not good enough then there are those who dilute heaven to be just good enough for us. Where heaven is made for everyone. Another poll in USA in the 1990's asked Americans about heaven and almost 50% of Americans believed that one didn't need to believe in Jesus Christ to get to heaven after they died. Western culture – including church culture – often sees heaven as a glorified vacation. Where you can eat all the chocolate you want – and never gain a pound! Where you play golf all day long and every shot is a hole in one.

**CERTAINTY****PLACE - HOPE**

But the apostle Paul in his letters to the Corinthians that this perspective is false. In the first letter to the Corinthians – in chapter 15 – Paul speaks of the glory of the resurrection that will happen after the life on earth – the temporal life – ends. In this second letter - he writes in the first five verses of chapter 5 of the transition of the old to the new. An earthly tent into an eternal house. A tent is a shelter that is small and portable and temporary whereas a house is a shelter that is permanent and eternal.

Paul is working against the Grecian philosophy of the time that denied the resurrection of the body and saw the soul as separate and only it lived on after death. The body was left behind. But Paul is declaring that there will be a new body in the heavens with God. For the Greeks – and the Jews this is a brand new vision.

In our journey through Lent – we've continued our journey of 2020 to gain a clearer vision of who God is and who we are to God. Using the Heidelberg Catechism – a teaching tool of the Christian Reformed Church – as a guide we've looked at how we find that our comfort – in this uncertain world – comes because we belong to God. But after accepting being forgiven and freed from the past we now seek – if God takes care of us now will he take care of us – in the future .

Again the catechism says yes !! That Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit assures us of eternal life.

When we speak of the hereafter different terms are used – heaven, eternal life, kingdom of heaven. In some ways they are distinct – and others interchangeable. In an offhand way – one might say that heaven describes the place where God dwells, that eternity describes the duration of His dwelling, and that kingdom might describe the power of God's dwelling.

Regardless of how we see them - kingdom, eternal life, heaven – it is a blessed place, a place of hope and joy.

At the funeral of our church member this past week people spoke of this woman's faith in God and people declared her certainty with God Passages were read – some by her choice – that reflected these truths.

John 14: 1-3 reminds us that Jesus declares of the many places in the Father's house and that His preparing them for us when our time is due. As such we can have comfort. Philippians 3: 20-21 speaks of how our due place is in heaven and at that time our bodies will be transformed into what God intended for them to be. Isaiah 65: 17-19 and Revelation 21: 3-4 speak of a new heaven and a new earth and all the former things – including the weeping and crying – will pass away. These last verses were a great comfort to those of us who had watched our sister in Christ struggle in the last year with her breathing

#### PROCESS - FAITH

For this heaven – this eternal life – the kingdom of God is something that we don't fully understand. Paul's metaphors aren't clear, and the bible doesn't paint specifics of what heaven – our eternal life – will look like. But what we do know is that our faith of that future is better than what we can see or imagine in the present. In verse 7 Paul speaks of walking by faith not by sight. His goal of faith keeps His eyes forward but not on the goal of heaven or eternal life but on the One who gives eternal life

#### BY CHRIST

Paul knows that the gift of eternal life is from Jesus. Lent reminds us of our journey in life and in faith doesn't end with our understanding of ourselves. Rather it ends – and begins – with an understanding of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The gift of forgiveness, the gift of freedom, the gift of being taken care of and the gift of eternity is not through our efforts but by God's gift of grace through Jesus Christ

For we are the objects of Christ's love. The NIV in verse 5 speaks of God fashioning us. But the ESV, NRSV, NET translations speak of God preparing us. In other words – God has – is – preparing us for Him. Through the life and death and resurrection of Jesus.

#### BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

God is preparing for us to return to Him through Jesus and God is preparing for us to belong to Him through the Holy Spirit. And this gift is a guarantee to us – Paul declares in verse 5. A deposit of the glory yet to come. A deposit – implying that the full payment is coming. A guarantee that it WILL indeed happen

The catechism declares it strongly. Because we belong to Jesus - the Holy Spirit of God Himself - assures us of our destiny with Him. As assured as we are of God's forgiveness and freedom for us now we can be assured of God's hold on us for eternity. In the midst of the uncertainty in which we live now and in the midst of the uncertainty in which we see ourselves now there is a certainty promised because of the certainty of God Himself !!

**PRAISE - LOVE**

The catechism declares that we belong to God because of the work of Jesus Christ and because of the power of the Holy Spirit. This gives us great reasons to praise God as we understand that heaven wasn't made for us - and our expectations - but rather that we were made for heaven - and our exaltation of God Himself forever.

Our other text today in Psalm 73 exemplifies this. In vs. 23 we read that God is always with us and that God will hold our hand. In vs. 24 we affirm that God guides us in this world with His counsel and after this world – God takes us into glory. In vs. 25 we understand that who or what else do we have but heaven as our goal and that nothing on this earth compares to it. In vs. 26 we see that this earth and our place on it is temporal – we will die. So we affirm that God is the strength of our heart now and God will be our portion forever.

**APPLICATION / CONCLUSION****MYSTERY OF THE UNCERTAINTY**

We are living in some very uncertain times. Not sure when or how things will get better. Living in the mystery of the moment and the future. Surrounded by fear and collapsed by anxiety. The uncertainty of our expectations and understandings of what is happening now are mirrored by the same limitations in our perceptions of what will happen next. We see ourselves as needing to be good enough or do good enough in order to find a heavenly result. But deep down – we know that it isn't enough. So many choose to lower the bar and create a heavenly fantasy where the result is a glorified vacation and everyone's dreams come true.

**MAJESTY OF THE CERTAINTY**

But we are reminded that the problem, the process and the places of our expectations are met in the place, the process and the praise of God. The Kingdom of Heaven – yet to come will be where God is – forever. And that is a goal towards which we long for. A place which we can't fully see or understand because it is beyond our comprehension. So we walk in the certainty of faith.

A faith given by the grace and the glory of God Himself. God who is preparing us for that Kingdom by the grace of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit who assures us of His truths in this world and in the world yet to come which will be the fulfillment of our hopes.

A faith and a hope which we can give God great praise as His love for us – and our love of Him – is made manifest in its completeness.

Faith, hope and love – the end of Paul's exhortations to the Corinthians church in chapter 13 – and the greatest of these is love. Now that's a Kingdom worth waiting for and that's a Kingdom worth living in.