Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Focusing on Expectations
Scripture: Philippians 3:20-21
Code: 50-36

Let's open our Bibles this morning to Philippians chapter 3, Philippians chapter 3. We return for part four of this series out of this chapter called "Reaching for the prize," pursuing the prize. The text to which we have given our attention for several weeks is verses 17 through 21. Let me just remind you of that text by rereading it for you, Philippians 3:17: "Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us; for many walk of whom I often told you and now tell you even weeping that they are enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their appetite and whose glory is in their shame who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory by the exertion of the power that He has, even to subject all things to Himself."

Going back from verse 17 which we just read all the way back to verse 14, we focus on the key to this passage. Paul says, "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." We're talking about pursuing the prize, pursuing the goal, living your Christian life in such a way that it demonstrates that your single great passion is to be like Jesus Christ, that's the prize, that's the goal Paul so lived. If you go back in to verse 8 he said, "I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Jesus Christ my Lord for whom I have suffered the loss of all things and count them but rubbish in order that I may gain Christ." In verse 10 he said, "I want to know Him. I want to know the power of His resurrection. I want to know the fellowship of His sufferings. I want to be conformed to His death." In verse 11 he said, "I want to attain to the resurrection from the dead." And that brought him in verse 13 to say, "There's only one thing I do," verse 14, "I press on toward the goal."

You see, Paul lived a life pursuing Christ's likeness. That's what we've been noting in this passage. Christ's likeness must be the pursuit of every believer. It is the single basic duty of every Christian. We live, however, in a sort of non- committal time period. I received a letter this week from some people asking me to speak at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention and they said, "We are deeply and greatly concerned about the apathy in the church, the indolence in the church, the seeming lack of passion in the church and would you please let us have it?" Is the way they put it, as if I'm not in enough trouble, now they want me to get in trouble with all of the religious broadcasters, which I will gladly do. That kind of trouble is my piece of cake in some ways, I guess. But they're greatly concerned about what they see as the pervasive apathy.

We live in what Serokin(?) called a sensate culture. That is a civilization that is much more concerned about pleasant emotions than it is about productive efforts. We are much more in to comfort than we are in to accomplishment. And I believe that this sensate culture has produced a lazy, indolent group of people. In fact, you can simply note by the increasingly burgeoning population of quote/unquote the homeless, how many people are not interested in productive effort. We live in a society that is fast moving toward nothing, absolutely nothing, without goals other than personal comfort, lack of responsibility, lack of accountability, seeking comfort rather than accomplishment.

And I think it spills over into the church. And I think the church today suffers from apathy, a lack of commitment. We have forgotten that we are in a holy war and that we as soldiers of Jesus Christ must wear the armor. In Ephesians 6:14 Paul said we are to put on the belt of truth. The first thing a soldier put on when he went to battle, he had a tunic, just a piece of material, he wouldn't go in to hand-to-hand combat with that material flying around, it would get in his way, could be the cause of his own death. And so the first thing he would do would put a sash or a belt around his waist, tie it as tight as he could, take the corners of his tunic, pull it up through the belt so that it wouldn't incumber his leg as he moved swiftly across the terrain in hand-to-hand combat and tied it all down tight so it wouldn't get in his way. And the belt of truth really could be the belt of truthfulness, in the text, and it has to do, I think, with the seriousness of one's attitude about battle. It's not really a piece of armor in the sense that it can't protect you directly, it's not a weapon. But it does indicate that you're serious about the battle and you're tying up the loose ends of your life. Before you take the machaira, which is that dagger of the Spirit, before you take the shield and the breastplate, you've got to be sure you're serious about the battle and that belt of truth or truthfulness or sincerity or commitment means you are devoted to the struggle and you are devoted to the victory, you are devoted to pursuing the goal. We've said much about this. And I don't want to belabor the point in general, but we are called to follow the goal of being like Jesus Christ, that is the goal and that is the prize that God will give us in the end.

Now, Paul suggest for us in verse 17 as he concludes this section some necessary elements in this pursuit. Element number one is to follow after examples. Verse 17 he says, "Brethren, join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." In other words, if you're going to be pursuing Christ's likeness, you've got to have somebody to follow, somebody who shows you how to pursue that. And that's the role of spiritual discipleship, spiritual leadership, follow after examples.

The second thing, and we noted this last time, was to flee from enemies. Verses 18 and 19 introduce us to the enemies of the cross of Christ. They must be avoided at all costs because their end is destruction, their God is their appetite, their glory is in their shame and they set their minds on earthly things, they cannot lead you in the right path. Please note what I told you last time. They're enemies of the cross but that's not how they identify themselves. They invariably identify themselves as friends

of the cross. Therein lies the subtlety of their deception.

Now we note for you in verse 18 there are many of them, he says many walk this way, that he often warned them about such and was so passionate about it that even as he pens this he is presently weeping. This is of major concern to Paul as to other New Testament writers...avoid, flee from the enemies of the cross. I suggested to you last time that he could have in mind with regard to the Philippians two different groups. One could be the Judaizers of whom he wrote in verses 2 and 3, the Judaizers who said, "Yes, we believe in Christ, yes we believe He died, yes we believe He rose, but we also believe that salvation must be attained, partly Christ, partly you, it's Christ plus circumcision, Christ plus keeping the Mosaic Law." So they added works to the cross and thus they were the enemies of the cross. That is, hostility toward the cross. The claim of Revelation, that is the claim of the Word of God, is that the work of Christ on the cross is sufficient, there is no need for human works to be added to it.

So the Jews, the Judaizing Jews were enemies of the cross because while affirming the cross they were adding works for salvation and they could be described in verse 19, each of those elements of description could describe the Judaizers, there end would be destruction because if they add works to salvation or add works to grace, I should say, then there is no grace and salvation does not occur. Their God being their appetite could refer to their preoccupation with dietary laws, or it could refer to the fact that they were doing whatever their own lusts dictated to them to do to accomplish things for their own glory. Their glory in that same verse is in the thing they should be ashamed of, that is the effort to add works to grace. They set their mind on earthy things like feasts and festivals and circumcisions and ceremonies and so forth. So it could refer to the Judaizers.

But, secondly, and perhaps more likely, he has in mind here the licentious antinomian Gentiles, those who would say, "Yes we believe in Christ but we want to live anyway we want." Perhaps they were dualistic in their viewpoint, believing that didn't matter what the flesh did anyway, it was enough to just believe in Christ, that took care of the spiritual end of things and it didn't matter how you lived after that. These antinomian, that is anti-law kinds of people, these libertines also were the enemies of the cross even though they may have said we believe in Christ and we believe in His death and resurrection. The Judaizers added works to salvation at the wrong point and the Gentile antinomian subtracted works from salvation at the right point. The Jews said you have to have works going on, and the Gentiles said you don't need works coming out. One dealt with justification, the other was sanctification, but both were enemies of the cross. To say that the cross does not change one's life and call for a life of obedience is as wrong as to say that there must be works for salvation. So on the one hand the Jews in Judaizing, adding works, were enemies of the cross. The Gentiles in eliminating any works were enemies of the cross. And again the Holy Spirit points to the false professors who are not really saved, the constant theme in New Testament Scripture.

Now finally, and for this morning we come to the last two verses, the final element necessary for pursuing the prize, let's call it focusing on expectations. Following examples, fleeing from enemies, and focusing on expectations. Here we come to the underlying motivation. What is it that makes us pursue the prize? It is the expectation, it is the hope of the coming of Jesus Christ who will change us to be like Him. We have to keep that focus clear.

Now let me stop at this point and say you can read the contents of verses 20 and 21, it's obvious. Paul says our citizenship is in heaven and we are eagerly waiting for the return of the Lord Jesus because when He comes He'll transform us to be like Him and He's got the power to do it, that's what he says. In other words, we have a heavenly perspective. We view heaven as our primary preoccupation. This is what motivates us. We're concerned to see the Savior. We're concerned to hear "Well done" from the Savior. We're concerned to be rewarded by the Savior. We're concerned for eternal glory, that's their preoccupation. You see, the Apostle Paul knew very little of creature comforts. He knew very little of pleasant emotions. He was uncomfortable most of the time, beaten, shipwrecked, stoned, left for dead, on and on and on, always sorrowful, always weeping over one thing or another, tearful, always in some kind of pain or another, disappointment, difficulties, deprivation. But he had no concern for pleasant emotions and pleasant feelings, he was committed to a productive life moving toward a goal. And that goal was all tied to heaven. So his preoccupation was heavenly. That's why he could say, "Far better to depart and be with Christ." Much better for him.

And this is the focus of life that is required if we're going to pursue Christ's likeness. Christ is a heavenly being. Christ is of heaven, from heaven, in heaven, heaven is His place, He is ours, heaven is our place. If preoccupied with Him, we're preoccupied with heaven. It matters little to us what happens here, it matters a lot to us what happens there. He is there, that's our place. So in verse 20 he says our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Back in verse 14 he called it the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. The time is coming when...when the Lord calls us up to meet Him and will be forever with Christ. That's our focus. Paul says, "I long for that...I long for that." And the only reason he stuck around here was to do his work, to finish his ministry. And when he came to the end in 2 Timothy he said, "I've finished my course, I've kept the faith." And now he says, "I'm ready to get out of here, I'm ready to get the crown of life which the Lord the righteous judge should give to me, and not to me only but to all them that love His appearing." He wanted out when the work was done because that was a better place, that was his place. He wanted to be with his Savior.

Can we understand what a remote thought that is from the contemporary church? Frankly, that...that is not even a popular thought. In fact, not at all a popular thought. You see, you have in the church today this far-reaching emphasis on prosperity, health-wealth gospel, solve all your problems, fix up your life, have a happy marriage, have a happy home, be successful. We are living in a...not only a

man-centered theology but we're living in an earth-bound kind of perspective where the church is content to milk this world for all its worth. This has become our place, even though it shouldn't be.

A number of months ago I did a Sunday night series on heaven, eight sermons. If you haven't listened to that, get those tapes or get the study guide on heaven, I think it's important for you to understand that. I might just give you a little bit of a reprise on some of the things we talked about in that series, but most of our lives in this world today are so bound to the earth that frankly we have absolutely no desire to leave and go to heaven. And then there are some cultures in the world where if I went into a church of assembled believers and said, "How many of you would be willing today to leave and go to heaven?" the majority of them would say yes, where I think in this situation here if I said, "How many of you honestly and genuinely would be ready to pack up and leave and go to heaven today?" most of us might say no. Some of us might want to go because we don't like our circumstances. Others of us might like to go because we want to inflict pain on somebody who would miss us. But from the standpoint of just the sheer joy of going, I mean, you go to a Christian funeral, the typical Christian funeral, and we don't talk about heaven, we don't think about heaven and we have very little concern about heaven until somebody dies and then we go to the funeral and we comfort the remaining family that this person is in heaven and secretly we're thrilled it isn't us. And we live under the very very deceiving lie that death is the enemy of the Christian when the fact of the matter is, for those who have a heavenly perspective death becomes a friend. So in a humanistic evolutionary world where the view of life is that death is the enemy that ends it all, the church somehow sort of buys into that. And in a materialistic world where it's get all you can get now, the church buys into that. And so we are really laying up treasure on earth where moth and rust corrupts, where thieves break through and steal.

But we're into this world. We are also are not into delayed gratification. And when the Lord says, "Well, in the future I'll give you a reward," we don't understand, we can't even relate to that. Who in our world experiences delayed gratification? Whatever you want, you get now, you don't have to have money, you can just use a credit card. You don't have to build it, you can buy it. You don't have to go very far to get it, it's all over the place, whatever it is. Everything is instant gratification.

So, you talk about heavenly reward...it doesn't interest anybody because we're into instantaneous gratification. So in modern evangelical circles, heaven is pretty much ignored. Very little Christian preaching on heaven, very little emphasis on heavenly things, very little concern about the life to come, but mammoth kind of preoccupation with this world, this life, how I feel, how I get along, how I succeed, how I prosper, on and on and on and on, so that death becomes the enemy because we assume that this is the best, when it isn't.

But if you're going to pursue Christ's likeness and maybe this is the reason so few do, if you're going to pursue Christ's likeness with the passion with which Paul did it, you're going to have to get your focus out of this world and into the next. So let's see if we can't help you do that, look at verse 20,

"Our citizenship is in heaven." That's where we have to start, beloved. We are not citizens of this world. The word "citizenship," by the way, only used here, this particular word, means a colony of foreigners. It is used in a secular source to speak about a capital city that kept the names of its citizens on a register. In other words, we're registered citizens of another place. We are registered citizens of heaven. Our names are there, our father is there, our Savior is there, our home is there, our fellow saints are there, our inheritance is there, that's our place, that's our place. And Paul says we have to have that perspective.

Now the Philippians could understand that because the Philippians were a colony of Roman citizens far from Rome. So they would understand what it was to have citizenship somewhere other than where you're living. They were citizens of Rome but they were in the colony of Philippi. We are citizens of heaven living here in the earth. Unfortunately, like Israel of old, you remember, taken into Babylonian captivity, when it came time to go back to the promised land, many of them had decided that they wanted to stay where they were they became so entrenched. And I see that same kind of analogy as in the church. When the Lord says now it's time to go to heaven, we fight it as if it was the worst imaginable thing because this world has become everything to us. But our citizenship is in heaven. You must understand that. Our citizenship is in heaven.

Now he doesn't stop at that point. He says, "From which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." So what he's telling us the Lord is in heaven and He's coming back. Do you remember in John 14 He said, "I'm going away and if I go I will come again to receive you unto Myself that where I am you may be also," John 14:2 and 3? "I am the way, the truth and the life," passage. So Jesus said I'm going away, in My Father's house there are many rooms, I'm going to prepare them for you, I'm going to come back, I'm going to get you, I'm going to take you to be with Me, so we're waiting for Christ. We're not waiting for an event, we're waiting for a person...we're waiting for a person.

You know, and maybe just my own strange musings but it seems a curiosity to me that up until about ten years or so ago most of the evangelical church was committed to a pre-tribulational Rapture, that is to say that the church age would come to an end when Jesus came and took the church out. And then there would be a time period known as the Great Tribulation. And then the Lord would return with His saints to set up His Kingdom. But that the church would be taken out, that the Lord would come and take us before the Tribulation, with the Antichrist, and the holocaust that are described particularly in Revelation 6 and following, but over the last ten years that has shifted and the new preoccupation seems to me to be a post-tribulational view that says we're all going through the Tribulation, that's the popular one. And to be real honest with you, I don't think it's particularly exegetical, I don't think it's particularly theological, I think it's particular a reflection of the sort of subliminal preoccupation with the world. You know, we'd sort of like to hang around and see the Antichrist, kind of mentality. "I mean, I've been reading about this so long, I'd like to see the guy, so I'll develop a theology that leaves me here, I'm safe anyway, right? I'd like to stomp on a few demons,"

the sort of...the Charismatics have sort of fed the fire of this stomping on demons, binding Satan mentality that preoccupies people with things that are in a negative supernatural world. And so I think the church has sort of a new preoccupation. We're no longer longing for heaven and longing for Christ. We'd kind of like to hang around the world as long as possible, and we're so much a part of it we'd like to see how the whole thing comes out in the end. We'd like to step on a few demons and watch some of the action in the Tribulation. It's kind of like, you know, Revelation is coming attractions and previews and we don't want to miss the main feature because for us the main feature has become the novelty of what happens and we've lost sight of the reality of communion with the living Christ.

Now I don't want to say that we have backed in to a post- Trib view in the church, but I kind of feel that, I can't be dogmatic. There is an unhealthy preoccupation with that kind of thing and an almost absent concern about being with Christ, seeing Christ. But our citizenship is in heaven. And I don't know about you, but I'm not waiting for the Antichrist, I'm waiting for Christ. And I'm not waiting for the Tribulation, I really could care less about being around, I want to be with Christ. Why do I want to be in a devil-filled world when I can be in a holy heaven?

But, you know, I think there are other people who don't want to go to heaven because they like their sin so much they know there won't be any of it there. That's a strange thought, but I'm sure it's true. The pleasures of sin are the pleasures of sin. Some people say, "I don't want to go to heaven, it wouldn't be any fun there." Some Christians, I think, are even reluctant to give up some of their vices. But heaven is our home and we wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Romans 8 it says that we groan, waiting for the glorious adoption of the children of God, we groan waiting for the redemption of the body, Romans 8:18 to 23, that whole text. We are groaning, longing for what is to come. Paul says the sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory which is to come. So I'm not looking for creature comfort, I'm not looking for pleasant emotions, I'm not looking for a pain-free life, this stuff doesn't matter to me, I'm looking for what's there...what's coming. I'm doing what Peter said, 2 Peter 3, "Looking for and hasting under the day of God which causes us to be found blameless and in peace, looking for the Savior." John says if we have this hope in us, we purify ourselves. You're to be looking for Christ. That is the greatest point of spiritual motivation on the one hand, it is the greatest point of spiritual accountability on the other hand, and it is the greatest point of spiritual security.

You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, if I know Jesus is coming, that's motivation...that's motivation. I want to be ready when He comes. I want to be faithful when He comes. I want to show Him that I've served Him. Paul says that when He comes, 1 Corinthians chapter 3, He's going to look at your work, it's going to be tested by fire, and you're going to receive an eternal reward. It's going to be determined whether your works are wood, hay, stubble or gold, silver, precious stones. That's motivation. I want to receive the reward, I want to receive the prize. I want to receive the well-done,

good and faithful servant. I want to enter the joy of the Lord. That's motivation to me. I am motivated at that point because I love Christ and because I know that there are eternal benedictions tied to my faithfulness here. So I am motivated by the fact that He's coming, that I'll have to face Him, that there is a judgment seat of Christ where I will have to face the things that I have done and be rewarded a He would reward me.

But it not only is motivation, it's also an accountability point. It's not just sheer motivation of love and joy and desire for reward, there's also a threat there, isn't there? Because I know that I don't want to face the Lord having lost what I have wrought, as it says in John's epistle. Look to yourselves that you lose not the things that you have wrought but that you receive a full reward. I know it's going to be a time standing before the judgment seat of Christ when the true assessment takes place. And I am...well not under condemnation, I certainly feel the threat that some of the things I've done in my life are going to be burned up. So on the one hand it's a positive motivation, on the other hand it's kind of a negative threat, it's an accountability point that I have to face the Lord. There is accountability there. That's why in 1 Corinthians 4 Paul says, "Look, we have to wait unto the day when the secret things are revealed, then shall every man have praise from God." God's going to open the secret things of your heart and find out what's worthy of praise.

But thirdly, this hope in the coming of Christ, is not only a motivation and a point of accountability but it's our greatest security because it's a promise. If I go, Jesus said in John 14, I will...what?...come again. That's a promise. Acts 1:11, "This same Jesus who is taken up from you shall so come in like manner as you've seen Him go into heaven." John chapter 6 verse 39, "You can know this for sure, it's the Father's will that all that the Father gives Him He will raise up at the last day and will lose none of that," read that, John 6:39 and following, that's a promise.

So as I look at the Second Coming of Christ and the promise of being with Him, I have motivation, I have accountability and I have security in that. It doesn't matter what happens in this world, nothing's going to change that. Why? Because my inheritance is undefiled, incorruptible and reserved in heaven for me, says Peter. Isn't that a great statement? First Peter 1...it's reserved for me. We need to live in the light of the Second Coming of Christ. We need to live in the light of the return of Jesus Christ. We, in a sense, are not in heaven, obviously, but in another sense, we live in the heavenlies. Ephesians 1:3, "You've been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies." What do you mean by that? What do you mean by that? Ephesians 2 says that we have entered into the heavenlies in Christ. What do you mean by that? Well, we are not in the place called heaven but we are experiencing heavenly life. We have the life of God within us. We are under the rule of the heavenly king. We live by the rules of the heavenly kingdom, the Word of God, the standards of righteousness. You see, we share the heavenlies. We are ruled by heaven's king, we live for heaven's cause, we obey heaven's laws. We are to lay up our treasure in heaven. We are blessed in the heavenly dimension, the spiritual dimension of our new life in Christ. So we're tasting the heavenlies. This is what the hymn writer called, "a foretaste of glory divine," we are a new order of

person living in a new community, experiencing a new fellowship that will be full-blown in the place called heaven.

So, Paul says, "look, you belong in heaven, that's your place. You're going to be there forever, right now we're looking for the Savior. What's our attitude?" Notice it verse 20, "Eagerly waiting...eagerly waiting." This wonderful verb is the same one that we find used throughout the New Testament to refer to the Second Coming. It indicates an eager anticipation with patience, that's the best way for me to sum it up, an eager anticipation with patience...with patience. And as I said, it's commonly used in those passages which refer to waiting for the Second Coming.

Now, the question came up when we were studying heaven, where is heaven? People always ask, "Where...where is heaven?" Let me tell you what the Bible says. The Bible says heaven is up, okay? Up. It's all it says. "Come up here," Revelation 4:1. You say, "How far up?" Way up, far up. How far? Well, it's called the third heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:2. You say, "How long does it take to get there?" Are you ready for this? Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "Today, you'll be with Me in paradise." All we know about it, it's up, it's far and we get there fast. The Bible says, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." "Far better to depart and be with Christ." Marvelous, that will tell you a little bit about what happens after death...if nothing else, about the speed with which you move.

What is heaven like? Well, you can look at Ezekiel chapter 1, read Ezekiel 1, that's an Old Testament description of heaven. Don't read it now, and when you're done reading it, you'll scratch your head and say, "What did I just read? I don't understand it." And that's because you can't comprehend its beauty, it's just colors and wheels and lights and it's fabulous. Then turn to Revelation 21 and 22, you'll get a little more careful perspective on what heaven is like. Read Revelation 21 and 22, you'll read about jewels and light and gold and angels and temples and the presence of God. You'll read about the absence of tears and death and crying and sorrow and pain. You'll read everything is perfect and the redeemed of all the ages in history are there. The holy angels are there. So that's heaven. It's got a capital city called The New Jerusalem. It has twelve great pearls that are its twelve gates. It's cubical, it's incredible, heaven is absolutely indescribable. It's everything that the Scripture can describe and infinitely beyond our mind's grasp.

But that's our place. And that's where our Savior is. And that is the place from which He comes. So we eagerly wait. We're waiting for Him. In our eagerness to wait, we are motivated to be like Him. We have a sense of accountability and we have a sense of security because we know He's coming, because He always keeps His promise. So we intensely wait, apekdechomai, we wait with eagerness and intensity and yet with patience for His coming.

It's not an event, look at the end of verse 20, "The Lord Jesus Christ," we wait for a person. That's the prize. Beloved, the goal we pursue all our life is to be like Christ, the prize we get is to be like Him when we see Him.

Now let's go to verse 21. Why are we waiting for Christ? Why do we want Him to come? Listen to this. "Because He will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory," that's why. Why are we waiting for Him? Because we want to be transformed, because we're groaning for the redemption of this body. We'd like to get rid of this sinful flesh. We want to be like Christ, perfect. And again, if you don't want to be, then you like your imperfection. And if you like your imperfection the way it is is because you like your sin. That's how warped our thinking can get. He will make us like Himself. He will transform the body of our humble state. That's our unredeemed flesh.

You see, we've already been made a new creation in the inner man. But the inner man is incarcerated in unredeemed flesh. We're a prisoner locked in unredeemed flesh. And that's not just epidermis and tissue, that's the mind of the flesh and the flesh's lusts. It's deeper than just tissue. There is a humanness, an unredeemed humanness in which this new creation dwells. And the new creation longs to be liberated. That's why it's called the glorious liberation of the children of God in Romans 8. We want to be set free. Paul called it the body of this death from which he longed to be liberated. So we're waiting for that redemption. And He will transform the body of our humble state.

And you say, "When does this happen?" Listen carefully. If you die now or any time before Christ comes for His own, your body goes into the grave. Your spirit goes immediately to be with the Lord, 2 Corinthians 5, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord." Philippians 1 says, "Far better to depart and be with Christ." So when you die, your spirit goes immediately to be with Christ. And you go fast, as I said, into heaven. You become one of the spirits of just men made perfect. Heaven is now occupied by spirits made perfect, they're waiting for their bodies. The bodies are awaiting the coming of Christ. The Bible says when He comes for His church, the dead in Christ do...what?...rise first, and the ones that are alive, they'll just go up and be transformed on the way, cause we haven't died if we're alive at that time. But the bodies are going to be resurrected in the future. Then later on, the Old Testament saints bodies will be resurrected. So even the spirits of just men now made perfect in heaven are waiting their bodies. And they have to have a body because they are designed by God for functions in service and worship throughout eternity that are best expressed through a glorified body as well as a glorified spirit.

So, people say, "Well, what happens when you die here?" Your spirit goes immediately to be with the Lord, but your body has to be changed. When Jesus comes, it says in verse 21, we're waiting for Him, He will transform the body. Now you say, "Well mine might not be anything but a pile of dust." That's fine, He'll still transform it. That word "transformed," metaschematizo. Have you ever seen a schematic, we get the word from that. A schematic is simply the internal design of something. And what it says here is God is going to reschematic us, He's going to totally transform us, it's a new scheme, it's refashioning, redesigning. We will be...we will be given a whole new body adapted to an eternal holy heaven.

You say, "What will it be like?" Look at Christ after His resurrection. He ate, He talked, He walked, He also appeared and disappeared, He also flew through space from earth to heaven. Look at what Christ was like after the resurrection. He was recognizable, He was identifiable. And yet He was transcendent. All of that, perfect, holy glory adapted to the new environment. Our new body is described in some detail in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, you can get out your Bible and read and you'll find yourself thrilled as you see some of the things that are true. We are corruptible, we will be raised incorruptible. We are sinful, we will be raised perfect, holy. And when our spirits are in glory, they're not yet complete until that body comes and the combination of the two suits us for service forever.

So what will we be like in heaven? We will have a perfect soul or a perfect spirit, a perfect inner part and a perfect form, a perfect outer part. The combination of which will perfectly manifest the glory of God. There will be the elimination of all the sin that remained in us. There will be the elimination of everything that inhibiting us...that inhibited us from doing exactly what God wanted. There will be perfect freedom from all evil. Get this, there will be no sin, no sorrow, no pain, no disappointment, no doubt, no fear, no temptation, no weakness, no failure, no hate, no anger, no quarrel, no more prayer, no more repentance, no more confession, perfect pleasure, perfect knowledge, perfect comfort, perfect love, perfect joy.

You say, "I like it better here." No you don't. That's how warped our thinking gets. So, that's what we wait for. You say, "We'll be transformed into...what?" Into conformity with the body of His glory. That's absolutely unbelievable. First John 3:2 says we'll be like Him for we'll see Him as He is. You know, it would be enough if God just saved us from hell. It would be enough if God just saved us from hell and more than enough if He gave us heaven. It would be enough if He just saved us from hell and more than enough if He gave us heaven, but beyond that, He makes us like His Son and He does it all by grace, and we don't deserve any of it. What magnanimity, what generosity. We will be conformed, summorphos, made in a similar form with Christ, our morphos will be like Christ. That word "conformity" there, summorphos, is the same word used in Romans 8:29 where Paul says that God's goal in saving us was to make us conformed to the image of His Son, one in form with His Son. Morphe, we get the word, English word, morph. We talk about an endomorph, an ectomorph, a mesomorph, different forms. We will be in the form of Christ. Unbelievable.

So when we die we are instantly a perfected spirit. When Christ comes, the bodies are raised and we are made instantly into perfect form of Christ as a perfect holy instrument for service, worship and praise with never an evil impulse, never an errant movement, with a mind full of the pure light of God's truth, a brain of undilluted love, undilluted joy, undilluted peace, undilluted goodness, emotions in perfect expression at their fullest and yet in perfect balance. We ought to long for that with all our hearts.

You say, "Are you sure He can do it?" Yeah, look at the end of verse 21, He's going to do it by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. That's another way of saying...it's such a huge statement. You could preach...you could preach months on that whole thing of the plan of God to subject the universe to His authority. But He's going to use the same power that He has to subject the whole universe to Himself. If He can subject the entire universe under His sovereign control, then He can certainly raise your body. That's the point. The word "subject" means to arrange in order of rank or to manage. He has the power to order the universe. He has the power to line it all up. He has the power to manage it. Listen, our Lord had the power to create the world, He has the power to providentially control the world, He has the power to miraculously overrule natural law, He has the power to give life, He has the power to take life, He has the power to save, He has the power to subdue, He certainly has the power to raise from the dead. And if you have any question about it, look what He did for Himself. It's the same power by which He subjects the whole universe. Read 1 Corinthians 15:24 to 27 and read how Christ will take the whole universe over and make all His enemies His footstool. And He will make everything in the universe subject to Himself and then having taken the universe captive, He will then offer it up to God and it will resolve in the fullness of the trinity and redemptive history will have run its course when He recaptures the whole fallen universe and gives it back to God. And He who has the power to restore the whole universe and give it back to God in full expression of God's glory as the instrument through which God will glorify Himself forever and ever, the same power by which He can do that encompasses the power by which He can raise your body and mine out of the grave. He has the power to give us the prize. He has the power to make us like Christ. That's the promise part.

So, in this hope that we have in the coming of Christ, there's motivation, there's accountability, and there's promise. Where's your focus...where's your focus? I hope it's on heaven. I hope you're not so distracted that you've missed it.

I got in an airplane, I'm always in airplanes, but I got in one the other day just after that DC10 rolled down the cornfield in Iowa. And I got on the plane and I have from time to time little incidents that happen, like they lose an engine on takeoff once in a while, things like that. And so, you know, it's not that those things haven't happened to me, they have. And I was sitting on the plane thinking, "Well, this whole thing could just crash." I looked around at all the other people and, you know, you realize the gravity of that situation, the complexity of all their lives and network. And as we were roaring down the runway and I was realizing to myself that this could be my last day on earth, for all I know, the guys maybe didn't put the flaps in the right place, or who knows what's going on, or somebody's left something up in the wheel well and, you know, whatever. This thing could crash.

And I began to think about heaven. And I mean, I'm a happy person and thankful to God for where I am, but I can tell you, by the time we got in the air a little ways, I could have cared less whether we came down for a landing or came down without a landing. I just began to contemplate the realities of heaven. I hope we can live like that.

I want to close by sharing with you a little story that really moved my heart. It's a story of man who really lived, his name is Phocas, P-h-o-c-a-s. He lived in the fourth century. He has been revered through the years as a real precious saint of God, lived in Asia Minor. He lived in the city of Sanopae(?) and he had a little cottage outside the city gate in which he grew a garden. The whole story of the man is recorded by one of the ancient bishops and somehow has found its way down through history.

The story goes something like this. Travellers passed his door almost all hours of the day and night as they went in and out of the city gate. And by the wholly ingenuity of love, he stopped as many of them as possible. Were they not weary? Let them rest themselves, sitting in his well-tended garden. Were they in need of a friendly word? He would speak it to them in the dear Master's name.

But then quite suddenly one day life was all changed for Phocas. Orders went out from Emperor Diocletian that the Christians must be put to death. When the persecutors entered Sanopae they were under orders to find a man by the name of Phocas and kill him. About to enter the city one hot afternoon, they passed in front of the old man's cottage and garden by the gate. In his innocence, he treated them as though they were his warmest friends, begging them to pause a while and rest themselves. They consented. So warm and gracious was the hospitality they received that when their host invited them to stay the night and go on their way refreshed the next day, they agreed to do so.

"And what is your business?" said Phocas unsuspectingly. And then they told him that they would answer his question if he would regard it as a secret. Well it was obvious to them by now that he was a man to be trusted. Who were they? Why they were the soldiers of Rome searching for a certain Phocas who was a Christian. And please, if their kind host knew him, would he be so good as to help them identify him? After all, he was a dangerous follower of this Jesus about whom the Christians talked and he must be executed immediately.

"Oh, I know him well," said Phocas quietly. "And by the way, he's quite near. Let's attend to it in the morning." His guests having retired, Phocas sat thinking. Escape? That would be easy. He had only to leave under cover of darkness and at daybreak he could be at least 20 miles away and he knew fellow Christians who would give him hospitality by hiding him. And when the persecution had passed, he could reappear and once again cultivate his little garden.

The decision to flee into safety or stay unto death was apparently made without struggle or delay. We can only imagine what he was thinking. Out in his garden Phocas went and began digging in the middle of the night. Was there any earthly thing he loved better than this little plot of ground, the odor of the humus, the feel of the soil, the miracle of fertility? What were his thoughts as he went on digging? Well, there was still time to run away but the Savior didn't run. He didn't run from Gethsemane and He didn't run from Calvary. Or perhaps he thought of his fellow Christians to whom

he might go for rest, would not his coming endanger them? And as for these executioners that now were soundly sleeping under his roof, they were, after all, only men who were carrying out orders, and if they failed to find their man, their own lives likely as not would be taken and they would die in their sins.

Deeper and deeper Phocas dug. Before dawn he was done and there it was, his own grave. Morning came and with it the waking of the executioners. "I am Phocas," he said calmly. And we have it on the word of the Christian bishop who recorded the story that the men stood motionless in astonishment. They couldn't believe it. And when they did believe it, they obviously were reluctant to perform an execution without mercy on a man who had shown them nothing but mercy. But it was a duty, he reminded them, that they were required to perform. And he was not bitter at them. Besides, death did not terrify him, his heart was filled with hope of heaven. Toward them he bore nothing but the love of Christ and moments later it was all over. The sword had done its work and the body of Christ's love mastered man lay in the stillness of death in the garden he loved so dearly.

The hope of heaven removes fear. I hope we can live a little more like that and a little less the way we are prone to live in pursuing the prize. Let's pray.

Our dear Lord, we beg You to grant to us the grace to so live as this dear saint whom we shall some day meet in Your presence, to so live that we care little for our own life and we care much to be with You. Help us, Lord, to pursue the prize, following the right examples, fleeing from the wrong ones, the enemies of the cross, and focused always on the expectation of Jesus. We may die and our spirit go first, or You may come for us, either way, come, Lord Jesus, take us to Yourself. But until that day, may we be faithful to serve, knowing that the only reason we're here is not to become citizens of the world, not to become preoccupied here, not to lay up treasure here but simply to serve You and to pursue the Christ likeness that makes us a testimony of Your grace until the day when we are made like the one we love. In Christ's dear name we pray. Amen.

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