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“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth,”
Colossians 3:2.

Heavenly Realities

Lesson Aim: To encourage believers to set their affections on eternal things.

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Topic: Faith: Of Believers; Hope.

INTRODUCTION — A skeptic once said, “I cannot accept the Christian doctrines of God, heaven, etc., because I cannot believe in what I cannot see, touch, taste, hear, or feel.” Poor man. How Satan has blinded his heart. He completely ignores the ministry of Christian faith which gives assurance to our hope and makes us certain of realities we do not see.

The Christian lives in a state of assurance “as seeing him who is invisible,” Hebrews 11:27. Unseen things are unreal to unbelievers but only because they are spiritually blind: “. . . **the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not. . .**” II Corinthians 4:4. Their denial of unseen spiritual realities has the same force as a blind man's denial of the reality of sight.

For the Christian, however, it is otherwise. **“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal,”** II Corinthians 4:18. This is the ministry of faith—to make real to us that which we cannot see. Thus faith makes possible assurance about the heavenly realities.

The aim of today's study is “to encourage believers to set their affections on eternal things.” The materialism of our age may tempt the believer to place more emphasis on the seen than on the unseen. Thus his affection may be drawn away from God and eternal realities. This study seeks to keep each believer heaven centered in his affection and service.

We live in two worlds. In one, things are known through the witness of

the five senses—sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. In the other, things are known by the witness of the spirit through faith. Both worlds are real. The tangible world is temporal. The intangible world is eternal. Which world is the most real to you?

EXPOSITION

I. A REAL INHERITANCE, 1:3-5.

The Scriptures speak of our being “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ,” Romans 8:17. An heir is one entitled to inherit another's property. A portion of the inheritance of the believer is described in I Peter 1:4 as “an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. . .”

1. Our inheritance has been provided in grace, verse 3. This is why God is to be praised for it. When Peter pens the doxology, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,” all believers respond with a heartfelt “Amen!” The Holy Spirit bears with their own spirit a witness that they are children of God (Romans 8:16) and they know this is solely by His grace, Titus 3:5.

Reference is made to the “abundant mercy” by which God provided the believer's inheritance. Mercy is the expression of grace; it is grace in action. Considering the depth of man's sin, his just desert of judgment, the redemptive deed of Jesus Christ, the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, and the gracious adoption of each believer into the family of God, we all can bless God for His abundant mercy. Apart from His dealing with us in grace and mercy there would be no heavenly inheritance.

2. Our inheritance is guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, verse 3. The hope of each believer is a living hope. It stands in sharp contrast to the vain hopes and empty wishes of those who know not God. And the believer's hope rests on the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In what sense is the resurrection of Christ Jesus the guarantee of our hope? It demonstrates that we have a living Saviour. If He were still in the tomb, bound by the powers of death, how could we be sure that He could redeem us from death? But His gracious words, “Because I live, ye shall live also,” John 14:19, assure us of resurrection and an eternal home in the heavens. Because Jesus lives, hope is real. His resurrection proves that God intends to go all the way with His redemptive design. It kindles in the believer's heart a hope which will not die.

3. Our inheritance is glorious beyond description, verse 4. It is “a

perfect inheritance beyond the reach of change and decay,”—Phillips. A four-fold expression is used to describe it.

(1) It is an incorruptible inheritance. It is in no way subject to decay. It is therefore imperishable. This inheritance belongs to the perfect state, of the future life which the risen saints share with God Himself. So many inheritances vanish away before they are obtained and enjoyed. Other inheritances are received and soon wasted by careless heirs. Not this one! It is not subject to decay nor perishing.

(2) It is an undefiled inheritance. Its absolute perfection admits no flaws nor faults. It is stainless. Everything of earth has flaws, of course. Nothing here is absolutely perfect. But this blessed inheritance is so pure and flawless that men must be purified before they can enjoy it. (3) It is an unfading inheritance. Here a word is used which speaks of the fading of a flower. The definite statement is made that the heavenly inheritance never fades. It will be ever new and delightful and satisfying for eternity. It never tarnishes nor loses any element of its beauty. Its heirs never tire of it. It never grows old or unattractive. It is unfading!

(4) It is an unfailing inheritance. “Reserved in heaven for you,” this inheritance will not pass to another. Each believer will receive that inheritance which is rightfully his. Goodspeed catches the idea exactly when he translates “which is kept safe for you in heaven.” The Apostle Peter used a word, which we translate “reserved,” that means “to take care of; to guard.” No power nor person will take away your heavenly inheritance.

Here, then, is a heavenly inheritance. It shares the divine glory of God. It endures as surely as Jesus endures. It is waiting for each believer being guarded of God that none lose his reward. No wonder it inspires a living hope and words of praise. And, it is real!

4. Our inheritance is assured to only a certain designated people, verse 5. It is only for those who are “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” There is no word of an inheritance for those not kept by the power of God but every assurance for those who are. To underscore the significance of his thought, Peter took a word from military vocabulary current in his day. “Kept” pictures an armed force employed in sentry and escort duties, surrounding their ward and interposing a wall of enclosure and defense. Thus does God “keep” His own!

In order to enjoy that heavenly inheritance, man must “stay saved” until he is in heaven. But the matter of staying saved is not his own duty and work, but is the work of God who surrounds and protects His dear children. This is why we believe in the security of each one who truly trusts Jesus as personal Saviour. God's guardianship is the basis of our assurance of

receiving the inheritance He has promised.

5. Our inheritance is yet to be revealed, verse 5. It will be revealed “in the last time.” We know it is there but we have not yet seen the extent of its glory nor enjoyed the benefits of its possession. Like a prospector who finds a vein of gold, but knows not the extent nor value of the deposit, so the believer only guesses at what the fullness of salvation will be.

Peter speaks of a salvation which is to be revealed at the last time. It is important to understand his words. There are three phases of salvation. (1) The penitent believer is saved eternally when he turns from sin and trusts Jesus. This is a once-for-all eternally-valid salvation from the guilt of sin. (2) The believer is being saved day by day as his life is invested in the service of men for Jesus' sake. This is salvation from the dominion of sin. (3) The believer is yet to be saved when his body is transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ and he receives his heavenly inheritance. This is salvation from the **presence** of sin. And this is the fullness of salvation experienced. We wait with a “living hope” for that blessed day. This is our inheritance as children of God. We have not yet seen it. We still wait for it. But through faith it is as real to us as if it were already ours.

II. A REAL RELATIONSHIP, 1:6.9.

There are two words in the Greek language in which Peter wrote which are translated as “know” in our English language. One means what we call “head knowledge” and the other means to “know by experience.” It is significant that when the Bible makes reference to the believer's knowledge of God it commonly refers to “knowing by experience.” This is why the relationship with Him is real. It is experiential.

1. Trials and hardships do not break our relationship with God, verses 6-7. Christian faith does not immune one from trials. On the contrary, Jesus said, “. . . **In the world ye shall have tribulation. . .**” John 16:33. The difference is that the believer can rejoice through the most fierce and multiplied trials. The believer experiences peace and joy, not just happiness. Happiness depends on the “hap” (circumstance) in which a person finds himself. Peace and joy depend on a personal relationship with God. This truth underlies the words of Jesus, “**Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid,**” John 14:27.

The believer knows that trials is no evidence that God has forsaken him. Nor are they any indication that God loves him the less. On the contrary, in trials we can know that the concern and care of God become

more evident than ever. The relationship between the Christian and Christ remains unbroken in adversity. The relationship is real. Times of testing show the true nature of a person. If one only pretends allegiance to the Lord, he will fall away in testings. But if one is truly committed to Him, trials will not shake him. This is why some have gone to prison and even unto death for the witness of Jesus. Their relationship with Him was real.

2. Love to Jesus is real to the believer, verse 8. We love Him even though we have never seen Him. This indicates the reality of our relationship with Him. So fickle are human emotions that an old proverb states, “Out of sight; out of mind.” But not so in spiritual things. We love Jesus though He is unseen by our physical eyes. If our relationship with Him was based on fleshly bonds, we might fear to lose Him when He is unseen. But it is not so.

Our relationship to Jesus is based on spiritual things. Through the eyes of faith we do see Him. And though we do not see Him (with fleshly sight) now, we know He is there and loving Him, we rejoice.

Someone may object, “How can you love One whom you have never seen?” The believer replies, “I have seen Him. In the Bible, in the lives of other believers, in the providential work of God, in the witness of the Holy Spirit to my heart, through the eyes of faith, I have seen Him. He is nonetheless real because He is not seen with the physical eyes.” Love makes our relationship to Him the more real.

3. A real relationship with Jesus creates great joy in the believer, verse 8. It is described as a “joy unspeakable and full of glory.” This means our joy is too great for words and it is crowned with glory as well—an indescribable and glorious joy! Here is the picture of the tides of joy overflowing their banks and pouring their abundance into the soul of the believer. There are those blessed moments when heaven and earth draw near and we “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus,” Ephesians 2:6.

Unbelievers do not know this joy. They cannot experience it. It is entered into only through personal faith. But how it assures one that he belongs to Jesus! **“Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice,”** Philippians 4:4.

III. A REAL SALVATION, 1:9-13.

1. Salvation is the end of faith, verse 9. Not that one no longer trusts after he is saved. Salvation is the “end” in that it is the goal toward which faith moves us, the fulfillment which faith seeks, the boon which faith brings. Faith keeps right on trusting the God who has saved, to keep on saving, and finally to save unto eternal glory. Remember the three tenses of

salvation. We have been saved from the guilt of sin—by faith. We are being saved from the rule of sin—by faith. We shall be saved from the presence of sin—because we are trusting Jesus. It is faith all the way.

This salvation is not mere imagination nor deception. It is real. How do we know it is real? Because faith makes us certain of realities we do not see. You can be saved and know it! It is that real.

2. Salvation is the message of the prophets, verses 10-12. As prophets were given insight into the redemptive plan of God, they marveled. Their theme was that God would send a Savior. Many details they did not know, of course, but verse 12 clearly states that they preached the same message which the Apostles of Jesus preached — salvation! Jesus said, **“For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them,”** Luke 10:24.

What a holy privilege is ours. Not only can we “see” and “hear” of salvation, but we possess it and experience it. And its real, its real; Oh, I know its real!

3. Salvation inspires to service, verse 13. The privilege of being saved brings with it the responsibility to serve the Savior. Peter has listed the privileges of grace: election, hope, inheritance, love for Jesus, eternal salvation. Now he turns to the attendant responsibility. Read verse 13 very carefully. What is Peter saying?

“Wherefore, having put out of the way once for all everything that would impede the free action of your mind, be calm and collected in spirit, and set your hope perfectly, wholly, and unchangeably, without doubt and despondency, upon the grace that is being brought to you upon the occasion of the revelation of Jesus Christ.” With such words Kenneth S. Wuest catches the exact idea which Peter expresses.

Look at the importance of a disciplined mind. All doubts, uncertainties, or absence of assurance are to be laid aside once for all. Here is a call to service which is perfectly reasonable in view of the reason later given. **“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer,”** I Peter 4:7.

Does the reality of personal salvation inspire you to service for the Lord?

CONCLUSION—There are spiritual realities just as there are material realities. Give Satan no opportunity to make you think or feel that the material is more real than the spiritual. It is not so.

At this moment you can think of some friend or relative who is away

from you. Is he less real because he is out of present sight? Not at all. Neither is Jesus less real because you do not now see Him.

Things which are seen are material and limited to time. Things which are not seen are spiritual and unlimited by time for they are eternal. Therefore the things unseen are more enduring than those things which are visible. Be steadfast, Christian believer, and rejoice in the prospect of glory when anticipation is ended and the “heavenly realities” are ours!

“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal,” II Corinthians 4:18.

QUESTIONS

1. What is a “reality”?
2. How can unseen things be real?
3. How does faith make them real?
4. What does II Corinthians 4:18 mean?
5. How do we receive an inheritance with Jesus?