

The Next Life, Part 3: *Preparing for Heaven, Pt. 4*

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1 Corinthians 3:10-15; Matthew 6:19-21

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[Editor's note: All words that appear in bold italics were made into PowerPoint slides for this message. This PowerPoint presentation is available to pastors and teachers upon request at www.halseed.com)

Good morning New Song! Find a Bible, please, and prepare to open it a few minutes from now to Matthew 6:19, on p. 960.

For three weeks now, we've been learning about Heaven. This morning, we're going to conclude the series. Up to this point, each week we've learned some important things, some things God wants us to know. This morning, we're going to learn some crucial things, some things that can literally change the quality of your eternity as we study *How to Prepare for Heaven*.

Each week we've been sounding off on our readiness to learn. Are you ready to learn again this morning New Song? ("I'm ready.")

A. What We've Learned

Besides all the specifics we've learned so far, the two biggest things we've learned are:

- 1. God wants us to know about heaven.*** And
- 2. God wants us to think about heaven.***

Two weeks ago, we recited

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - together

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of me, who have no hope.

And concluded that God wants us to know about heaven.

Three weeks ago, we looked at this verse:

Colossians 3:1-2 ***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.*** And concluded that God wants us to think about heaven.

Author Randy Alcorn, whom I've told you has been my main tutor for this journey, writes, ***Heaven should affect our activities and ambitions, our recreation and friendships, and the way we spend our money and time.*** – Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*

Christ-centered righteous living today is directly affected by knowing where we're going and what rewards we'll receive there for serving Christ. After all, if we really believe we're going to live forever in a realm where Christ is the center who brings us joy... why wouldn't we choose to get a head start on Heaven through Christ-centered righteous living now?

So we've begun learning that **3. God wants us to prepare for Heaven.** That is, after all, what it means to "set your heart" on things above.

One time, Jesus said that God wants us to love the Lord with all our hearts, souls and minds. Are you ready to love God with your mind today and do some real learning?

Really? Because after all, Christmas is next Tuesday, so all of you are already on vacation. Have you deflated your minds, or are you ready to use the best of them to love God this morning? (I'm ready.)

If you've been with us for the entire series, you're becoming familiar with the ***The Chronology of Planet Earth:***

- 1. The Garden**
- 2. The Fall**
- 3. The War**
- 4. The Millennium**
- 5. The New Heaven and New Earth**

Our history begins with a Garden, called *Eden*. It was the perfect God promises will once again belong to the human race.

In the Garden, our forefathers, fell. They disobeyed God, causing a curse on the cosmos and inviting Satan to gain dominion over the earth.

Last year at this time, we studied the book of Daniel. God gives Daniel a glimpse of his future our history. He describes four empires that were to come: the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires, and then a fifth that will remain forever.

In Daniel 9, we learned that this kingdom will come after a 7 year period of time called, "The Tribulation." It reads, ***War will continue until the end. He [the Anti-Christ] will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple, he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.***
– Daniel 9:27

Chapter 7 is the climactic description of future history: ***I looked and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign***

power; all peoples, nations and men every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed. – Daniel 7:13-14

The “son of man” is Jesus, who will come and reign on this earth for 1,000 years, during phase 4 of earth’s chronology, called, “The Millennium.”

Rev. 20 describes the beginning of the Millennium. It says, ***I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that time, he must be set free for a short time. – Rev. 20:1-3***

The rest of Rev. 20 says that after 1000 years, Satan is released, proves he still is untrustworthy, and ...***was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They were tormented day and night for ever and ever. – Rev. 20:10*** – Which I believe is a long, long time.

If all of that’s a little confusing, don’t fret. We spent 10 weeks on the subject of Future History last year and we’ll cover the topic again some time in 2009 through the book of Ezekiel. In a few weeks, Maggie Turner is going to lead a Bible using the book *Future History*, (www.futurehistorybook.com) for any of you who weren’t here for the series and want to catch up.

And so the learning begins.

B. How to Prepare for Heaven:

How do you prepare for heaven?

- If you’re preparing for a test, you study.
- If you’re preparing for a vacation, you make a packing list and start gathering the things you’ll want on your trip.

Those are the two ways you’ll want to prepare for heaven as well.

The test is the easy part.

When I was an undergrad, sometimes I’d stay up half the night pouring over notes, memorizing lists, and practicing sample essays.

Passing the heaven test requires no such preparation. There’s a simple, one question test. In the first moment of your death, God Himself will meet you face to face and ask, “Have you received My Son into your life?”

Read this out loud with me: ***To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. – John 1:12***

Have you invited my Son into your life? Have you admitted that He is God and you are not? He came to earth at Christmas, proved His authority by performing miracle and His compassion by freely giving His life as a substitute for your sins on the Cross. Have you bowed to Him?

Friend, you could do that know, you could qualify to answer, “yes” to that question right now by just praying these words in your heart right now, and meaning them, “Jesus, I believe you are the Lord and I invite you to be my Lord, thank you for forgiving me for the things I’ve done wrong, I give you full permission lead my life from now on.”

Let me put that on the wall for you. And if you’re a Christian, at some point in your life, you’ve said something like this. Maybe not these exact words, but this intent. So I’m going to invite you to pray this out loud with me in just a minute as a reaffirmation. If you’re a wanna be Christian today, then this is something you’ll want to pray with us as well. So if you’re absolutely sure you’re a Christian, or you’re absolutely sure you want to be a Christian, pray this, boldly, out loud with me right now: ***“Jesus, I believe you are the Lord and I invite you to be my Lord, thank you for forgiving me for the things I’ve done wrong, I give you full permission lead my life from now on.”***

Great prayer friends. You passed the test.

Now you know that whenever you take a really important test, you double check every answer to make sure you got it right, don’t you?

The Bible gives a kind of double check on this question in Romans 10:9. Read this out loud with me: ***If you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. – Romans 10:9***

So here’s the double check If you know that you prayed to receive Christ for the very first time today, or if you’ve never publically expressed to someone that you are indeed a Christ follower you help yourself and all of us right now by waving your hand at me and saying out loud, ***“I have made Jesus my Lord.”***

...And this is your day? Congratulations and welcome to the family!

Okay. So that’s the entrance exam.

1. Step 1 = Receive Christ.

That’s the only question on the test.

Step 2, then, is like preparing for a vacation.

Lori and I went to Ireland this summer. Beforehand, we read some books to figure out where we wanted to go and what we wanted to see. I made sure I had the Euros I'd saved from our last time in Europe. And we gathered up all the clothes and personal items we'd want when we got there.

We'd store up the things we'd need for the trip.

Now is the time to open that Bible to **Matthew 6:19, on p. 960**. This is the pivotal verse for understanding how to prepare for heaven.

In the same way, the Bible says that smart Christ-followers think about their move to heaven and begin storing up for it as soon as they realize they're going to go there someday.

Jesus, in His first and most basic talk about how to live a healthy spiritual life, His Sermon on the Mount said, ***Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. – Matthew 6:19-21***

So once you've got the entrance question down pat, step 2

2. Step 2 = Store Up Treasure

How many of you hope to spend your eternity in heaven?
(How many of you hope to spend your eternity somewhere else?)

With the time remaining, I'm going to show you four ways that you will want to store up treasure in heaven.

a. Be a thankful person.

Since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably... - Hebrews 12:28

Tomorrow is Christmas Eve. The later in the day it gets and the more we focus on how much we're going to enjoy Christmas, the more joyful we'll become. Just watch. Most people don't get happy about things that have already happened to them. They get happy about things that *are* happening to them, and things that are *about to* happen to them. The more you think about heaven and what's about to happen to you, the more thankful you will become. It's just natural.

A thankful spirit won't necessarily store up anything for you in heaven, but it will be prepare you better for living there.

So, a more important prep step is...

b. Work with God on working on your character .

One of the most important verses in the Bible comes from Philippians 1:6, ***He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. – Philippians 1:6***

Once you've received Christ, He begins working on your character, to carry it to completion.

The Apostle Peter says...

The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. – 2 Peter 3:10-12

You ought to live “holy” and “godly” lives. Those two words sounds like words most men would never have said about them. “Look at him, he’s a holy guy.” We’d rather be savvy, smart, strong, decisive, tough.

“Holy,” what’s that? The word simply means, “different,” or “set apart.” God is holy because He’s different. He cares about values, about people, about His reputation. If you’re a holy man, you care about those things.

“Godly” isn’t really a complement for most men either. On the other hand, who among us doesn’t want to be God-like? Who does want to be thought of as strong and generous, wise and powerful, self-controlled, able to help people in any situation they’re in. That’s godly.

You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. – Those are character qualities to work on, they’re qualities that you can take with you into eternity, that will gain you status in eternity. Everything else is going to be burned up upon entry into heaven.

How do you work on your character? You listen to the whisper of the Holy Spirit when you’re tempted to do something that isn’t holy or godly. He’ll whisper, “John, Bob, Jason, Sylvia, ‘don’t do what you’re thinking of, instead, do the thing that will help everyone here right now.’” The more you respond to that voice, the more you will find yourself becoming a person you admire.

Third item:

c. Begin building your eternity, with permanent building materials.

Paul says that in some way, we’re all construction workers, we’re all home builders, building our life and legacy in heaven. He says...

By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder... If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.

– 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

You can build towards eternity with things that will burn up, the Bible calls those wood, hay and straw or things that will last: gold, silver and costly stones. How do you tell the difference? You know you're building with combustibles if they're things that build you up and with costly stones if they're things that build God's kingdom up. This is, in part, why I've devoted my life to the church. The church is Jesus' family that will one day become the kingdom He rules.

In 1887 a young college student in England by the name of C.T. Studd – isn't that a great name, inherited a huge estate from his father and gave it all to the cause of Christ and then convinced his friends to join him in planting churches around the world because he figured out this principle.

Studd coined a phrase that's like one of those little jingles you hear that sticks in your brain and you wish you could get it out. Since I'm infected with it, I'll infect you as well. Studd's jingle was, ***Only one life, will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last.*** Say that three times and you'll never forget it. And you'll say, "That's cutsy and I wish I could get it out of my brain." But it's like "It's a small world" at Disneyland. Once you've got that song in your head, it never leaves.

The redeeming part of Studd's jingle is, it's true. Randy Alcorn writes, ***Following Christ is not a call to abstain from gratification but to delay gratification. It's finding our joy in Christ rather than seeking joy in the things of this world. Heaven – our assurance of eternal gratification and fulfillment – should be our North Star, reminding us where we are and which direction to go.***

What will last for eternity? Not your car, house, degrees, trophies, or business. What will last for eternity is every service to the church, every prayer for the needy, every effort invested in evangelism and every moment spent caring for precious children... The Bible says we'll reap in eternity what we've planted in this life.

So,

d. Set a goal.

To be Heaven-oriented is to be goal-oriented in the best sense. Paul says, ***I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 3:14***

What kind of goal should you set?

Here are the rewards waiting those who earn them and I'm going to show you a lot of verses on these friends, so that you never wonder if God is serious about us intentionally serving Him. He wants us to understand the rewards and uses them as a long-term incentive for us to serve him, serve him faithfully, serve him in adversity and serve him long term:

C. Understand the Rewards:

1. Crowns

In ancient times a crown was a sign of authority.

2 Timothy 2:12 says, ***If we endure, we will also reign with him.*** So endure whatever hardship you need to for Christ's sake.

2 Timothy 4:7-8 says, ***I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*** So, long for his appearing.

In ***Luke 19:17*** the Master says to the servant he entrusted property to and the servant enlarged the Master's holdings, ***Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.*** So some of Jesus' servants will take charge of multiple cities on the New Earth.

Rev. 2:10, Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. Christianity isn't for sissies. God expects us to stand up for His cause just like our Marines and sailors stand up for America.

Rev. 3:21, To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

One of my favorite childhood memories was when my dad was reading the paper in his big chair and he'd hoist me up beside him and let me sit next to him.

Rev. 5:10 – You have been made to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.

The question I did not answer from our twenty questions game last week was, "Will we all be equal in heaven?" The answer is, "no." Some of us will be given more authority than others. Some of us will be given authority to rule over others of us.

Similar to that, some of us will be given:

2. Judgeships

- According to 1 Cor. 6:3, we'll be given authority to judge angels, and according to Rev. 20:4, we'll be given authority to judge the affairs of other humans as well.

One of the most intriguing verses on Heaven's rewards is Rev. 2:17. Look at this:
He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

So three other prizes are:

3. *Hidden Manna* - manna was the miraculous food provided by God to his children in the wilderness after they left Egypt. Orthodox Jews believe that manna will be the food served in heaven. I don't think that's what this is. I know that I'm very appreciative of all the cookies and brownies so many of you have been giving our family at this time of year and I like the idea of God serving a special meal to some, and hope to be one of them.

The second prize is a white stone.

4. *A White Stone*

In certain cultures, when a jury reached a verdict, they would deliver a black stone if the person was guilty, and give them a white stone if they were acquitted.

In other cultures, the winner of a race would be given a special white stone that would gain him entrance into special parties and places.

The third prize is a

5. *A New Name*

A special name, known only to God and the recipient. If you've ever had someone you admire bestow a secret name or title on you, you know how good and motivating that feels. I remember when I was just starting out in ministry. I was a Youth Pastor and one of the dads took me to breakfast and said, "Hal, you're a winner." His belief in me stays with me to this day.

Friends, I hope, over these last few weeks you've not only become more aware of heaven and knowledge of heaven, but more incentivized by heaven. I hope that from this day forward you will live your life as preparation for your life on the New Earth. I hope we can compete together for the prizes that await us and spur one another one to achieve more for Christ.

The famous French author Victor Hugo once wrote, ***I feel within me that future life. I am like a forest that has been razed; the new shoots are stronger and brighter. I shall most certainly rise toward the heavens the nearer my approach to the end, the plainer is the sound of the immortal symphonies of worlds which invite me. For half a century I have been translating my thoughts into prose and verse: history, drama, philosophy, romance, tradition, satire, ode, and song; all of these I have tried. But I feel I haven't given utterance to the thousandth part of what lies within me. When I go to the grave I can say, as others have said, "My day's work is done." But I cannot say, "My life is done." My work will recommence the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes upon the twilight, but opens upon the dawn.*** - Victor Hugo

The famous English author, C.S. Lewis wrote, *I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.* – C.S. Lewis

When H.S. Laird's Christ-loving father, lay dying, his son sat at his beside and asked, "Dad, how do you feel?"

His father replied, "Son, I feel like a little boy on Christmas Eve."

Christmas is coming. We our lives between the first Christmas and the second. We walk on disputed turf, between Eden and the New Earth, but the dispute will be settled sooner than we imagine, and Christ will reign over the universe, and we will reign with Him.

As a teenage athlete, I spent as many as seven hours a day training for a metals, ribbons and trophies. Friends, if you train 24/7 for the heavenly prizes, you will never regret it.

Here's the list of prizes we know of. I believe they'll be others as well. Which of these will you goal set for?

Rewards:

- 1. Crowns***
- 2. Judgeships***
- 3. Hidden Manna***
- 4. A White Stone***
- 5. A New Name***

Put an X on your sheet by the ones you plan to achieve.

Now, just before I pray, think for a minute: what kind of effort are you willing to put in to achieve these?

Let pray for you.

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