

As we have looked at death over the past few weeks, I have heard from a number of people in the congregation that they have been encouraged to have a new attitude toward death and what lies beyond death. I have been very encouraged to hear this, as it is the beginning of a new attitude toward our lives here and now. To help us get started on the transformation of life, here are a few things to consider:

## Day 1

### Treat Yourself in the Reality of God's Love

Having considered the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and the rich inheritance that awaits us after death, we should have a renewed understanding of the love God has for us, and of His desire to renew a relationship with us. Looking at heaven, it can be rightfully overwhelming to consider the love and glory we will experience as we are brought into the love and unity of the trinity. To have our lives changed in the here and now, however, requires us to start living like this is our future. We must have confidence in that love that is hinted at now, but will be made manifest at the end of time. One of the biggest changes that can be made, but is often the most difficult, is to start to live now in the love of God that will be a certain reality later in heaven. This means, in part, treating yourself consistently with the truth of God's love for you. I was listening to a podcaster explain how he had been crippled his whole life by severe self-criticism. He would be irate with himself because of his failures, and would inwardly berate himself whenever his performance fell below perfection. He could not remember a time when he was not overcome with rage. His therapist gave him instructions to record himself talking out-loud to himself whenever these times of self-criticism occurred, with one change. He must talk to himself like he would talk to his best friend, or someone that he truly loved, in the same circumstance. He had to record these conversations and send them to his therapist. Within a few months he was cured of his negative self-talk and inner rage at his imperfections. What would it be like if we lived in the reality of God's love for us? If we treated ourselves like we were the beloved images of God? If we had respect for ourselves, and could live in the true grace and forgiveness that will be made clear to us in heaven? Give it a try, see what happens.

Verses: John 3:16, 1 John 4:19, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Prayer Topics: Love, Peace, Joy

## Day 2

### Treat Others in the Reality of God's Love

The next challenge for us is to live in the reality of God's love for others. The podcaster who I wrote about yesterday that suffered from inner rage directed at himself found something curious. When he spoke to himself like someone he loved, and found freedom from being gracious and loving toward himself, he began to be more loving toward others. When we fall short of the ideal of perfection that is God, we must deal with it in a couple of ways. We must either start to diminish the ideal of perfection, and be condemned to live a life of failure, or we must defend the ideal by diminishing ourselves. In order to soften the blow of berating ourselves, we will often be internally critical of others as well. Misery loves company, and if we will condemn ourselves, it helps to condemn others as well. The reality that is before us in heaven, and which we will live in for all eternity, is a reality of living in the perfect love and righteousness of Christ with all the redeemed. Just as we must start to treat ourselves in the reality of our future, we must treat others that way as well. When God's love overflows in your life, you can then start to pour love into the lives of those around you. Our unity with one another is a mark of the transformational love of Christ being manifest in our lives. Just as we are saved by grace, others are

saved by grace, and its reality for us is reflected in how we treat one-another. Let's start practicing for eternity, where God's love and grace have overcome our sins, and the sins of others.

Verses: 1 Peter 4:8, 1 John 4:8, Colossians 3:12-17

Prayer Topics: Compassion, Generosity, Community

Day 3

View Your Life in the Reality of Eternity

There are many frustrations in life. From traffic, to toddlers drawing on the walls, to bills that we can't pay, to the little annoyances that aggravate us about ourselves and others, we are surrounded by the imperfect. What if you knew that all that was going to be over by Sunday? What if artificial intelligence had just figured out a way to take all the imperfections of life away, and on Sunday the new update would transform the world? Would it make any difference to the rest of the week? Would you live any differently between now and Saturday night? My suspicion is that we would all have a pretty good week. Considering the impermanence of all these imperfections, many of them would seem inconsequential. My suspicion is also that we would experience much greater joy for the rest of the week. Is the reality any different? We know that when we die, heaven is before us. We know there will be no more sadness or suffering, and we claim to have confidence in that fact. Yet, we mostly live like the imperfections around us are permanent, and we will have to live with them forever. One of the bright spots about getting older is the experiential knowledge that the difficult times pass. Let's make a practice of living our lives in the reality of a perfect eternity, for there is abundant joy to be found right now if we have confidence in the perfection that awaits us.

Verses: Galatians 6:8, Psalm 16:11, 2 Corinthians 4:17

Prayer Topics: Big Picture, Confidence, Unity

Day 4

Eternal Priorities

If eternity is forever, and right now passes before I blink, I might have different priorities. If I lived my life in light of the truth of heaven, I would probably spend my time somewhat differently. I would probably have a different set of concerns, and even the concerns that did not change would be experienced in a different way. I would probably spend more time thinking of people instead of things, and character formation instead of tasks. I would probably see tasks as a way to form people, instead of seeing people and relationships as a way of getting tasks done. I would probably spend less time on entertainment, and more time on character formation. I might just see some of my sins in a more serious light, and my salvation as more valuable than I realized. I would probably get frustrated over different things, and find joy in different things as well. I might be more confident in Christ, and less confident in my own wisdom, seeing how my knowledge in passing things like how to build a computer or how to hunt squirrels is useless in the eternal, unlike Christ's incomparable wisdom in all heavenly things. I might trust his word more, and my instincts less, given this reality. I might try to show more love to others, and spend less time worrying about myself. I might try to make evangelism and the love of the lost more important in my scheduling, and time for myself a little less important. All these changes would not be a burden, because my priorities would have changed, making it desirable to spend my time differently. All these things might happen, if I lived my life in light of an eternity in heaven and experienced a change in priorities because of it. I wonder if that will happen?

Verses: 2 Corinthians 4:18, John 6:27, Romans 6:22

Prayer Topics: Spirit, Character, Everlasting Faithfulness

Day 5

Assume Victory

If you knew you would succeed, what would you do? If you knew you would win the lottery, would you buy a ticket? If you knew your business would take off and be wildly successful, would you start it? If you knew the parachute would open, would you jump? If you knew you would reach the destination, would you take the trip? If you knew you would win the battle, would you start the fight? Obviously, you don't know the outcome to these things ahead of time, so some things you risk, and others you don't. When the Israelites were camped outside of the promised land that God had promised to give them, they gathered to hear the report of the spies they had sent to scout out Canaan. One by one the spies gave their report, and issued their recommendations, and because 10 out of the twelve believed they could not succeed, they didn't try. They spent 40 years wandering around in the wilderness instead, as they all died out and a new generation arose, a generation that believed God's promise and succeeded because they had faith. We may not know if we will win the lottery, and we may not be sure if our business will succeed, but we know that we will have ultimate victory in Christ, and that knowledge will change how we live. If I am sure of eternal, limitless joy in heaven, which sin is really tempting now? What can it provide that eternal bliss cannot? What setback or struggle can I not endure now if eternal joy awaits? What suffering can I not endure now if endless happiness is my future? Do you live your life like victory is certain? What will you change? When will you start?

Verses: Deuteronomy 20:4, 1 Corinthians 15:57, Ephesians 6:13

Prayer Topics: Triumph, Glory, Strength