

“Bringing Substance to the Eternal Perspective”

- Pastor Gabe Barber 8/16/2009



英文講道，中文翻譯錄音：

<http://www.efcoc.org/english/20090816EBG.mp3>

Scripture Reading 讀經: Isaiah 賽 65:17-25

As many of you know, our family recently moved from our apartment in Fullerton to a house in Anaheim. We're still renting, but still, this was a pretty exciting move for us. I remember the weeks leading up to the big move, in fact, and I remember it being a time of being excited about what would be in store for us in our new house. We'd have more space, no more shared walls, an extra bedroom to turn into a home office, and the best part, a back yard. That might not sound like a big deal to some of you, but with two toddlers who like to run around and make lots of noise, we were really excited about the yard. And you know, I think dreaming about the future is something that's really important for us to do. Dreaming is something that can bring us so much hope and joy – because we're dreaming about something great in the future. So this morning, we're going to spend some time dreaming together. We're not going to dream about houses or cars or college or kids or grandchildren. We're going to dream about heaven this morning. I realize that heaven might be kind of difficult to dream about, since none of us, obviously, have been there, and we don't know too much about it. But at the same time, it's by far the most exciting thing we can imagine, and it's something that I believe God wants us to think about.

You see, the Bible talks about heaven quite a bit. And I'm convinced that it talks about heaven for a very important reason – to give us hope, no matter what we're going through in life. And we need hope. We need hope, because we live in a fallen world, a world that is full of sin. And as we've all experienced, sin is something that leads to heartache – things like broken relationships, the failing health of people we love, death, failure, fear, frustration. The list goes on and on. The consequences of sin are scary. But God gives us the promise of heaven, which gives us the hope that we have something better in store. We have something to look forward to that will be far better than anything in this fallen world.

In the English Congregation, we've been studying the book of Isaiah on Sunday mornings. Isaiah's an incredibly long book – 66 chapters, actually. And by the time we get to today's passage, in chapter 65, Isaiah has come to the point in his book where he really needs to encourage us with heaven. He's spent most of the book so far talking about sin and how the world, he says, is full of it. And the reality of sin, as Isaiah describes it, is that it needs to be punished by God, because God is just and cannot tolerate the presence of sin. And what is the punishment for sin? Well, we've already talked about that. The punishment for sin is death, the eternal separation of mankind from the presence of God. But here's the thing – God doesn't like that. He created us in His image, and He loves us, and He really doesn't want us to suffer for all of eternity without Him. He wants to save us from the penalty of our sin. So what did He do? He provided a solution. He decided to pay the penalty for our sin Himself. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth to live a perfect, sinless life, and then to die on the cross. Jesus died instead of us, so that we don't have to die for our sins! That's why the Bible says that, while we were yet sinners, Christ

“Bringing Substance to the Eternal Perspective”

- Pastor Gabe Barber 8/16/2009

died for us. And get this – the only thing that we have to do to receive this gift? Accept it. That’s it. Receive the grace that God offers, and you will inherit the salvation that He died and rose again from the grave to be able to offer you!

And guess what! Salvation comes with the very special promise of heaven. And this is an important promise, because it’s this promise of heaven that we must cling to in this life. The promise of heaven brings us comfort, and it gives us the motivation that we need to be able to live for God. But here’s the thing. For how great heaven is, how much time do you spend considering what it will be like? What do you think heaven will be like? This world is filled with all kinds of misconceptions about what our eternity will be like – how many of them have you believed? We’ve all seen the pictures where heaven is a place with a bunch of fat angel babies sitting on clouds, playing their harps. And we’ve all heard people joke that heaven will be boring because all we will do is sing, which is okay for thirty minutes, but for eternity? Is that what you believe? Is heaven going to be boring?

So this morning, we’re going to talk about heaven. We’re going to take some time to look at what the Bible says about heaven, and we’re going to start right here in this morning’s passage, Isaiah 65:17-25.

So what does Isaiah say about heaven in this passage? Let’s take a look. As he’s writing these words, he’s doing so to Jerusalem, that special city in Israel that is such an important part of God’s plans. And he’s writing to Jerusalem at a time when the people of this city seriously have nothing to be glad about or rejoice over. You see, Jerusalem has just learned that she will be taken captive by Babylon. This city, God’s chosen city – on whom He’s poured out His blessing – has sinned, failed, and rebelled against God for the last time. And now they’re looking at a future in which their city will be destroyed, the temple will be leveled, and the people will be deported all the way to Babylon. Needless to say, that’s not fun. These people are feeling hopeless; they are afraid; they have failed. But God has good news for them – He wants to give them hope!

And that’s where our passage picks up. We’ve read the passage once already this morning, but let’s look at it one more time. In these verses, Isaiah is telling God’s people – Jerusalem – that it’s time to stop mourning, and it’s time to start rejoicing with an eternal joy. Why? Because God will soon create new heavens and a new earth! God’s people, who are suffering, will get a new start, a new beginning. And look what Isaiah says about this new heavens and new earth. It is a place, in verse 17, where there will be no memory of former things – no recollection of sin, or of failure, or of sorrow. That by itself is amazing, but it’s only the beginning. In verses 18 and 19, we see that it will be a place of constant, ongoing rejoicing. In fact, there will be no more crying or weeping in this new heavens and earth. In a different passage, Isaiah says that God will wipe away tears from all faces, which is another way of saying this same thing – that there will be no more sorrow there. He goes on, and in verse 23 he says that the land will be *filled* with people who belong to God. And in verse 24 – God’s people will have perfect, unhindered communication with Him. No more difficulty praying, or listening, or waiting on the Lord. Our communication with Him will be perfect. And finally, in verse 25, this will be a place of complete peace and security. Isn’t this all great? Think of how encouraging this passage must have been for Jerusalem, who was in so much pain at the time it was written. God wanted them to have the joy that comes with having hope. He wanted them to have the hope that there is something waiting for them that far outweighs the pain of this world. He wanted them to know that He would personally see

“Bringing Substance to the Eternal Perspective”

- Pastor Gabe Barber 8/16/2009

to it that they will one day see the end of all their pain and heartache. And guess what – God has the same message for you and I this morning. It’s a message that is talked about all throughout Scripture.

So let’s turn our attention away from this passage for a moment, and let’s talk for a bit about what the rest of the Bible has to say about heaven, our future hope. If I asked you right now where you are going to go after you die, what would you say? I’m guessing most of you would say that you’re going to heaven, right? And that’s true, obviously. But what else could you tell me about heaven? What is it like? What will you do there? How does the Bible describe it? Is it a place of endless seafood buffets? Is it a place with infinite mansions that would make Beverly Hills or Bel Air look like the ghetto? Does Saint Peter meet you at the pearly gates and immediately give you an iPhone with unlimited storage and unheard of downloading capabilities? Will your dog get unlimited bones to chew on, like in *Ice Age* where the squirrel gets the most humongous acorn ever imagined? Come on, I want answers – what’s heaven going to be like? I heard a surfer once tell me that he pictured heaven as this endless, perfect wave that you get to ride for as long as you want. Hey that sounds good to me – though I doubt it’s true!

When we think of heaven, we usually imagine all of these amazing things that we love here on earth, because all we really know is that heaven is going to be an absolutely amazing place. But I have a challenge for each one you. Some time this week, I want you to go home, open up your Bible, and study what God’s Word has to say about heaven. If you do that, I think you’ll really enjoy it. Seriously, the theology of heaven can be life-changing. I spent some time this past week studying and considering it, and I want to share with you just a fraction of what I found, because I was really blown away. But if you want to know more, you’re going to need to study it on your own. Deal?

Okay. Now first of all, what I found is that the Bible clearly teaches that heaven is an actual, physical place – not just a state of mind. In fact, Paul tells us that we will receive glorified bodies – whatever those look like, maybe we’ll all look like Superman, without the tights – and we’ll spend eternity with God in heaven. But when you dig deeper, you’ll come across the same phrase that we read about in this morning’s passage – heaven is described as the new heavens and new earth. What does that mean? It means that all of God’s creation will be renewed and glorified! Think about it – God’s creation, all the way back in Genesis 1, was perfect, right? But then in Genesis 3, Adam & Eve ate the fruit, which brought sin into the world, and now all of creation is fallen and flawed because of that sin. But God has a plan to create these new heavens and earth – and He will restore His perfect creation that He had back in Genesis 1, and we will finally inhabit it just like He always wanted us to. Now what do you think these new heavens and earth will be like? Will it be something that God creates from scratch, or is He going to renew and purify this world that we’re living in right now? That’s a great question, and I honestly don’t know the answer. But when I read John’s words in Revelation 21:1-4, I’m left believing that know matter how he does it, we will all be amazed. Look with me at these verses:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

“Bringing Substance to the Eternal Perspective”

- Pastor Gabe Barber 8/16/2009

Whatever this new heavens and earth will be, the Bible says that we can't even begin to imagine such beauty and magnificence as what we will witness once we are there.

There's one more thing the Bible brings up about heaven, and that is the role that we will all have once we are there. This is pretty cool, because just to be in the presence of such beauty is way more than we deserve, but we will also be able to serve the Lord and grow in Him while we are there. The Bible speaks, in several places, about how we are going to rule and reign with Christ in His eternal kingdom. What does that mean? Once again, I can't pretend like I know, but what this does tell me is that we will have an important place in heaven. We're not going to be just sitting around bored for all of eternity, but we're going to spend eternity doing exactly what God has created us for. We'll never tire of exploring the nature and character of Almighty God, and we will be able to use the gifts He's given us with perfect ability. Have you ever accomplished something that you worked really hard on – and had a great feeling of fulfillment? Well, imagine what it will be like to be able to do exactly what you love to do, without any barriers or obstacles – you'll never be too busy, or too tired, or too stressed, or too poor. I think that's what heaven will be like. We'll be in the presence of our infinite and perfect God, and we'll *never* be able to exhaust His greatness.

Listen. The bottom line – what I want each of you to understand this morning – is that heaven is a place that is worthy of our most grandiose dreams and expectations. We can't comprehend what it's going to be like, but we know that it'll be a place of physical beauty that's beyond description. We know it's going to be a place where we'll have perfect fellowship with believers from every nation, tongue, and tribe throughout history. We know it's going to be a place where we'll finally find eternal freedom from pain, sorrow, heartache, and suffering. And most importantly, we know this – we know that heaven will be a place where we'll experience perfect, intimate fellowship with our true, living, Creator-God. My friends, nothing will be sweeter. And this is something we have to believe. We *must* hold on to this hope of heaven if we're going to live this life to the glory of God.

Before we come to a close, I want to talk to you about one last thing. I want to talk about why the Bible brings up the topic of heaven so frequently. Why is it so important for us to grasp the magnitude of this future hope that we have? Certainly this morning, in trying to explain heaven to you, I've raised more questions than answers. However, there's one important truth that I hope we'll all walk away with today, and that is the fact that our hope in heaven should give us an eternal perspective. Are you familiar with that term? I've talked about having an eternal perspective with you several times before, and what it is, is looking at life with the understanding that we have a future that more than makes up for any pain or difficulty we might experience right now. In other words, someone with an eternal perspective isn't living for this life – it's living a life that understands the promise of what we have in store in the future. Look with me at this passage in 2 Peter 3, because I think it makes this point quite clearly. It's 2 Peter 3:11-13:

“Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

“Bringing Substance to the Eternal Perspective”

- Pastor Gabe Barber 8/16/2009

But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”

Look especially at that first verse, verse 11 – knowing everything that we know, Peter asks, how do you think we ought to be living? How can you learn about heaven, and not live a life that is completely changed? As I was studying, I came across this line from C.S. Lewis from one of his more well-known books, *Mere Christianity*. He says: “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.” Think about what he’s saying, because it’s really important. He’s saying that if you want to live for God in this life, you’ll find your motivation to do so by looking at what’s coming to you in your next life. And when you study the Bible, or if you look throughout church history, you’ll see that the men and women who did the most remarkable things for God are those who had an eternal perspective. I’m talking about people like Moses, Abraham, Samuel, David, Paul, Peter – the list goes on and on. All of them were willing to sacrifice comfort in this life in order to accomplish something great for God’s kingdom. They knew this wasn’t their home.

Now we’ve already talked about how this world is full of sin, and sin is what causes the pain and heartache that we face in life. But God, in His infinite grace, has given us the hope of a perfect life to come. We can be confident that one day we’ll stand before His throne, and that we’ll see Him face to face. And I believe that in that moment, when we look into the eyes of the Most High God, we will finally understand His perfect, unconditional love. At that moment, we’ll lack nothing, and we’ll want nothing else, because we’ll have found perfect and complete fulfillment in Him. I believe that, in that day, we’ll all fall to our knees in joy and in awe, because we’ll hear Him welcome us into His kingdom with those glorious words ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant.’

I wonder how many of us this morning can really say that we’re living with this eternal perspective that I’m talking about. Because if we really had an eternal perspective, I think our lives would look much different. With an eternal perspective, godly living would no longer be a chore, but a privilege and a joy. With an eternal perspective, daily quiet times, devotions, and prayer would no longer feel like an obligation or burden, but we’d see these times as an opportunity to deepen our relationship with our Heavenly Father, and we’d approach it joyfully. With an eternal perspective, we’d no longer be driven by our pursuit of the things of this world – money, power, success, comfort, and the like – but we’d be driven by our longing to please the One who loves us with a perfect love. And with an eternal perspective, suffering and pain would no longer feel like too much for us to handle, but we’d see it for what it really is – a temporary struggle that one day will give way to a glorious eternity that words simply cannot describe.

I don’t think the experience Jerusalem was facing in this chapter of Isaiah is really all that unique to the people of this world, including you and me. We all know what it’s like to face times of failure, fear, and suffering. But just as the Lord encouraged Jerusalem, so He would encourage each one of us – that we are not alone. God has given us the hope of a future that is free from pain and heartache. It’s a future that we’ll spend in perfect relationship with Him – no more sin, no more sorrow, no more fear, and no more heartache. And so this morning, I have a challenge for each one of you. My challenge is for

“Bringing Substance to the Eternal Perspective”

- Pastor Gabe Barber 8/16/2009

you to respond. You’ve been offered hope this morning by the God of all Creation. You have a future that’s being prepared for you in the new heavens and earth. How will you respond to this offer? My hope and prayer is that you’ll respond by finding the motivation to live for God, and that you’ll start to store up your treasure in heaven. Family of God, we have an amazing and glorious future, and our treasure belongs in the presence of God.

I’m going to invite our worship team to come back up to the stage, and just like in our weekly English service, we’re going to close our time together this morning with another set of worship. Instead of one response song, we’re going to be singing three songs, and the reason we do this is because we want to give you a chance to respond to the message. So this morning, as we cry out to our God and King, I want you to search your heart, and spend this time in prayer. Ask God to show you the areas of your life that aren’t invested in eternity. And ask God to give you an eternal perspective, so that you’ll have the motivation to live a life that brings honor and glory to Him. This is your time to pour out your heart to God. Let’s pray...