

Transient People in Threshold Times

Col. 3:1-4

Intro. This morning I want to prime the pump for our study of Heaven in the Adult Department of VBS. We're calling the study, **Talkin About Heaven**. But the fact is Heaven for the most part, has fallen off our radar screens. It's seldom a subject of conversation. For nearly two thousand yrs. Christians joyfully anticipated the life beyond this life. But during the last 100 years, seminaries, theology books and pulpits have gone silent on the subject. This is strange when we consider the fact that many believe we're living on the threshold of Christ's return and the doorstep of eternity.

In his book entitled, *The Eclipse of Heaven*, A.J. Conyers writes, *"Even to one without religious commitment and theological convictions, it should be an unsettling thought that this world is attempting to chart its way through some of the most perilous waters in history, having now decided to ignore what was for nearly two millennia its fixed point of reference...it's North Star. The certainty of judgment, the longing for heaven, the dread of hell: these are not prominent considerations in our modern discourse about the important matters of life. But they once were."*

Commenting on this observation, Randy Alcorn writes, *"Conyers argues that until recently, the doctrine of Heaven was enormously important to the Church. Belief in heaven was not just a nice auxiliary sentiment. It was a central, life-changing conviction."* But for most Christians today our main concerns revolve around the here and now.

Aside from so little attention given to Heaven and Hell, polling done by the Barna Research Group demonstrates another serious concern. Polls suggest that *"while an over-whelming majority of Americans continue to believe there is life after death and that Heaven and Hell exist, what people actually believe about Heaven and Hell varies widely."* A Barna spokesman said, *"(People) are cutting and pasting religious views from a variety of sources...television / movies / and conversations with their friends / even jokes. The result is a highly subjective theology of the afterlife that is entirely disconnected from the biblical teaching about Heaven."* Just ask yourself...when was the last time you heard a serious study about Heaven and Hell?

The silence is all the more strange when you consider what Paul wrote to the believers at Philippi. He wrote, **But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ.** Heaven is the true home of every Christian...not just for time, but for eternity! The name of every true believer is registered there. So Christian...how much do you know about heaven and how often do you think about the place Christ is preparing for you? How often do you dream about Heaven and what it will be like to see Jesus face to face?

At least 4 of our families vacationed out west this summer. Before setting out on a long road trip isn't it good to do some research? We gather maps and travel brochures. We read about the sites we'll visit. We program our GPS and plan an itinerary. If we're smart, we make hotel reservations. "No vacancies" and a night in the car with 3 or 4 kids is a fast cure for spontaneity! Amen? We want to know about the place we're going to. Yet isn't it odd that most Christians know so little about the place where we'll spend eternity? And much of what we know is based on misinformation! It really is!

I think it's fair to say that we've all been affected by Naturalism and the pressures of life here and now. Heaven isn't something we think about too often if at all. There's no worry of Christians being *"so heavenly minded that we're no earthly good."* Instead, the opposite is true. We tend to be *"so earthly minded that we're no heavenly good."* And C.S. Lewis made this observation...*"If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought the most of the next...It is because Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one."*

So let's be challenged this morning and in our study next week to give some more thought to the life after this life. Our text is **Col. 3**. I'd like you to find that chapter in your Bible.

1. Transient People – vs. 1, 2 - Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Here and throughout the NT, believers are viewed as transients who have no permanent attachment to planet earth. **We have been raised with Christ**. Among other things, this means we are raised to view life from a higher vantage point than others. Like the view from a valley compared to the view from a mountaintop, the view from a mountain is expansive and wider. God has opened our eyes to understand His Word. The One who knows the end from the beginning, has told us what He plans to do. He's told us His plan first involves the rapture, a massive airlift for all who are in Christ!

As I mentioned earlier, Paul wrote, **our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ...** - **Phil.3:20** In the same way, Peter urges Christians to live as **aliens and strangers in the world.** - **I Pet. 2:11.** We're *resident-aliens*. Our origin and destiny is Heaven, but our temporary residence is here on planet earth. Because we've been rescued from a dying world, John wrote, **Do not love the world or anything in the world.** - **I Jn. 2:5.** In the Revelation, a clear distinction is made between those who dwell on the earth, and those who follow the Lamb. Because our citizenship is in Heaven, the Bible never refers to Christians as **earth dwellers**. We are transients. We're like people waiting at a bus stop. We're going somewhere...we're going home. Our reservation has been made. Our address and citizenship are established there already. Like many before us, we believe God's promises. **Heb. 11:1** says, **faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.** So by faith we're certain of Heaven.

Unlike some who minimize the new birth or the miracle that happens when a person trusts Christ for salvation...the New Testament describes salvation as a miraculous transfer. Notice what Paul wrote in **v.1 - Since, then, you have been raised with Christ...** Not only are believers united with Christ in His death...but we are united with Christ in His burial and resurrection. Writing to those who are saved already, Paul wrote, **you have been raised with Christ**. In other words, our resurrection with Christ is something that happened in the past. The fact is, the moment we trust Jesus as Savior, we are spiritually raised to a new position in Him. This is one of the great mysteries of the faith.

To be **with Christ** or **in Christ** is to be brought into a new sphere...a new relationship and position. Before salvation, we were joined to Adam and the old fallen creation. But salvation severs our tie with Adam and the old world. It joins us to Christ and His new creation. This dramatic transfer was mentioned in **Col.1:13** where Paul wrote, **He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves...** The fact that believing sinners are brought into union with Christ is one of the great underpinnings of eternal security. Just as God shut the door on Noah's ark, He shuts salvation's door behind every believing sinner. If Noah or any man shut the door we'd have reason for concern. But the Bible says **God shut** (Noah and his family) **in. (Gen. 7:16)**

Nowhere does the NT ever speak of someone who was **in Christ** / out of Christ / then in Christ again. That's my grandkids...in the house, outside, then in the house again and again and again. We have to keep the door hinges lubricated. But it isn't that way with salvation! Once inside, salvation's door is shut tight and forever! Like Noah and his family who were safe in the ark, Christians are safe **in Christ**. When the Flood ended, Noah stepped into a new world. And when our flood of trials and troubles is over, Jesus will safely airlift us to a new world. It's guaranteed by the fact that we are **in Him** and **He is in us**. He has already brought us into His kingdom.

Notice how **Col. 3** begins. **Since** expresses a first class condition which means the same as *because* or *in view of the fact*. *Because* we have this new position...since we've been raised and brought into a new sphere...there's something we must do right now. First, Paul says we ought to **set our hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God**. The word, **set** is in the present imperative tense. That means a continuous, ongoing effort is required...we must continuously set our hearts. To **set your heart** means to aim or focus our affections on something. I think we know what that means. The young people know what it means when their affections are set on some video game or a good looking member of the opposite sex. The ladies know what it means to set their heart on a new dress. The guys know what it means to have their heart set on of golf clubs or a shiny new ride. When your heart is set on something or someone...that object or person is made significant and important. In the extreme, you may find yourself unable to think of anything else.

Now listen carefully. When Paul said, **set your hearts on things above**, he was including the place Jesus is preparing for us, but he was thinking beyond material things. Is Heaven a material place? ...be sure of it! Just read **Rev. 21, 22**. It just happens that the streets of the great city are paved with gold and city walls are inlaid with precious stones. But Heaven also has trees with fruit and rivers with fish. The Bible refers to earth's Eden as a copy of the garden that exists in Heaven. So forget the fog machine version of heaven. You can touch and handle the stuff Heaven is made of. Our glorified feet will walk on gold instead of asphalt. Jesus said, **I am going there to prepare a place for you**. So come to VBS next week. Keegan has a junk car for the teens to demolish. But in the adult class we'll demolish the idea that Heaven's residents float on clouds in one endless church service!

So once again, the **things** spoken of here in **Col. 3** are not primarily material. Instead, the context argues the **things** in view are spiritual values / attitudes / and behaviors. Glance ahead to **vs. 5-10**. **Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.** What is common down here is set in contrast with things above. These are **the things** our hearts and minds should be set on here and now. We should set our hearts on holy living because life in the new sphere we've been brought into is holy. Like an astronaut who prepares for outer space by hours spent in a zero gravity chamber, our main objective should be the pursuit holiness and Christ-likeness. More than anything else, we must keep our focus on Jesus maintaining our passion to be like Him.

Then **v. 2** continues, **Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things**. What we love and desire most is what we set our minds on. And whatever we set our minds on will stimulate and control what we do. Here's a question. What do you think about throughout the day? Now we all daydream about various things. Sometimes the pressures of life are so consuming, we find it hard to escape the clutch of the immediate. But pressures aside, do our minds regularly go up to Christ and things above, or are we preoccupied with things down here?

Last Monday I was meditating on this passage while spreading mulch. My upward thoughts and what I was doing seemed so contradictory. Can you think of a greater waste of time and money than mulching? When you spread mulch you know you'll have to do it again next year and the year after that. You know how it fades and mysteriously disappears. It's a multi-million dollar racket! The only redeeming thing about mulching is the mindlessness of spreading it. You can think about other things. The Bible doesn't instruct us to neglect or abandon everything to think about spiritual things. That's what a monk in a cave tries to do. Instead, the Bible urges us to include God in everything.

We're to learn to practice His presence each day throughout the day. That's what David meant when he said, **I have set the LORD always before me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.** - **Psa. 16:8** In **Phil. 4:8** Paul wrote, **Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praise-worthy-- think about such things.** You and I have the power to control what we think about or we wouldn't have these commands. It's within our ability to open or close the gates of our minds just as it's within our power to guard our hearts. Since we've been raised with Christ, since God has shown us life from Heaven's perspective, our hearts and minds should be aimed upward not downward. Remember, we're Transient People...people going somewhere forever. As the old Gospel chorus says, *"This world is not my home, I'm just a passin through..."*

2. Threshold Times – vs. 3, 4 - For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Many Christians the world over believe we're living on the threshold of time when God will once again intervene in history. That's not to suggest the Lord isn't involved in human affairs today. God has never been an absentee landlord to His universe. As Paul told the Athenians, **God is not far from each one of us. (Acts 17:27)** But God's role and activities today are for the most part, behind the scenes and invisible. This invisible and spiritual rule of God is believed and accepted by some but disbelieved and rejected by most. Because God can't be seen, most people conduct their lives as though He isn't there. That's the deceitfulness of naturalism. Naturalism dismisses God and all super-natural involvement in world affairs. Yet isn't it interesting that the same people who dismiss God because they can't see Him, tend to be extremely cautious around electricity?

So God remains invisible, but only for the time being. In a coming day, the Bible says Heaven will be opened / God will be seen on His Heavenly throne / and every eye will see Christ and His Church descending to earth with power and unimaginable glory. All that is presently invisible will one day become visible. And every indication convinces us we're living on the threshold of these events. It's an exciting time to be alive! But it's also a time to be ready and watchful...a time to have our lamps of testimony trimmed and burning bright. As followers of Jesus, we must remember we are transients on earth. At any moment, the Lord could snatch us from this environment and transport us to the place He's prepared for us in Heaven. It will happen in the twinkling of an eye. Let me mention just a few of the prophetic indicators that have convinced many believers that we're living on this threshold.

II Tim.3:1 says, **But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.** Today it's no longer fatalistic to expect that someone, somewhere soon will detonate a dirty bomb or nuclear device. Those in the field of intelligence say, *"it's just a matter of time."* There can be no doubt that radical Islam / Iran / Russia / and North Korea pose a clear and present danger. Yet times are also **terrible** because of the godlessness / lawlessness / and anarchy in the nations and within our own borders.

And ever since the attack of Sept.11, nations have taken a giant step toward globalization. Many world leaders recognize this horrendous attack was not an isolated assault on the United States, but one which targeted the entire civilized world. Terrorism / climate change / mass immigration / economic woes / and security against hostile aggression are critical issues drawing nations together. The prophet, Daniel describes the final empire on earth as a confederacy of independent nations bound together by common interests. **Rev. 17:13** says that during the Tribulation, the leading nations will...**have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast.** According to both testaments, a Satan-empowered man will rise up at a time when the nations are desperate in their pursuit of peace and safety. Rather than turn to God for help, the nations will seek help from a man and Satan has just the man.

In harmony with other Scriptures, the first horseman or the AntiChrist introduced in **Rev. 6** conquers by peaceful means. His white horse is symbolic of peace. He has a bow, but no arrows. **I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest. - Rev.6:2** Today, the whole world craves peace and safety. No one wants to be frisked at an airport / afraid to get on an airplane / fearful a terrorist might detonate his bomb in some peaceful gathering / or cautious about opening their mail. No one wants the economy weakened or their comfortable lifestyle disturbed. So, like never before in modern times, the world seems poised to accept a leader who promises to achieve peace and bring stability. Yet **I Thess.5:3** gives this warning, - **While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.**

And then there's Israel. Zechariah said Israel would be **a reeling cup** and **an immovable rock** in the last days. Now we have to remember how amazing it is that there even is a nation called Israel! Nations that were far greater in strength, size, and number have vanished, but God's people are still here! You see, the Bible says Israel is God's forever people. Though hated / conspired against / persecuted / taken into captivity / and exterminated, God's covenant people remain indestructible. They're indestructible because God has promised to protect and preserve them. In **Jer.31:35-37** the prophet wrote, **This is what the LORD says, He who appoints the sun to shine by day, who decrees the moon and stars to shine by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar--the LORD Almighty is his name: "Only if these decrees vanish from my sight," declares the LORD, "will the descendants of Israel ever cease to be a nation before Me."**

In 1948 the unthinkable happened. The state of Israel was reborn. After being scattered among the nations for 1,900 years, God regathered His people to their ancient homeland. Just as prophesied in **Ezek. 37**, today Israel is restored physically, but not spiritually. In 1948 prophecies that seemed unthinkable suddenly became headline news. Israel's spiritual revival won't happen until the Tribulation is underway. But in case you didn't hear the news, two weeks ago in response to Iranian backed terror attacks, the Israeli police took control of the Temple Mount. This was an historic development which moves Israel closer to a new Temple and the restoration of Jewish worship.

Consider what the Lord said through Zechariah concerning Israel in the last days before many in Israel turn to Christ. **Zech. 12:2, 3 - "I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem. On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations."** Today virtually every nation on earth wonders what to do with Jerusalem. State department lights burn late as leaders desperately search for some way to negotiate peace or distance themselves from the problem. But the objectives of Israel's enemies are clear. They're not interested in peace...they want Israel driven into the Mediterranean and annihilated. Jihad has been declared against Israel. This comes as no surprise to God. He told us Israel would be a burdensome problem to the nations in the last days before Christ's return.

And God has also told us about an all-out attack that will come against Israel in the last days. **Ezek. 38** prophesies Russia coming against Israel with a horde of Arab allies. 3 x's in **chap. 38**, Ezekiel says it will happen at a time when Israel is living in peace and safety. This invasion seems to take place in the early part of the Tribulation, after the Church has been removed. It will happen after the AntiChrist rises to power on a platform of peace and Israel signs the peace treaty he authors. But even now, we see this conflict taking shape. The west has entered a new cold war with Russia who is tight with Iran and other Arab states. The Russian people are extremely dissatisfied with their bankrupt economy and displeased with leaders who can't put bread on their store shelves. New sanctions our congress imposed last week will further hostilities between the US and Russia.

Today, 71% of Americans identify themselves as Christians. The percentage of true believers will prove to be much lower when Jesus returns. But it seems quite certain the United States will be severely weakened by the rapture and the sudden disappearance of millions. In that scenario it's not hard to imagine an aggressive increase in Russian expansionism met with an anemic response from the west. According to Ezekiel's prophecy, when the invasion happens the western nations will ask, **"Have you come to plunder? Have you gathered your hordes to loot, to carry off silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods and to seize much plunder?"** That's like a store clerk saying to a masked man with a gun, *"excuse me friend, is there something here you want?"*

Once again, it's not hard to imagine the end of Gospel opportunity under the leadership of a hard-line Communist who takes sides with his oil-rich Arab neighbors against Israel. As fast as the walls came down, they could go up again. The stage is set and we find ourselves living on the threshold of these ancient prophecies. For these reasons many believe we're living on the threshold of divine intervention. The Age of Grace and the Church's remaining time on earth may be very short. Never before, have so many world conditions lined up so precisely with what the Bible predicts for the last days.

But let's consider the admonitions in **Col. 3:1, 2** in light of the Threshold Times we're living in. **For** is the conjunction that connects Transient People to Threshold Times. **vs. 3, 4 - For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.** Remember the first point? We said we're Transient People. But we're transient people living on the edge of time when God's invisible rule and kingdom are about to become visible. In **v. 3**, Paul says our life (our true life as Christians) **is hidden** for the time being. Like Jesus who is unseen because He's in Heaven today, our real life is **hidden in God**. That means, we can't see it right now. It isn't visible. Our glorified body / our heavenly home / our eternal occupation / our sonship with the Father...none of these things are visible right now. We claim these realities by faith, but we can't see them. **We walk by faith not by sight.** John put it this way, **Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. - I Jn.3:2**

Paul had this same reality in mind when he wrote, **When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.** A great reveal...a great "coming out party" is ahead. On that day the children of God will be seen for who we really are! In the meantime, our focus and affections shouldn't be locked on things down here. Our focus should remain riveted on Jesus. He should captivate our hearts and minds. We're waiting for Him because **He is our life**. Though most have chosen to ignore or marginalize Jesus, He will be revealed. Jesus will soon appear in fullness of glory. And when our Savior and Lord appears... we who believe **will appear with Him**.

So we're transient people living on the threshold of eternity. Ancient prophecies are coming to pass with increasing frequency. The challenge for believers is really quite simple. Having been raised to the mountaintop **in Christ**, we have a wider view than most. Because this is true, we have a choice to make. Will our hearts and minds be occupied with scenes and stuff in the valley, or will we aim our affections heavenward? Will we focus only on the life that now is, or will our focus include and be dominated by the life to come? That's the choice God calls us to make everyday.

Communion

Heb. 12:2 - Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.