

Living in Light of Eternity



Luke 20:26-40

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- A. Our Hope for Eternity (26-35)
- B. What do we believe about eternity?
- C. The Character of Eternity (35-40)

Our cell group started a with a discussion question about what our dream house would be like. Indeed it is nice that we dream. I shared how I would love a big yard to care for for gardens and orchards. It would be wonderful to have a huge skylight opening to the heavens. But then I remembered my neighbor. Then I remembered my grandparents. Then I remembered my parents. My neighbor is doing her best to care for her house almost the size of ours. Been there for decades, and she fights the thought of moving. Even though having heart surgery and foot problems, she does her best at convincing her children she can be alone in such a huge house. We see it happen again and again. We grow and expand and then as we retire we begin to scale back to smaller and smaller quarters. For as much as we might discover and even gain our dream house on earth, each of us has to go through the process of giving up what we have worked so hard to gain. Psalm 49:11-12 says it so well,

11 Their inner thought is, [that] their houses are forever, [And] their dwelling places to all generations; They have called their lands after their own names.

12 But man in [his] pomp will not endure; He is like the beasts that perish.

All our dream houses designed and built on earth will not survive. They might survive us or we might survive them. But in the end, we will be separated from our dream houses. It makes us wonder is it wrong to dream? Certainly not. But we should realize that dreams are given to us to help us reach into the distant future and even into eternity. The best dreams are ones that don't end. The relationships, joys and projects last forever. True dreams are made to call us to reality. If we are to get the dream house here on earth, we need to do a lot of planning and hard work. But it is all the more important for us in our preparations for eternity, that we now plan and make those sacrifices.

Through this series on "In Light of Eternity," we have been describing how to ready ourselves for eternity. Our life here dictates our blessings there. There is no doubt that life on earth is a test of our love for the Lord, and we will be rewarded or not rewarded in eternity. I remember one incident in the classic CS Lewis when describing the joys of heaven. There was one who was so excited about the great joys and delights there. He was wondering why the other fellow over by the tree was not equally excited.

C.S. Lewis in the The Last Battle, 144-145

"Ain't we all blind in the dark!" said Diggle.

"But it isn't dark, you poor stupid Dwarfs," said Lucy. "Can't you see? Look up! Look round! Can't you see the sky and the trees and the flowers? Can't you see me?"

"How in the name of all Humbug can I see what ain't there? And how can I see you any more than you can see me in this pitch darkness?"

"But I can see you," said Lucy. "I'll prove I can see you. You've got a pipe in your mouth."

"Anyone that knows the smell of baccy could tell that," said Diggle.

"Oh the poor things! This is dreadful," said Lucy. Then she had an idea. She stooped and picked some wild violets. "Listen, Dwarf," she said. "Even if your eyes are wrong, perhaps your nose is all right: can you smell that." She leaned across and held the fresh, damp flowers to Diggle's ugly nose. But she had to jump back quickly in order to avoid a blow from his hard little fist.

"None of that!" he shouted. "How dare you! What do you mean by shoving a lot of filthy stable-litter in my face? There was a thistle in it too. It's like your sauce! And who are you anyway?"

Summary

Eternity is a path each of us will take. The question is whether we will be ready or not for it. We first see that some will (Charts) be risen unto death. Just think how scary death is. I've met people who refuse to go to funerals.

But we also must think about what happens after His people are called to heaven. I believe it is because we are so little focused on heaven that we have done very little if any deliberate preparations for the world beyond.

Today, I would like for us to look closely at an incident when some Sadducees met up with Jesus found in Luke 20:26-40. I would like to share three points about this meeting that will help us prepare for the future.

26 And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and marveling at His answer, they became silent. 27 Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), 28 and they questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that IF A MAN'S BROTHER DIES, having a wife, AND HE IS CHILDLESS, HIS BROTHER SHOULD TAKE THE WIFE AND RAISE UP OFFSPRING TO HIS BROTHER. 29 "Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died childless; 30 and the second 31 and the third took her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. 32 "Finally the woman died also. 33 "In the resurrection therefore, which one's wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife." 34 And Jesus said to them, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; 36 for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. 38 "Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him." 39 And some of the scribes answered and said, "Teacher, You have spoken well." 40 For they did not have courage to question Him any longer about anything. (Luke 20:26-40).

A. Our Hope for Eternity (26–35)

What do we believe about eternity?

As we begin our contemplation on eternity, let's ask the question, "What do you believe about eternity?" It seemed to be the question that was spread before Jesus by the Sadducees. From the nature of this question and other texts, it was a hot topic among the Jewish leaders. Do you remember Paul, when trapped in court, he merely said that he was on trial for his hope in the resurrection, and then a great commotion took place. No longer was Paul the issue. The topic of eternity was the issue.

The question is good in a sense. The Sadducees had all this concern for the details of heaven and their relationship on earth.

We would think the question was from some honest soul who really cared about the affairs in heaven. But there was a few words that were put in parenthesis that made us think again

about the question. It is said in verse 27, "the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection)." In other words, Luke was sympathetic to the non-Jewish readers and filled them into the story behind the story. The hypothetical situation is interesting but there is a point behind it.

Our question that comes to our mind is, "Why would anyone speak such a long story if they did not believe in the resurrection?" We can think about many parallels I suppose. Why do people vote even though they think their vote will not help their losing candidate win? Why do people eat candy even though they know that there is no value in it? Why do you watch a certain movie even though it bores you so? There are reasons behind the actions that help explain things. When the Sadducees told this story, it made me think why would they spend so much time conversing about a matter and yet not have his heart in the matter. And then I wondered maybe we too have been fooling ourselves. Maybe many of us talk about having eternal life, but it does not really make a difference in our own lives. If we believed or not believed, it simply doesn't make a difference. How can the Sadducees talk about eternity but not believe in it? How can they speak of the resurrection and not believe in it? Is it at all possible that many of us would say we believe in Jesus and are going to heaven, but the Lord has written a slight preface to our confession, (But he doesn't really believe there is a heaven).

This made me think of the many parables and stories Jesus spoke of about people who said they believed, but didn't really. Remember the 10 virgins? Jesus in Matthew 25:1-13 says,

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 "And five of them were foolish, and five were prudent. 3 "For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them, 4 but the prudent took oil in flasks along with their lamps. 5 "Now while the bridegroom was delaying, they all got drowsy and began to sleep. 6 "But at midnight there was a shout, 'Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.' 7 "Then all those virgins rose, and trimmed their lamps. 8 "And the foolish said to the prudent, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' 9 "But the prudent answered, saying, 'No, there will not be enough for us and you too; go instead to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.' 10 "And while they were going away to make the purchase, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding feast; and the door was shut. 11 "And later the other virgins also came, saying, 'Lord, lord, open up for us.' 12 "But he answered and said, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.' 13 "Be on the alert then, for you do not know the day nor the hour. (Matthew 25:1-13).

All ten got their candles, but they all did not take it seriously. Five of them just didn't make any preparations. And when He returned, they just missed out. They never made it. Perhaps it is much like some of us who are ready to say we have eternal life but not really believe in it. I know we will protest and say we really do believe Christ is coming back, but we don't really take it seriously. There is a great fear in my heart that we are not as ready for heaven as we would like to think. We are confident that there is a ticket somewhere for us and yet we have not searched for it. We assume it is there. But I think that heaven is much better than Wonker's Chocolate Factory, and that the ticket to enter is much more precious than Charlie's much sought after ticket. Do you remember people from every nation were giving up fortunes for a chance for the ticket? But they had a mere tour; but we have an eternal home.

Let me give you a test. On a scale from 0 to 10, write down how many times you have thought about Christ's return and/or heaven in the last week? How did you do? If you got 4 and above, that means on an average you just edged out thinking about eternity on every other day. We talk a lot about having a hope in eternity. We know much about the teaching of eternity, but much like the Sadducees, it is not something we believe.

But you contest. I believe. How can you say I don't believe it! Our problem goes back to the east-west difference between knowledge in an intellectual way and knowledge in an experiential way. The emphasis coming from the Greek world of thought teaches if we think the right things, then we are great men. The east would say if we are great men, then we are great men. It is much like today when many people are deluded into thinking that great education and good leaders have nothing to do with our lives. It is absolutely ridiculous to say that character has nothing to do with the quality of our lives. Of course we are not saying possessing a set of skills is not important, but I have been very disappointed over some very nice meals because of sour-

faced waitresses but on the other hand some very poor meals have become very pleasant because of shine on a certain waiter or hostess' face.

When we are content with knowledge but have not made that knowledge part of our lives. It is more like the foolish virgins who demonstrated through their non-preparation that they really did not believe. I want you to understand that if Christ's return and eternity is not on our minds, then it is not in our hearts. You can tell me all you want, but the facts dictate something else. (Chart of 2 roots).

The Sadducees were an example of a people that for the most part at least lived consistently. They denied the resurrection. This world was all there is. Well, they were very comfortable in their elitist position. They did not mind making this their home. The Pharisees however, believed there was a resurrection. But this belief fooled some and helped others. How can it fool them, you ask? When we have confidence that what we have is different than what we really have, then it will only take time to one day show that it is not there. In other words, the Pharisees could ask the question the Sadducees asked too. They did believe in it. But this kind of intellectual argument was all they were really interested in. But if the Pharisees stole their parents' money, or lied about a particular matter, this did not make much difference. What mattered is that they believed in the resurrection. But Jesus always countered this. It was not where the scriptures lead us. We are saved by Christ's blood but our confidence that we have been saved is not our ability to talk about salvation but that we have actually been saved. And how do we know we actually have been saved? It is by the power of Christ's life living through us.

So how do we know we really believe in the resurrection of the body? Because we can repeat the facts of the two resurrections, one unto life and another unto death? No. Not at all. Satan can repeat these matters. Information becomes belief when it begins to shape our lives. If after all these discussions on eternity and preparation, you have not changed, then indeed your faith is dead. If you still do not meditate on the glorious return of Jesus even after knowing the facts, then you don't love Christ. If we save our money and make all the plans for our lives on earth but not for heaven, then we should be more honest about what we really believe. If you do not think about how wonderful it will be to get to heaven, then we should not be confident about going there. The Sadducees' confidence would destroy them. They were wrong. The five foolish virgins were confident but deadly wrong.

The early church had such an expectation of Christ's return and it shaped their lives. They believed in Christ's words and therefore gave away their possessions to the poor, risked their lives in preaching the gospel, and was busy in prayer meetings.

B. The Character of Eternity (35-40)

The Sadducees had talked a lot about the resurrection but they did not believe it. Their question was based on the Law as written by Moses in the OT text Deuteronomy 25:5-7,

5 ¶ "When brothers live together and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be [married] outside [the family] to a strange man. Her husband's brother shall go in to her and take her to himself as wife and perform the duty of a husband's brother to her. 6* "And it shall be that the first-born whom she bears shall assume the name of his dead brother, that his name may not be blotted out from Israel. 7* "But if the man does not desire to take his brother's wife, then his brother's wife shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to establish a name for his brother in Israel; he is not willing to perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' ...*

The principle is simple, if a man dies and leaves a widow, it is the brother's duty to take her and give her a child so that she can be taken care of. It was a means of caring for one's family member, though it sounds very difficult for us in our rich age where we move all around. The real point had to do with inheritance. If she married out of the family, then the land would go to another outside the family and the tribe would begin to disintegrate. We see Boaz married Ruth because of this principle. But the Sadducees brought out one of their treasured word problems that often frustrated the Pharisees. The argument goes something like this I suspect: If there really is a resurrection, then God is going to be pressed very hard when it comes to working out the details! But they did not believe. They didn't want others to believe either.

One can always find that the unbeliever scoffs at God's Word rather than prize it. Jesus' response was totally the opposite. Jesus respected the scriptures rather than mocked them. Jesus had thought much about the scriptures and gave a careful response that humbled the Sadducees. I'd like to now look at each of these truths about eternal life. Each of them should help shape our lives on earth.

20:34-36 • neither marry, nor are given in marriage

We should realize that no matter how precious marriage is here on earth, it will not be existent in heaven. Marriage is such an important fabric of our society and so the statement that there will not be marriage and weddings in heaven, is a great shock.

Some people feel that not having marriage in heaven is going to be rather unfortunate. Some religions think of heaven as a place where men will be able to have a great selection of women. For them, heaven is a celebration of their lusts. How unfortunate for them to think wrongly and not turn away from such desires.

Marriage is short term - life on earth. If our vows said be your husband or wife forever, this would be wrong. It is as long as we both live on earth. As much as I love my wife, there will be a day in heaven when that special relationship will be gone. On earth marriage is for reasons of teaching us about covenant love, where children can be born, of providing a family environment where children can be stabilized, and where love can be safely provided. Let me share a few points here.

1) Heaven on the other hand is the fulfillment of covenant love. Christ and the church. That is the summary and exalted purpose of the church. Shadows must drop aside; the scaffolding must be taken down. It is time for the real to be unfolded before our eyes.

2) Earth is a place where children are born. Some think of heaven as a place where more will be added. No. It is clear that the sons of God are to have their entrance through earth. One cannot join the church later.

3) Of course if there are no children born, then there needs be no stabilizing influence; the Lord is that Rock. There is no same need for marriage.

4) Heaven is not for sex. Obviously our bodies will have some change. And though some think that what we have on earth is the ultimate expression of joy, we should be quickly humbled at such foolish thoughts. Why foolish?! Simply because what we have on earth is far inferior to what we will have in heaven.

Heaven will allow His people to have greater intimacy with all. Now, we can find a marriage partner and share deep things of our lives with. But in heaven, God is recreating the Garden of Eden, so that our lives are bared before the Lord and each other. Marriage will not be there as if we are limiting in depth sharing with only one person. No. Love will be able to have much greater ways of communicating without any corrupt thoughts that would destroy us today.

Lu 20:36 • they are like angels

We are like angels in the sense that we will not marry. We are not angels but will share some characteristics with them. We will not be men and women with a focus on sex differences. If we want children, we must have them now.

Lu 20:36 • are sons of God

We are sons of God. We should remember that God has highly elevated us. We are humans and created in the image of God. But fallen, we had lost that holy image. But in Christ we have found what we have lost. Listen to these three verses powerfully stating the special relationship we humans have in the family of God.

Ga 3:26 For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.*

Ro 8:14 For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.*

Ro 8:19 For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God.*

We have been chosen to be saved by the blood of Christ and brought into His family. We will be His honored servants empowered to do His will.

Lu 20:36 • being sons of the resurrection

We will have a common experience - that of the resurrection. Christ was the firstborn. We will share a common experience with Christ. Our lives will not have begun in heaven but on earth. We will have tasted death, but will have been called into life.

Lu 20:37-38 • being sons of the resurrection

Jesus ended His message with a powerful account of the resurrection unto life. The Sadducees had no answer to this. Listen again to Jesus' statement in Luke 20:37-38,

37* "But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the [passage about the burning] bush, where he calls the Lord THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB. "Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him."

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had long died by the time of Moses, at least 3-400 years beforehand. But God defined who He was by them. He is not saying what had happened with them in the past but His present relationship. Jesus is life and it is right that all would find their life in Him.

There are two stories about Christ's return.

Donald Grey Barnhouse in *How to Live a Holy Life*, pp. 58-60

"Let me set before you two attitudes, both of which are held by some believers in these days of our Lord's absence. In 1917, when the United States entered into the Great War, there was a young couple in the West who had made their plans to be married. They had a little house which they had been ~living for weeks, and all their resources had gone the preparation of that~home. Their plan had been married and to move into this new little home, but war was declared, and the young man, who was a reserve officer, was immediately called to the ~ps. His company was ordered to go to the Mexican frontier to train before going to France.

The young lady said to him the day before he was due to go on: It is not quite the date: for our wedding, but you might be ordered overseas immediately; you might be killed, and thus I might never see, you again. I would a thousand times rather go through life bearing your name than go through life always explaining that the man I loved had been killed in the war.

So let us go through with it and be married right now." So they were quietly married, and for their honeymoon he went with the troops and she went to the little house. She was very lonely, of course, and you can well imagine how she missed her lover-husband! Day after day he wrote to her, and the letters began to accumulate He sent her gifts; a Navajo rug, some Mexican lace, and some Indian pottery. Months passed, and there came an afternoon when she felt especially lonely. She took some pillows and put them on the floor in front of the open fireplace, spread the rug upon the floor and sat down upon it. She took the box with all her husband's letters; on some pillows she spread the lace that he had sent her, and put the pottery on a chair before her.

Then, taking two or three handkerchiefs for a good cry, she settled down to enjoy herself with his letters and with thoughts of him; But as she began reading the letters and thinking of him, suddenly there was a step on the porch, the door opened, and he was there.

He had sent a telegram and it had been delayed in delivery, as so frequently happened in those war days.

When she saw him the realization came to her that he was there, she jumped to her feet; the letters in her lap were scattered all over the place,: some of them falling into the fire; she stepped on the lace, and knocked a piece of pottery off the chair, but she was in his arms, and that mattered more to her than all the letters and all the gifts he could have sent her. He had returned. She had him and having him, had all."

Donald Grey Barnhouse in *How to Live a Holy Life*, pp. 61

"It was the story of a young aristocrat who had married a girl and had then gone off to the trenches. She had written to him that she was occupied in war work, saying how tired she was with nursing in a certain hospital. She apologized for not writing frequently, saying that she was spending hours every day with the war wounded. Some months later her husband was coming on leave, and a friend of his, who had received information about the state of affairs, said to him: "I would not announce if I were you, that I was getting leave; I would slip over quietly." The husband took his advice, arrived in London unannounced, and went to the hospital where the girl was supposed to be a nurse. He found she was not there at all! Then he found out where she was living, but on calling got no satisfaction, merely being told: "Oh, she will probably be at the tea dance at the Ritz this afternoon." He found her there, in the company of another man. He soon found out a great deal more, and the judge readily granted him a decree of divorce. I could not help contrasting those two stories and drawing the spiritual analogy.

Dear friends, our Lord Jesus is coming back and He is going to find you and He is going to find me in one of those two attitudes. Will you be flirting with the world, or will you be occupied with His love letters, His gifts, His work, thinking of Him? He is coming! "Every man that hath this hope in Him purifieth himself, even as He is pure." What a judgment that is going to be when He appears!"

Application

He who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed. (Proverbs 19:17).