

Heaven: Where Your Heart Is

Last week Andrew preached a heavenly message ... the second in this series on heaven. Christian professor and writer Dallas Willard once said: “One does not miss heaven by a hair, but by constant effort to avoid and escape God.” A sobering thought we might keep with us as we contemplate heaven ... our eternal destination.

What do you treasure most in life? People will often say they treasure their spouse, or their kids, or the time spent with family, or certain memories, their freedom, their good health or various other things. Does anyone treasure their place in heaven? Jesus once said: *For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* Isn't it true that what we treasure in life is what we have our heart set on?

Is your heart set on heaven? Sure everyone wants to go there but very few want to get on the train that takes you there. It has become common in our culture to believe that all people go to heaven when they die – I guess you could call it justification by death, as opposed to the Christian belief in justification by faith... faith in Christ Jesus to bring you home to heaven. People assume that if they have not committed some heinous crime they're good enough for God's heaven; whereas Christians know that no one's good enough. God's holiness and purity are beyond anything we can achieve. But faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice for our sin can usher us into God's heaven. You can't buy it, but you can receive it with a repentant heart.

Buy, Buy, Buy

It's no surprise to most of us that one of Americans' favorite pass-times is shopping. People love to get stuff ... all kinds of stuff they fancy. People have so much stuff that they rent storage space. Our garage attic is full of stuff ... you know, stuff we think we might need at some point. Of course it's not limited to Americans. Some of our Tongan relatives love to come here and spend a day or two at the outlet mall at Tejon – buying more stuff. The fact is, America produces lots of stuff and Americans have lots of opportunity to buy.

We love to buy. Many times we treat the stuff we buy like we are marrying it. You know, “to have and to hold from this day forward.” Our hearts are set on something and when we can we buy it, we do. Think about something you longed for, had your heart set on ... and then you finally got it. Have you noticed, very often once you get what your heart was set on, your heart becomes restless again? After a time you may notice that it just cannot reproduce that

euphoria you experienced when you first got it. And so we set our heart on the next thing.

Advice For The Ages

In the N.T. book of Timothy we have a letter from the Apostle Paul to his young protégé named Timothy. In the letter he has practical advice for Timothy as well as for the folks in Timothy's church. It was during a time when Greek and Roman society was fairly affluent by world standards – in that sense like ours today. When it comes to the things money can buy, money itself, and even all the pleasures of this world, here's some concepts it would be wise to embody:

1. Be content with what you have. *But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it,* 1Tim. 6:6-7. There was a popular philosophy among many Greeks of the time: stoicism. The stoics taught that "contentment" comes through self-sufficiency and suppressing desires. We use the word "stoic" today to refer to someone who is emotionally aloof to either tragedy or joy. Paul plays on this philosophy by saying that what's really profitable is to be godly AND content at the same time. He reminds us that we came into this world with nothing, and we'll leave this world with nothing. Everything we have is a gift for a time. In truth, he says, we are not so much self-sufficient as we are GOD-sufficient. All we really need are the basics, like food, clothing, shelter, and Monday night football!

Paul says in his letter to the Christians in Phillipi: *I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation I can do all this through him who gives me strength,* Phil. 4:11-13. Who's the "him"? Christ. If we have Christ, we have everything. If we do not trust Christ for our life and living, then no matter how much we have, it's not enough. In Christ, we can be thankful for all things, whether we have much or little. Out of such gratitude comes deep-seated contentment.

The letter to the Hebrews echoes this belief. Hebrews 13:5 says, *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have.* Christian writer and teacher Charles Stanley says we find contentment by "asking God to teach us how to have gratitude for what we have, rather than complain about what we're missing."

Two friends met in the street. One looked sad and almost on the verge of tears. The other man said, "Hey my friend, how come you look like the whole world has caved in?"

The sad fellow said, "Let me tell you. Three weeks ago, an uncle died and left me 50-thousand dollars." "That's not bad at all...!" "Hold on, I'm just getting

started. Two weeks ago, a cousin I never knew kicked-the-bucket and left me 95-thousand, tax-free to boot."

"Well, that's great! I'd like that." "Last week, my grandfather passed away. I inherited almost a million." "So why are you so glum?" "This week - nothing!"

2. Guard against greed. *Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil... 1 Tim. 6:9-10.* Many people know this verse from the Bible: *We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.* But how many wrongly quote another verse? Maybe you've heard people say: "The Bible says MONEY is the root of all evil." But the Bible doesn't say that at all! It says: *For the LOVE of money is the root of all kinds of evil, 1 Tim. 6:10.* In numerous places it declares that it's the LOVE of wealth that can get us into trouble (Ecc. 5:10; Matt. 6:24; 1 Tim. 3:3; 6:10; 2 Tim. 3:2; Heb. 13:5; 1 Peter 5:2). Money is a necessary thing in our economy, as it was in Paul's. He has nothing against wealthy people. It's simply a matter of in whom or what do you place your trust.

You are NOT your net worth! I've officiated at hundreds of funerals and memorial services – including for some people who had very large bank accounts and stock portfolios. Not a one was ever remembered for their net worth. All were remembered for loving relationships, acts of kindness and generosity, things like that. You are much more than the money you possess. How do we guard against greed? The same way we find contentment: we stay thankful. It's hard to be greedy when your heart is full of gratitude.

I know some people will say, "Why should I be grateful to God? It's really my hard work that got me where I am today!" Indeed God honors hard work, but remember who gave you the strength to work.

Deuteronomy 8:18 says, *But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth...* Think of all the opportunities you've been given. Even if you don't have a lot you are still rich in Christ.

3. Share generously with others. Wealth is uncertain ... it can be lost in the blink of an eye. The one safe investment is in God. One of the valuable lessons we pick up early on is learning to share. When you share you fight the temptation to be greedy. Greedy people don't share. Generous people do. Paul says of wealthy people, *Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.* That's what it means to be rich!

In his famous Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:19-21) Jesus said, *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ...* What does it mean to "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven?" Author Randy Alcorn says, "You can't take it with you, but you can send it on ahead!" Look for ways to invest in eternal things. Look for ways to bless people

and to lead them to a loving relationship with Christ. Use your money for good deeds. That's sending it on ahead.

Consecrating Our Treasures

Today we are consecrating our pledges to Christ's church and all that He does through us in His church. We are entrusting our wealth to God. Our pledges are our promises to God about the wealth He has given each of us. ... *where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.* **Generosity in giving to God is really a heart check-up.**

Today we received new members. They have declared publicly that they trust the promises of God, they trust Jesus for their places in heaven and have committed themselves to living out their faith, along with us, in this congregation.

We pray with all of them today that their hearts will continue to be set on heaven and that they will treasure her place in heaven. By the example of all of us supporting this congregation through our pledges and our generous giving, our newest members will be encouraged, even as we pray for all here to come to know the contentment that grows from generosity.

Let's pray: Lord God, the Bible says every good and perfect gift comes from you in heaven above. Thank you for your blessings. We have so much compared to most people in the world today. Teach us to be content with what we have, to avoid greed, to share with others, and to invest in your kingdom purposes. Let us know you for real and trust you for everything. We pray this in the name of Jesus, who had so little by world standards, but now has it all seated at the right hand of You, our heavenly Father. Amen.