

Counter-intuitive Path, part 2
July 9, 2017

Do you ever wonder what heaven will be like? Do you ever wonder what Judgment Day will be like? The Bible does not give us much information. So we wonder. We imagine.

(Song, "I Can Only Imagine")

The Bible does not tell us much of what heaven will be like. It does say that

- There will be an end to griefs and sadness.
- We will no longer struggle with these bodies of death.
- There will be no night there.
- There will be no sun, for the glory of God will be its light.
- We will be with Jesus.

The life that awaits us in heaven will be special. Jesus often described it as a treasure to be obtained at all costs. He also points out that, like most treasure, heaven is not easily found. See how He describes it in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:13-14 (NIV) "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

The life Jesus is speaking of is eternal life. The people Jesus was speaking to were already alive, like us. But eternal life will be so different and better that the two cannot be compared. That future life will be so perfect, so special, so incomparable to anything we know here that Jesus does not attempt to describe it. We would not be able to understand it. We would not be able to appreciate it. When we move into that existence, we will really know life, so unlike what we know now as life.

Even so, we try to imagine what it will be like. I have put my imagination to work this week, based on what the New Testament teaches us to value. Let me share with you some of my imagining of heaven.

When I can see Jesus clearly, that will be life. Now I see Jesus in the Bible. I see Him through the printed word. I see Him indistinctly. I can't know Him like the apostles knew Him. We have no clue what his face looked like. We don't know the color of his skin. We only see in the Bible how He behaved, how He treated people. We see His character, his faith, his intelligence. We see Him darkly, like trying to see a picture on your phone in the bright sunshine, with sunglasses on. We have lots of questions and few answers.

But in heaven we will see Jesus face to face. Then we will bask in His smile. And what of our questions? Maybe our questions will disappear from our minds as unimportant in the presence of Jesus. Or maybe the Holy Spirit will just input the answers into our minds supernaturally. And with the answers the hurts and doubts that spawned those questions will melt away. That will be life.

In addition, **When I am free from my sinful self, that will be life.** When I stand in the presence of Jesus, I won't be hindered by lust or greed, pride or ego, or a desire to be appreciated. All my emotional needs will be fully met in being with Jesus. All my sinful desires and thoughts will be erased. I will rest in the love of Jesus. That will be life.

In addition, **When I see my sin and His salvation for all that they are, that will be life.** We have such a small view of our salvation. We think of heaven as "no more back pain" or "rescue from the evil around us on earth". Our salvation is so much more.

But, to fully understand and appreciate my salvation, I need to fully see my sin. So much of my own sin is hidden from me. The prophet Jeremiah says this about our hearts.

Jeremiah 17:9 (NIV) The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

I believe that we will stand before God and all of our sins will be reviewed for us. That itself could take years for me. This is an important experience before entering eternal life. I need to see all of my sin, as God sees it. Right now, I am blind to much of it. I need to see all of it. I need to see the consequences of each hurtful word, each selfish action, each sinful thought, each disobedience. I need to see how huge is the pile of my sins. I need to see how long is the list of my sins against God and others.

I need to see the consequences of those sins upon others. I need to feel the pain that I caused others. I need to hurt as they hurt, physically, emotionally, mentally. I need to experience the guilt, shame, and remorse for all of my sin.

Then, there will be no doubt in anyone's mind, but that I need a savior. None of you then will think, "He's a good man." No one will think I deserve one moment in heaven, least of all me.

I need to see my sin for what it is. Only then will I fully appreciate what Jesus did for me. Only then will I fully appreciate God's mercy and grace. Only then will I be ready for life in heaven.

In addition, **When I experience full reconciliation with other believers, that will be life.** I picture some of the first days in heaven as a meeting of people I have known here who misunderstood me, or people I misunderstood. We hurt each other with our words or actions and are never reconciled to each other. Often, we fail to confront each other, and so never figure out why we sinned against each other. But we wonder, "Why did you say that? What were you thinking? What motives caused you to do this?"

I am thinking that all of those misunderstandings will be made right. God will show us both what was in our hearts and minds. Suddenly we will both understand. And in the grace we are both experiencing with Jesus in heaven, we will forgive each other. That will be life.

You see, I hope, that what we are living now is so inadequate, so poor, so sad, that we can hardly call it life. It is existence, but compared to what we will live, it is a pretty poor existence. When we come into the presence of Jesus... THEN we will live.

This is the life Jesus is holding out to us. Yet, He says that most people miss it. Why will they miss it? They will miss it because they do not know the way there. They are on the wrong road, Jesus says.

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Most people are on the broad road. They aren't finding the treasure of the right road into the kingdom of God. They are taking the road that most other people are taking. They are taking the road that seems like the best road to them. They are taking the easy rode. They are going through the wide gait.

This teaching in Matthew 7 is part of Jesus' sermon on the mount. All through this sermon He has been painting a picture between the popular theology of the day and the truth of God. He has been showing that the path of righteousness is harder than anyone knew. It is more comprehensive then people understand. Our greater sin is inside us more than what we do outwardly. The Pharisees and other religious leaders stressed outward sins and ignored inside motivations. They ignored the heart. Jesus had been speaking against that view and teaching that God is indeed looking most intently at our hearts. All of your outward actions can meet man's standards while your heart fails the standard of God. And you will be outside of His kingdom.

So why are so many people missing the right path? Because to see the path for what it is, the path to life, you have to first admit your sinfulness before God. You have to humble yourself before God. That is how Jesus started the sermon on the mount. Blessed will be the poor in spirit, those who admit before God that they have NO righteousness of their own that amounts to anything deserving of heaven.

We hide from our sin. The heart is deceitful. The heart keeps secret its desires and motives. We do not take the time to search our hearts for sin. We ignore it. We do not want to admit our sin. We don't want to know the extent of our sin. We would rather not think about the consequences of our sin.

So man invents his own path to God. Man decides what he is willing to do to search for God. And he pretends that whatever he comes up with is good enough. This is what most people do. That is how we got to where we are in American culture today.

In America today there are many people who choose to believe that most people are good, that good people make it to heaven, and that any road will get them there if they are sincere.

The Bible says the opposite. The Bible says that no one is really good and no one deserves heaven. Jesus says that there is not a broad, well-traveled road to eternal life in heaven. Instead, there is a small narrow road. Most people miss it.

Most people avoid the narrow road. They may glance at it, but not even consider taking it. Instead, they take the broad road, the wide road, the easier road.

Unfortunately, it does not lead you to life. It leads you to destruction.

I was reading someone's account of traveling in Ireland. The country roads are only a little wider than one vehicle. He spoke of the stress of driving those roads and meeting another vehicle and the difficulty of passing each other without running into the ditch on one side or the hedgerow on the other. He was wishing for a broad, easily driven road. But the only way to reach some destinations was on such narrow roads.

God has purposely made the path to life to be narrow. He did so that those who refuse to admit their sin will miss it. If you think following Jesus is easy, you might be on the wrong road. If you think that living for Jesus is simple, you might be headed in the wrong direction. If you think that being a Christian is just something you add to your regular life, then you might not be a Christian at all.

The narrow road calls for self-denial. It calls for humility. It calls for confession of sin. I urge you to seek out this path, the true path to God. Don't choose the way of most people. Don't make the same mistake. They are thinking that, "There can't possibly be only one way to eternal life." With all the religions in the world, they are thinking there can't possibly be only one way to life.

But, such thinking does not mean there are more ways. There is only one way for lots of things. There is only one way for us to get to the moon. We have to get there in a spaceship. You cannot walk there, swim there, bicycle there, or even float there. No matter how many people want to visit the moon, there is only one way to do so.

Getting to the life God has for us is the same. Jesus says there is only one way. That is, by definition, a narrow way. It is an intolerant way. It is a hard to discover way.

But Jesus has shown us that way. He is that road. Jesus is the way, the truth and the light. Jesus is the way to God, the truth of God, and the light for God. (John 14:6)

Today, won't you put your faith in Jesus? He died to pay the price for all of your sins. Receive Him as your savior.
Turn your life over to Him as your Lord.
All your sins will be forgiven and you will learn to walk the narrow path to life.