

Christmas Eve Sermon At Dick Conners Correctional Center 12/24/2017

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

I remember Christmas as a child as the most exciting time. We were very poor, my grandmother raised my sister and I after our mother died in 1953. We didn't even have a car, and my grandmother was unable to work, so we lived on Social Security, and the \$13.00 a week she received from an apartment we rented out in our house.

But when Christmas came... we were rich. As orphans, everyone bought us Christmas presents and I mean that tree was almost pushed out of the room every year.

But that was just a reminder and celebration of the great Christmas that had come, and the perfect gift that is yet to come.

We do not know the date Christ was born, but does it matter? We know He was born because He lived among us

John 1:14 – And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

Isaiah 9:6 – For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

He came to us

Not as a glorious King in fine robes, He came to us as one of the poorest, without respect, without beauty, with nothing to offer but truth and an old rugged bridge covered in righteous blood.

A truth that saves and a bridge that leads home... home to our father, back into His graces, back into His arms, back into the relationship we broke so long ago.

His birth brought us a new birth.

Christ Jesus created a gate, a gate to a narrow path that leads to that glorious home, and He leads us through the path, Psalm 23.

John 14:6 – Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Matthew 7:13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

As we celebrate Christmas tomorrow, I pray we are led by the Holy Spirit, to live in full awareness of the sacrifice made for us by the suffering this pure man,

Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace experienced for us... each of us.

And, that our day is filled with overwhelming Joy as we focus our attention on the true meaning of the day.

Yes, He was the gift ... the small gift wrapped in plain paper but when revealed became the most glorious gift of all history...

and when you want to give someone a gift, share this gift with them, it will be the most wonderful thing you can ever do in your entire life, share the true gift of Christmas with one other person, the gift of eternal life.

The Gift of Heaven

So, let's talk about that gift tonight... Let's unwrap that present a little early.

It is eternal, everlasting, never ending:

One of the challenges is understanding eternity; it really is beyond our imagination because we live in a "time oriented existence" and when you think about it we can't understand that either, let me explain.

Earthly life is short.

James 4:14 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

And supported by our own person witness that anyone of advanced years can attest to.

We also think of eternity in terms of time as we understand it in our present state, we even sing about it in one of our most beloved hymns

"Amazing Grace"

When we've been there ten thousand years,

Bright shining as the sun,

We've no less days to sing God's praise

Than when we'd first begun.

However, heaven is the end of time; in heaven there is no time at all. To understand eternity let's start with the current understanding we have of time, that it is a series of moments strung together for around 70 to 80 years.

We literally "live in the moment" let's examine this very moment and as we do, it is gone, and another moment has arrived and taken its place, and just as we realized that, another new moment has arrived, and suddenly it is also gone, with the presence of yet a new one.

You see we really can't even truly understand the time we're in now, for instance it was just a few moments ago I started this lesson, and that first moment is now gone forever and some of us here do not even remember it already. It's like trying to grasp and hold onto smoke... can't be done.

But heaven, is the eternal moment... not a series of moments, but truly "living in the moment" and truly grasping where you are and never forgetting that moment, for in a sense you continue in that moment... Yet not "stuck in Time: either.

The only way I can understand this is considering how much greater "mental" ability we will have to remember and know all things, not like God, but an extended ability over human life, so as something new occurs, that old thing does not dim from our thoughts such as it does now as we move from moment to moment but remains with us for eternity.

1 Corinthians 13:12 Now we see but a dim reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

This sounds like true transparency!!

Simply put... it's mind boggling and impossible to grasp as we

cannot understand anything without beginning and without end as God is, nor anything with a beginning but no ending as we are.

So let's move on...

Now, let's talk about Heaven

Luke 13:18 Then He said, "What is the kingdom of God like? And to what shall I compare it? 19 It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and put in his garden; and it grew and became a large tree, and the birds of the air nested in its branches."

20 And again He said, "To what shall I liken the kingdom of God? 21 It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened."

Apparently, it starts as a small concept, an idea when we first hear it, but by seeking it, feeding it by learning of God it grows, and grows, until it fills us, it becomes the largest idea, thought, and goal in our lives.

And as we mature in this knowledge it changes our very essence; it changes who we are, and the peace of heaven will grow within us, as birds of the air nested in its branches, the peace of God will nest in our lives, we will be a welcome and safe place for all those around us.

We will no longer seek the things of this world, nor will we be concerned with the things of the world, but only with our relationship with God...

There's an old fifties song "To Know Him Is to Love Him" sung by a group called "the Teddy Bears" and was written by Phil Spector, who was inspired by words on his father's tombstone, "To Know Him Was To Love Him... and it applies so well with this

growing relationship with God. 2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new

We are going to attempt to describe heaven the best we can with the information scripture as revealed to us.

The human authors of the Bible who have attempted to describe the beauties of heaven struggle to depict an existence in a dimension beyond the grasp of mere mortals:

... but just as it is written, "Things which eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, All that God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

For there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth and the First Heaven and the First Earth passed away. Just as Jesus said they would in Mt 24:35

Peter said they would be melted with fervent heat. 1 Pet 3:10

And There was no more sea according to Rev 4:6. This means there is no distance between God and His people. We will be with him for eternity living in the Holy City

And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb (Revelation 21:23, cf. also Romans 8:18; Colossians 3:4; 1 Peter 1:7).

Many years after John heard Jesus promise to prepare a place for His followers, he was given a vision of the future. He saw a new heaven and earth that were completely cleansed of all sin.

Standing on a high mountain, **he watched the New Jerusalem come down out of heaven.** The promised place was prepared and ready. The sight was beyond human description, but John did his best to put this celestial vision into earthly language (Rev.

21:1-22:5).

The brilliance of God's glory radiated from the structure, and its foundations gleamed with various colors of precious stones. The gates were made of pearls and the street of transparent gold. This 1500-mile-long cube-shaped city was designed by the Lord as a place where He and mankind would share an intimate, perfect relationship forever.

I have often been confused by this, thinking the new Heaven was just another way of saying the New Jerusalem similar to the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of heaven are interchangeable...

but I think I was wrong, I now believe they are two separate things... The one is a city, and the other is the people... and this makes a lot more sense of the description... and I admit I could be wrong, but this is the way I see it now.

And what is this new Jerusalem? it is the church, the people of God.

So, visualize this, A new Heaven and Earth prepared for the new Jerusalem, the new people of God who chose while in the flesh to partake in this new heaven and new earth by accepting the original Christmas gift some 2,000 years ago.

They will come down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband.

So, if our final destination is heaven, why are we coming out of it?

And as a bride...

This emphasizes a prepared people. And A Great Voice Out of Heaven declares that the Tabernacle (tent) of God is with men. and He will dwell with us. We shall be his Peoples, God himself will dwell with us and be our God.

So, as we westerners prefer to see things in like patterns, order, and be chronologically correct

1. A new heaven and a new earth has been created and are physical places. Just as Jesus stated.
 1. John 14: 2 In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.
2. The Church is removed from the old earth and the old Heaven and they meet together in the air.
 1. 1 Thessalonians 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.
 2. 1 Corinthians 15:52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
3. The old earth and heaven, destroyed
 1. For there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth and the First Heaven and the First Earth passed away. Just as Jesus said they would in Mt 24:35
 2. Peter said they would be melted with fervent heat. 1 Pet 3:10
4. They (The new Jerusalem) will come down out of heaven as a bride adorned for her husband.
5. And where are they coming from? The Air (heaven as in the skies), for they have met in the air for the old earth and the old heaven which have been destroyed
6. And where are they going? The new Earth
7. And How long shall we remain there with God among us? For eternity

Now I do not claim that to be a perfect description of events, or even places, it seems that the new Heaven and New Earth are interconnected somehow.

And of course, we ask so what is the present heaven, and why

does it have to pass away... the complete perfect explanation will just have to come when we get there...

It just seems to me the present Earth is the place we make the choice to go to heaven, and the current heaven is the holding place for the saved until the old earth and heaven are burned for that is the best way to destroy the disease called sin.

Just keep this in mind, heaven can mean the skies above us, or the abode of God, and Paul even spoke of a third heaven.

Like understanding time in the sense of eternity we may have difficulty imagining the physical structure of this city, however, we have no trouble understanding the meanings of the things that are not in the city, which is sin and corruption, nor will there will be pain, tears, mourning, or death. All frustration, boredom, and problems will cease. No one will have handicaps, and our bodies will never grow old, tired, or sick, for the former things are passed away God Said, I make all things new Kainos- new in character

So, what will we be like in Heaven?

1. Jesus "will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body." Philippians 3:21
2. We will be changed to celestial bodies from terrestrial bodies; "sown in dishonor" to "raised in glory." 1st Corinthians 15:43
3. God, through Christ's transforming power, is able to raise up His children in Christ with new glorious bodies, being completely free from the ravages of sin and possessing the glory of Christ instead. 1 Corinthians 15:56
4. Paul talks about the resurrection and the resurrected body. Our heavenly bodies will be different from our

natural bodies, 1 Corinthians, chapter 15 & 35

5. We are not merely a spirit just as Jesus wasn't; rather, the natural body is fitted for this present life in our physical universe, the spiritual body will be that which best suits us for the eternal existence we are destined for in our eternal abode. Luke 24:37-43.
6. Earthly bodies are characterized by mortality (being susceptible to death),
7. Resurrected bodies will be characterized by immortality (not susceptible to death).
8. Our earthly bodies are susceptible to decay (corruption), they will become incorruptible 1 Corinthians 15:53).
9. our natural bodies are prone to weakness, our resurrected bodies will be characterized by strength 1st Corinthians 15:43.
10. People will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. Matthew 22: 30
11. Our earthly body limits us in ways that our spiritual body will not. John 20:19
12. Never again will they hunger;
13. Never again will they thirst.
14. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. Revelation 7:16
15. the sin nature, inherited from Adam (Romans 5:12) will no longer be with us, for we will be made after the holiness of Christ (1 John 3:2).

But What Will I Do in Heaven?

Although most of us understand that heaven is a place of great joy and delight, we may wonder what we are going to do there. Some Christians have even voiced their concern that it might

be boring—one long church service that never ends.

The late great preacher E.V. Hill's son asked him this very question once, wouldn't it be boring in heaven just praising God all day long, and Rev Hill had the best answer to this I have ever heard, he said that when we raise up and say Holy Holy Holy and by the time we bow back down and raise up again God will have done something else so wonderful that we will be compelled to say Holy holy holy again... for eternity.

Although praise of our God and Savior will be an essential part of our activities, we must be careful not to view it strictly from the perspective of our present earthly experience.

Right now, we live in fleshly bodies and struggle with self-centered thinking, but then we will be free from selfishness, let's stop and think about that for a moment.

The day we are born the only thing we know is self. Hopefully as time goes on we are taught to think more of others and less of ourselves, yet we cannot help but retain the thought of self in a high degree, for it is our body in which we feel pain, it is in our bodies that we may end up in a prison, or being tortured, or murdered... It is in our body we feel pleasures, and it is in our bodies that we feel the temptations and commit the sins.

But there, we will no longer give thought to self-identity, or to ego, self-preservation, self-satisfaction, but we will take constant delight in praising the Lord.

When the blinders of this mortal life are removed, we will see things as they really are (1 Corinthians 13:12). Knowing fully what Christ has saved us from and seeing the glories He has provided for us, we will not be able to stop ourselves from joyfully thanking and exalting Him.

One of the most significant testimonies regarding the activity

of the redeemed in heaven is a short but meaningful statement that is found in Revelation 22 verse 3, look at it, it says: 'His servants shall serve him'.

Now, what type of work will we be engaged in in heaven? Well, I'm sure there will be many types, even practical types, but the imagery that is given to us here, particularly in the book of the Revelation, is an imagery of priestly service. We will be engaged in the service of a heavenly priesthood.

In chapter 1 of Revelation and verse 5 we read: '[Jesus Christ is the one who] loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen'.

We all, now, are priests; we all, now, through the Mediator, the one and only Jesus Christ, can come to God – but it will be the same in heaven when we are in God's immediate presence.

In fact, everything we do will be an act of worship. In Luke 19:12-26, Jesus told a parable that clearly shows we will be given responsibilities in heaven according to our degree of faithfulness with what God entrusted to us on earth.

Even in eternity, we're described as bondservants of the Lord (Revelation 22:3). Our service for Christ began the moment we were saved and will continue forever.

Relocation to heaven does not bring about the end of service but rather the perfection of it—all the frustration, failure, and inadequacy that has accompanied our work since the fall will be removed.

Heaven is a place we ALL want to see and live for eternity! Our eyes, minds and imaginations could NEVER, in a million years, quite comprehend nor grasp its encompassing beauty and glory!

One day, those of us who are born again Christians, will know

this beauty, where all pain, suffering and tears will be absent!

So I want to wrap this evenings lessons with this:

More important than anything else is the fact that we will be with our Lord forever. The River of Life flows from His Throne! It will be perfect! It will be clear!

When we see Christ face to face His presence will dominate heaven the same way the sun dominates the hot summer sky.

Just as the sun illuminates the summer sky, so will the glory of Christ illuminate all of heaven.

We'll get to talk to Him, and listen to Him speak. Imagine hearing His voice! The Bible says it will be "like the voice of many waters, and like the voice of loud thunder." (Revelation 14:2). Imagine the stories He'll tell us, the lessons He'll teach, the love He'll share!!!

And, think of the stories you can share to family, and non-believers as you go through life, and I sincerely hope you find a way to do so... what a glorious gift you have available to share with others.

Thank you for your time, and we will have you in our prayers for a beautiful Christmas even here in this place... remember, it's not the surroundings... it's the gift that counts.

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