# June 10, 2007 CrossRoads Christian Fellowship
# The hope of Heaven on Earth – Like Moths to a Flame
# Philippians 3:12-20
# Sermon by Pastor David Reed

Do you think about heaven? How often? How real is it? How compelling is heaven to you? Funny questions aren't they?

Here's why I am asking it. I have noticed recently that I and quite a few other Christians around me are no more happy than people who do not know Jesus. We are sad, depressed, anxious, and lonely like everyone else. A Barna study revealed that believers in the US experience the same divorce rate as non-believers. We seek fulfillment, belonging, understanding, fight failure, and desire an enduring happiness much the same as people who have no idea of God's everlasting love, of the overwhelming gift of forgiveness, or of the pure, endless, and immeasurable joy of heaven awaiting all believers in Jesus Christ in life eternal.

God never tells us we are going to escape sadness, or problems, or grief, and loneliness in the experience of this life. And it is obvious God has created all humans to seek fulfillment, belonging, understanding, and happiness. They are basic human drives and needs put into place by God. Most will say it was one of these life experiences or basic needs that drove us into the arms of Jesus.

But there is a lingering and nagging thought that has been popping up in my mind like one of those annoying computer pop-ups – pop! It's there…I hit delete but it just comes back…and the thought goes like this…

My experience of Christianity has failed to satisfactorily respond to the glaring observation that Christians – despite a tendency to describe themselves as happy, are in practice no more content than non-Christians. Our religion's answer has been predictable: sin less, seek God more, and have faith. (Dekker The Slumber of Christianity. P.9)

AM I MISSING SOMETHING? I sure hope so.

Ted Dekker in his book The Slumber of Christianity wrote a sentence that jumped off the page. He said *" I'm simply saying that Christianity has become preoccupied with finding true pleasure and happiness and purpose on earth rather in the age to come" (IBID p10,12).* Earthly pleasures and happiness that are lifeless and empty if not fired by a passion for the next life. Having fallen asleep, writes Dekker, to any tangible hope for heaven, we have embraced earthly pleasures as a result. And they are leading us into a dull and numb life.

CS Lewis, in The Weight of Glory writes; “Indeed if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are halfhearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in the slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday by the sea. We are far too easily pleased”.

By now you are all sifting and stirring aren’t you. I have begun to pull at the edges of the fabric that makes up what we might refer to as the stability of our existence. You, like me, are making mental lists and comparisons and categorizing this challenge...and forming the words…you talkin’ ta me?...you talking ‘bout my faith?...putem up, putem up.

I truly hope so. I hope the thought – “am I missing something” - gets under your skin and makes you want more and more. I hope this message drives you to the word. To a deep study of the Word of God about heaven and heaven on earth. This message can only scratch the surface and I hope gives you an itch that cannot be ignored…a pop-up that will not go away.

I, like Dekker, believe it is time we stop being driven by a world of empty promises and lifeless pleasures that continually disappoint us and start being drawn by the light of Glory – like a moth to a flame.

**Pray.** Father we are living in the in-between. We know your Kingdom is here and it is within us. We know your Kingdom is not of this world but our feet are. We are living in-between this world and your eternal Kingdom that is still coming, waiting to be fully revealed. Help us to see what is fleeting and what is eternal. Fill our hearts this morning with heaven, with true passion for the infinite joy of eternity with you, and the courage to place all our hopes not in this life but in the one to come.

Text: Philippians 3:12-20

***12*** **I'm not saying that I have this all together, that I have it made. But I am well on my way,** *reaching out for Christ, who has so wondrously reached out for me*. ***13*** **Friends, don't get me wrong: By no means do I count myself an expert in all of this, but I've got my eye on the goal,** *where God is beckoning us onward - to Jesus*. ***14*** **I'm off and running, and I'm not turning back.**

***15*** **So let's keep focused on that goal, those of us who want everything God has for us. If any of you have something else in mind, something less than total commitment, God will clear your blurred vision - you'll see it yet!** ***16*** **Now that we're on the right track, let's stay on it.**

***17*** **Stick with me, friends. Keep track of those you see running this same course, headed for this same goal.** ***18*** **There are many out there taking other paths, choosing other goals, and trying to get you to go along with them. I've warned you of them many times; sadly, I'm having to do it again. All they want is easy street. They hate Christ's Cross.** ***19*** **But easy street is a dead-end street. Those who live there make their bellies their gods; belches are their praise; all they can think of is their appetites.** ***20*** *But there's far more to life for us.* We're citizens of high heaven! **We're waiting the arrival of the Savior, the Master, Jesus Christ,**

As you can see there are three questions in the passages:
1. Verse 12: For what has Christ taken a hold of your heart?

2. Verse 13: NIV has it "forgetting what lies behind, and straining toward what is ahead" What holds you back from fully living, experiencing Christ's hold on your heart?

3. Verse 20: Where is your true citizenship?

**1. Verse 12: For what has Christ taken a hold of your heart?**
I do not believe Jesus died for us, rose again, and reached out to us so we would become content with this life and this world. Remember this Hymn…

1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
Oh, what a *foretaste* of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
- Refrain:

This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.

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2. Perfect submission, perfect delight,
*Visions* of rapture now burst on my sight;
Angels, descending, bring from above
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love.

*3.* Perfect submission, all is at rest,
I in my Savior am happy and blest,
*Watching and waiting, looking above,*
*Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.*

**Frances J. Crosby, 1873**

It is for heaven we are redeemed. As long as we are alive in body heaven is here. Jesus taught his disciples to pray that God's Kingdom would come and that his will would be done on earth as it is in heaven. That's not saying we need to get through this life in order to know heaven. In part, heaven is now. In part because heaven is not of this world – this life is a foretaste of what is to come.

2 Corinthians 5:1-7

***5*** The Spirit of God whets our appetite by giving us a taste of what's ahead. He puts a little of heaven in our hearts so that we'll never settle for less.

Romans 8:17-25

***19*** The created world itself can hardly wait for what's coming next. ***20*** Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in ***21*** until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens.

Colossians 1:5

***5*** The lines of purpose in your lives never grow slack, tightly tied as they are to your future in heaven, kept taut by hope.

God made us and redeemed us for heaven…not this world… *Watching and waiting, looking above, Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.*

**2. Verse 13: NIV has it "forgetting what lies behind, and straining toward what is ahead" What detains you from living, experiencing Christ's hold on your heart?**

Paul had a lot to let go of. He was a zealous member of the Sanhedrin. One of the highest, most prominent Jewish bodies, and Paul delighted in killing Christians – he understood it as his God given responsibility. Then Jesus took a hold of his heart and changed Paul. Paul knew he had done evil (yet must have understood he had released those lives to all their souls hoped and longed for).

A life of prominence and taking lives. He had a lot to leave behind but as a new creation in Christ knew there was much more waiting in heaven.

Paul himself said "to love is Christ, to die is gain" os as the Meaasge has it ***21*** Alive, I'm Christ's messenger; dead, I'm his bounty. Life versus even more life! I can't lose.

Verse 20: Where is your true citizenship?

**1 Cor 13:12**

***12*** We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us! ***13*** But for right now, until

that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

Don Piper was on his way home from a conference when his car was crushed by a semi that crossed into his lane. The medical personnel said he died instantly. For 90 minutes, while his body lay lifeless inside the wreck, Piper experienced the glories of heaven and was awed by its beauty.

Ninety minutes later, while a minister prayed for him – he miraculously returned to life – with the profoundly captivating memory of heaven and inexpressible joy burned into his mind, heart and soul. (Don Piper, 90 Minutes in Heaven/from the Back cover)

Don shares – Without the slightest doubt, I know heaven is real. It is more real than anything I have experienced in my life. Think of the worst thing that has ever happened to you, the best thing that's ever happened to you, and everything in between; heaven is more real than any of those things. Since my return to earth, I've been acutely aware that all of us are on a pilgrimage. At the end of this life, wherever we go – heaven or hell – life will be more real than this one we're now living.

I never thought of that before my accident, of course. Heaven was a concept, something I believed in, but I didn't think about it often.

In the years since my accident, I've repeatedly thought of the last night Jesus was with his disciples. Only hours before his betrayal and crucifixion and his journey to heaven, he sat with his disciples in the upper room. He begged them not to be troubled and to trust him.

Then he told them he would leave them and added;

***1*** "Don't let this throw you. You trust God, don't you? Trust me. ***2*** There is plenty of room for you in my Father's home. If that weren't so, would I have told you that I'm on my way to get a room ready for you? ***3*** And if I'm on my way to get your room ready, I'll come back and get you so you can live where I live. John 14:1-3

(Don Piper, 90 minutes in heaven p. 194-195)

Don Piper and the writers of the Bible have something we are missing - a true and deep and all consuming passion for heaven. A passion that outweighs anything this life has to offer. A passion that gives meaning, joy and happiness to this life. They knew they are citizens of heaven and there lies the true experience of living for Christ. Jesus didn't die so we could slog through this life but race through it with a passionate hope for the life to come.

I hope this has begun an itch you need to scratch – finding this passion for heaven and inexpressible joy in this life.