

**Forever**

As I write this article, Dennis, Lori, Collin and Clayton Wilkening will be leaving town in a couple of hours. Our former assistant pastor will assume the senior pastorate of the First Baptist Church of Colville, Washington. At Christchurch our members and staff are always more than members; we are family. We already miss Dennis and his family.

Yesterday our oldest daughter, Heather, her husband Jared and three children, Caleb, Christopher and Cara said goodbye and headed back to their home in Missouri after spending their week's vacation with us. On Tuesday night of this past week, I peeped in on Christopher who had gone to bed and not unlike many four year olds was not nearly ready for sleep. He smiled when he spotted me so I came into the room and sat by him on the bedside and he said, "Papa, sleep with me!" I explained that I would need to sleep in my own bed. He smiled his beautiful smile again and said, "Well, then give me a hug and let me kiss you!" Ah, music to a grandparents heart! He got more serious and said, "Papa, I want to live with you forever!" This reached beyond sentimentality and broached a most sensitive, but to the believer, a most precious subject. I said to my grandson, "This is what makes Heaven so wonderful. We shall spend forever together and never say goodbye." He flashed that angelic smile again and seemed content with my answer.

Goodbyes are tough, but for Christians who take the Bible literally (as we do), we know we never say goodbye permanently. In the first century of the Church, there was a common greeting that the believers used, they greeted one another with: "Maranatha!" This was an Aramaic word that ecstatically translates into English, "The Lord is soon coming!" This expression reminded the persecuted Church that even though they were separated by distance or even death itself, Jesus was coming and soon continual joy would be theirs in the land of no goodbyes. Paul said, "*For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*" (I Thessalonians 2:19).

"Forever" is a word that presents a pleasant picture even in the mind of a four year old. Synonyms for forever are: eternity, evermore, for good, for always, perpetually, continually, and constantly. We are intrigued by this thought. Just in casual investigation, I found there have been four books entitled "Forever," twenty-eight music albums named "Forever," forty-one songs named "Forever," and seven movies named "Forever." To say the least, "forever" is on the minds of people.

From our Christian worldview, without hesitation I can vouch for evangelical, fundamental Christianity; we have a grip on "forever," because "forever" has a grip on us. Allow me to make three dogmatic statements about "forever" from the biblical viewpoint.

## **1. Whoever places their trust in Christ will spend forever with the Lord.**

Jesus said, *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”* (John 5:24). This is the promise of the Lord! God keeps His word and cannot lie (Titus 1:2)! When a person hears the Word of God, falls under conviction for their sins, repents and believes, they are saved and at that moment of belief are granted the gift of eternal life. The thief on the cross requested while dying, *“...Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom”* (Luke 23:42). Jesus immediately gave this response: *“...Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”* (Luke 23:43). Notice our Lord said in John 5:24, that we who believe will never ever come into condemnation or future judgment, but is - at the moment of belief - passed from death unto life.

Paul said, *“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:6). When a person trusts Jesus, an irrevocable work of grace commences that shall not end until we are with our Lord in glorious reunion. In reference to the permanency of this work of saving grace we read in Scripture, *“For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord”* (Romans 8:38,39).

## **2. When believers die, they just really begin to live.**

Here’s a complex yet unique statement of truth. We find this claim verified by none less a personage than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Our Lord said to Martha after the decease of her brother Lazarus, who was soon to be raised from the dead by Jesus, *“And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”* (John 11:26). When a Christian dies, we can say with the apostle, *“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord”* (II Corinthians 5:8). Immediately at the very moment of death, we receive an intermediate heavenly body that shall be as real as the one we now occupy and then at the resurrection, we receive the permanent and perfected body described in I Corinthians 15: 51 through 53: *“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”*

What a promise! Although our physical body is experiencing the second law of thermo-dynamics (everything living is on the path to entropy or degeneration), we are assured that once that comes to final fruition, it is anything but final for the believer! We are changed! God takes what is left of our physical body, if even it is the smallest particle we can imagine, even dust itself and reconstructs our body into a similar yet permanent body that shall never again experience entropy!

### **3. Forever is not going to be boring!**

I believe it is not possible to fully imagine eternity in our present state of mind. In our present frame of reference, everything that we see has a beginning and an ending. As we try our best to imagine what forever is going to be like, the thought of “boring” comes to mind as the false conception of heaven is conceived by non-biblical sources as people all dressed the same, riding on clouds and playing harps. Nothing could be further from the truth. Think of this: hundreds of years after their life on earth Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration as described in three of the four Gospels and once by Peter in his second epistle. Luke said, *“And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem”* (Luke 9: 30,31). Allow me to bring two things to your attention: 1) We shall know each other in Heaven. Long after their life on earth, Moses and Elijah were recognized. *“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known”* (I Corinthians 13:12). 2) We associate with people we have things in common with and are active in a work. Moses and Elijah had much in common. Both were prophets who received the message of God and transferred it to mankind. One represented the Law, the other the Prophets. Is it any wonder that in the great beyond they should associate together?

Heaven will be more interesting than we can ever imagine. Here’s what I can imagine: Christian musicians, engineers, homemakers, preachers, lawyers, historians and doctors will enjoy fellowship and even have some work to do in the kingdom to come. Moses and Elijah were discussing the death of Jesus. Would you have not liked to have been there? What were they saying? I believe they may have been discussing the transfer of Abraham’s bosom after Christ’s resurrection (Ephesians 4:8). I do not know, but what I do know is Moses and Elijah were not bored; they were busy serving God on the other side. Let us therefore do away with contemplation of boredom in Heaven. We shall serve our Lord as surely then as we serve Him now.

I close with my father’s famous words, “Cheer up; we’ll soon be dead!” Actually, we shall be more alive then than we have ever been before.

-Pastor Pope-