

Last week, we started a new series we're simply calling "Transitions." So I want to catch you up just a bit to what we covered last week, and then we'll get to work this week. I think last week was the heaviest of this series, this week is the middle happy ground and then next week will kind of bring it to a conclusion. I wanted to talk about the transition from this life into what is next. So last week, we covered what the Bible teaches and what the Christian perspective is on death. The bulk of our time was spent breaking down where death came from. We said last week that death came from the fall. There was no death in the world until sin was introduced into the cosmos. And when sin was introduced into the cosmos, death came with it. So we covered a whole slew of text, and we showed that God was not going to be content with letting death reign and rule over His creation. So God comes into the flesh in Jesus Christ. We got into that great text in the the book of Hebrews 2 where Jesus comes, puts on flesh and blood like us and He died a death in order to destroy death and free you and me from the slavery of the fear of death. And that in turn changed our perspective on what death is. So we talked last week that the Christian perspective on life and death is pretty simple. First, life is a gift. If you're breathing, if you're alive, you didn't do that. You're not owed that. You being alive is a gift from God. And then we covered the reality that when we die, our work, what God had created us for to do on earth is finished. We talked about the reality that there's no such thing as dying early. So that's human terminology. "He was taken before his time. . . She died too young." That's the way we see it in our limited scope and our limited range, but in reality, nobody dies before their supposed to. Everybody dies on time. So we talked at length about that, and then we talked about the reality that dying for us is a surrendering of our spirit into the hands of God. And then from there, I wanted to put a caveat on there, because I get nervous sometimes about how we hear, process and implement truth. I wanted to spend a great deal of time unpacking from the Scriptures that, although this is how we view death, the Bible gives a lot of permission and a lot of freedom to mourn when we lose those we loved, those who were close to us, those who we walked with closely or maybe those who we respect and know. When they die, we have the biblical freedom to cry tears, to feel that loss, to mourn what could have been. All of those we have been given permission to mourn in the Bible. And the crescendo of last week's message when it comes to death is that Jesus is going to promise us in John 8 that if we keep His word, we'll never see death. My speculation on that text is that something in the moments before our eyes close in death occurs so that the Spirit of God, Jesus or an angel comes and grabs us so that our eyes open to the new reality, what we're covering this week, before we actually taste or see death. So that's what we covered last week.

And that brings us to what I want to talk with you about this week, which is heaven. And then next week, we're going to talk new heavens and new earth. Just to be frank, I found that the idea of heaven and the new heavens and new earth really isn't understood well anywhere, but especially in the Bible belt where new theories have replaced biblical teaching on what happens when we die. But for now, let's look at 1 Corinthians 2:9. "But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"" Now he goes on in this text to talk about revealing some of those things to us in Christ. Not all of those things are revealed at this point, but there will be a day with unveiled face that we see all that God has prepared for those of us who love Him. Now if we could just stop for a second and sit in or rest in this text, here's what just happened. The eye cannot see, the ear cannot hear nor can it even enter into the mind of man the wonders that God has for those who love Him. Now I am a bit creative in thinking. I can think of a lot of amazing stuff. What this text just said is that, no matter how much I dreamed, no matter what I thought, no matter what I drew up, it has not even entered into my mind the wonders God has for those who love Him. Which means the things I could dream heaven and new earth to be will either be there or they'll be something even better than that. And that's tremendous in and of itself.

But I want to keep driving back to this reality that we only know in part now. So we can take what the Bible teaches us, but in the end heaven is quite the mysterious ideal. I just want to cover what we know. So I'll just start like this. This might sound really simple, but I think it needs to be covered. Here would be the first thing when it comes to heaven. It's an actual place. I know that might sound crazy to just be as simple as that, but what I have found is that most people, when it comes to heaven, immediately think ethereal, misty, not really a place. But in the Bible, heaven is a definite locale. It has a location. It's out there somewhere. It's a real place. So right now when I'm preaching this, Africa is a real place. Sudan is a real place. Guatemala is a real place. There are real people in a real place doing real things. But I have found that we don't think that way about heaven. We're not aware of it, much like most of us aren't aware of the realities in other parts of the world. Right now, while we're doing this, other people are working. While we're doing this, it is daytime where some people are. It's the middle of the night where other people are right now. There is definite location when it comes to heaven. And when it comes to biblical imagery, this vertical imagery dominates the description of heaven's location. So you don't get a lot of horizontal imagery. With being said, the easiest way I know to explain this is heaven is a place in the Bible that God looks down from. So the imagery you have in the Scriptures is that God looks down from it and man reaches up to it. So that imagery across the board is going to be found in the Scriptures. Let me just unpack a little bit of that. Psalm 80:14, "Turn again, O God of hosts! Look down from heaven, and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted, and for the son whom you made strong for yourself." So even this gets interesting, because God is in heaven, but heaven cannot contain God. So in the biblical imagery, heaven itself is actually God's throne so that even heaven cannot contain the majesty, might and power of God. But He's in heaven and He looks down upon His creation. In Psalm 102:19, "He looked down from his holy height; from heaven the LORD looked at the earth." Once again, you have this imagery of God being above earth, beyond earth. You also see in the Scriptures that Christ came down from heaven. John 6:33, "For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." So Jesus came down from heaven. This is that kind of vertical imagery that you're going to see. You're also going to see that same Christ coming down from heaven in John 6:38, 41 and 42. So specifically in the book of John, he's going to drive this idea that Christ descended from heaven. And then correspondingly, you're also going to see in the Scriptures quite a bit of man reaching up to heaven. So let me give you a couple of these. 2 Kings 2:1 "Now when the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven by a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal." So once again, how does Elijah get to heaven? He goes up to heaven. So heaven is up; earth is below. Luke 18:13, "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" So in the act of worship, whether that be an act of worship by contrition or repentance, he will not look up to heaven. Or if you see a man or woman lift their hands or face up to heaven, this a location. God is everywhere, but heaven is above and earth is below. And then just as Christ descended, we see in the Scriptures that Christ ascended after His resurrection. We see this in Acts 1. "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, . . ." Now if you can remember back far enough, the the Gospel of Luke was written to Theophilus. So the first book being mentioned here is the Gospel of Luke. "In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen." You're also going to see this idea of the ascension of Christ in verses 10-11 in Acts 1. So the point in this imagery is honestly pretty simple. It's both that heaven is remote from earth, that it is very separate from earth and it is a higher, more superior mode of existence. So you've got the earth and you've got heaven, and in the biblical imagery, heaven is by far better than existence on earth.

Now what we also find in the Bible when it comes to heaven is that there is a giant chasm between earth and heaven. If you'll remember the space race, the Russians actually beat the U.S. into space. When the cosmonaut got into orbit, he said, "I've come to heaven and there is no God." He kind of missed the point in that, but there is a greater point. There is a chasm between earth and heaven than just the sky. You see this in Luke 16 in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. Lazarus was a poor man who sat outside the gates and the dogs licked his wounds. He died the same time as the rich

man. And then Lazarus is in Abraham's bosom in heaven, and the rich man is in hell. The rich man is like, "If you could just take a drop of water and put it on my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames." Abraham's response is, "There is a great chasm between heaven and hell, and no one can cross it." No one can cross from here to there, and no one can cross from there to here. There's a great chasm that divides heaven from the rest of reality. And that reinforces this idea of heaven having its own space, it's own location.

Now the remoteness of heaven is pictured in the Scriptures often by this veiling technique. So let me give you some examples of that. 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." Do you see what's happening there? "I know in part now. I have partaken in Christ. I know Jesus. I know the joy that He brings in dark days. I know the joy that He brings to joyous days, which means He increases my joy in happy days and He stabilizes, strengthens and sustains in difficult days. And I know that in part." The Bible is saying there will be a day when you know that in full, you know that completely. I know Jesus right now. To me, this isn't a game. I know Him. I have a relationship with Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is not me obeying God's rules so that I can get heaven. I know Jesus, I know Him, I walk with Him, I hear Him through His Word and in glad submission of heart to where He would have my life play out, I know Him, but only in part. The promise is one day the veil will be removed and I'll see Him face to face. So there's this veiling technique that you see in the Scriptures. Let me give you a couple more. Acts 1:9, "And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight." It literally means that the cloud blocked their sight, as if to block how He actually got into heaven. So you have Jesus ascending and then this cloud blocks their view of Him getting into heaven. Revelation 4:1 says, "After this I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven! And the first voice, which I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." Most of the book of Revelation plays out in heaven. So the seals are opened in heaven, and the Lamb comes in in heaven. That's not happening on earth; it's happening in heaven, which is a greater reality, a definite location. And for John to be able to see in heaven, there's this door that opens up and there's this invitation of, "Come in, and I'll show you what's going to occur." Once again, this is imagery. I don't pretend to understand it; I just know it's there. There's this door that is opened, and John is invited into heaven. Again in Revelation 19:11, "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war." Once again, the heavens are opened. So you and I cannot see that locale. We will not stumble onto that locale. We will not get far enough into the reaches of space to get there. This goes on no matter where we get in regards to technology. We're not going to find a telescope that takes some pictures of heaven and shoots it back to us. It's not going to happen. It has to be opened in order for us to see. Sometimes the heavens are opened. Sometimes that's a door. What we do see though is that God is interested in, for whatever reason, veiling that to us right now. It is veiled.

And then since we know it's a definite location, we know that it's some how veiled and we only know in part, I want to try to answer the question, "What's it like?" Now, I started this sermon the way I did on purpose, because he says, "You're not going to get this. You're not going to be able to process all of this. This is different than you have categories for." But there are four types of imagery that we see when it comes to what heaven is like. The first type of imagery is just the imagery of value. When people talk about heaven in the Bible, they talk in imagery that says it is more valuable, more opulent, more worthy than you can fathom. So if you get into Ezekiel's breakdown of heaven in Ezekiel 1, Ezekiel is going to describe the heavenly level, the heavenly location as being burnished with bronze that sparkles. He's going to talk about gleaming chrysolite and sapphire. He's going to begin to talk about not the vegetative cycle of life and death we have here but rather everything is bejeweled. What do we know about Revelation? The sea is made of what? Crystal. The streets are made of gold. The appearance of God is in splendor like that of jasper. There are golden crowns and gates of pearl. In fact, it's not just the streets, but the Bible's going to tell us the entire city is made of gold. Do you see what's happening here? John is grasping, because no eye can see and no ear can hear, nor can it enter into the mind of man the wonders that God has for them. He's forced to take one of the most valuable things here on earth, what we

treasure, what we prize, what we esteem, and then he's going, "It's like water up there. That's like bricks and mortar up there. That's like asphalt here." How valuable is heaven that John's forced to take the most valuable things on earth and reduce them to gravel streets and water? So think Lake Grapevine, Lake Lewisville, Lake Ray Hubbard or any of the man-made lakes we have here in Dallas. Think of the ocean if you've ever been to the ocean. And John is saying here, "Crystal, diamonds and gold, they're like water there." So this first bit of imagery is just value.

And then the imagery in the Bible moves on from value to that of splendor. What you begin to find in the texts on heaven is not only this imagery about value, but there's all this talk about light. They're constantly talking about light. Ezekiel talks about fire and lightning. One of my favorite things about Dallas is that we have great thunderstorms. So I love watching them roll in. I'll sit in my garage, and when it starts to rain heavily, I love that. I wouldn't love Seattle rain where it's just mist for 300 days a year. But I like the "we could die in this" type of storms. That's awesome. So to watch thunderheads roll in and to watch lightning crackle across the sky, Ezekiel is going, "Man, this is like heaven. It's just powerful and awe inspiring. It's flame and lightning." And again, when you get into Revelation, John says after the door opened and he walked in, there wasn't a sun or a moon. You didn't need a sun or a moon anymore. God was our light. Once again, we can't even fathom this because the sun is what warms us. The sun is what makes life work on earth. If you don't have the sun, you don't have the earth. Our grass doesn't grow, the processes necessary for life to be sustained on earth are dependent on the sun. But that's not so in heaven. We don't need those things. Warmth, the processes of life are not dictated by chemical reactions predicated upon the sun, but just God Himself. And that's the splendor of heaven.

And then you also have a purity of existence in heaven that's vastly superior to life on earth. I'll give you some examples of this. The purity of existence in heaven and the spiritual perfection of those who are enrolled in heaven is expressed in a lot of different types of imagery. We are in washed robes, we are in white garments, we are in clothing of fine linen, bright and pure and we are chaste people who are spotless. So one of the splendors of heaven is that the dirtiness of this world (and I don't mean dirt), the foul side of the fallenness of the world doesn't exist in the splendor of heaven. It is washed; it is spotless. And he even references you. You are spotless. You are completely clean. Remember what we said last week. Those things we wrestle with, those things that we toil with and those things we fight against, one day we will not war against. You will not always have to take every thought captive unto Christ. One day, the energy expended to do that will no longer be required to do that. In fact, Augustine wrote a book called *The City of God*. In the middle of that book, he starts to talk about some of the functions of our bodies in heaven. The liver that has a purpose of filtering out the blood to make us healthy will no longer need to filter out that blood. Because that blood will not be the impure blood, the broken, fallen blood that now runs through our veins. So some of you are like, "Wait a minute. Will we have a body in heaven?" I'm starting to get into next week, so we'll just leave you dangling there. So we are seen as spotless. And we receive these gifts in heaven. Once again, this is imagery of splendor and I don't pretend to understand it. I just know it's there. Daniel 12:3 says we'll be like stars for ever and ever. You want to talk about splendor? Even in how we're viewed in heaven according to men on earth, not only is heaven this splendid environment where the most expensive and sought after things on earth here are building materials there, but even we ourselves shine like the stars. In Revelation, you've got crazy gifts that are thrown onto the redeemed. We receive the morning star (Revelation 2:28). We receive a white stone with the secret name written on it (Revelation 2:17). I've thought a lot about some of these things. Like what is that? I'm wondering if that's not a new name. God loves giving new names. You have Saul who turned into Paul. God loves to give new names. "Hey, that's a former name. Let Me give you a new name." But we get a steadfast stone with a secret name written on it. We get to drink from the fountain of life (Revelation 21:6). Those who enter into heaven will become pillars in the temple of God. Now what's being described, in particularly Revelation 21 and Ezekiel 1, is an opulence that contrasts starkly with Genesis 1. So if we go back to Genesis 1, what do we have? You've got the garden. The garden is in order, and you've got the command, "Fill the earth and subdue it." But the garden is simple. And now at the end, it's opulent, it's built out and it's spectacular. The entire thing is golden, the sea is crystal and God reigns and rules there in such a way that it pours out of there. It's beyond our comprehension and it stands in stark

contrast to how it began as an evidence of what God has accomplished through it all. And it will be on that day and the day after that every tear here begins to not only make sense but show us that our grief here was somewhat unfounded.

Now, the next type of imagery is mystery. Let me be straight, there is some weird stuff in Ezekiel 1. I don't know if you've read it, but I had nightmares after I studied it. I broke down the text and woke up screaming. Let me walk through some of this. Let's just look at Ezekiel 1. We're going to pick it up in verse 4. He's going to talk about the fact that the heavens were opened and he saw a vision of God. "As I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud, with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were gleaming metal. And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures." So we're talking about heaven here. So you've got your lightning and fire burning, and now he's going to start describing these creatures that were there. "And this was their appearance: they had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot." Now I don't know how you can say they "had the likeness of human" but had four faces, wings and the feet of a calf. It seems to me that those two are diametrically opposed. "He was human, but he had four faces." Then that's not human! "He was human, but he had cow's legs." Well that's not human. And that's the least weird creature we're going to read about here. "Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot. And they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings on their four sides they had human hands. And the four had their faces and their wings thus: their wings touched one another. Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle. Such were their faces. And their wings were spread out above. Each creature had two wings, each of which touched the wing of another, while two covered their bodies. And each went straight forward." Now this is interesting because this is very similar to Isaiah 6, the vision Isaiah has of the throne room of God. He describes creatures that are very similar to this. We could keep going here. There are more creatures described. There's actually this wheel thing and the rims of the wheel are filled with eyes and the Spirit moves in and weaves in and out among the wheel. And as the wheel moves, the rims don't and the eyes are always open. There is some scary stuff in Ezekiel 1. And when it comes to the imagery of heaven, it's going to stay online that it is a mystery. So what we know there just from the text is there are mysterious creatures there that aren't here. And maybe your Labradoodle is going to be there; maybe it won't. But I'm telling you now that there are creatures unlike anything we have here that Ezekiel can just go, "Man, I don't know. It had the face of an eagle, but its legs were like that of a cow. He had a human face and some hands." So there's this mystery imagery in the Scriptures. And we could go through Revelation here too. You've got these six wings full of eyes in the back and front. How great would that be as a parent if God would give us some of that right now, wings and being able to see in front and behind you. We'd just be busting fools all the time.

And this last bit of imagery that the Bible unpacks is strong images of healing and comfort. The predominant images of heaven for the saints are it's a place of healing, comfort and protection. Let me read some of these to you. Half of the equation is that the fall is canceled out. So all the results of the fall are canceled out and they're simply not there. Revelation 7:16 says there's not going to be any more hunger, thirst or no more scorching heat in Dallas. In Revelation 7:17 and Revelation 21:4, God will wipe away the tears from our eyes. Death, mourning and pain will vanish, for Revelation 21:4 says, "for the former things have passed away." Death, mourning and pain go away because they are former things, which means from heaven on into what's next, death, pain, mourning and loss are a thing of the past. They are a former thing and they will no longer exist. If you have ever endured a difficult season of life and went into greener pastures, one of the things that can occur is you may have to battle fear that those days might come back. I have to get scanned every other month, and I feel good and I feel strong (when they're not trying to poison me.) And people tell me all the time that I look good, but in reality, I looked great when I had that seizure. I was in the best shape of my life, I had unbelievable energy and I was blowing and going with a golf ball sized tumor in my right frontal lobe. So I can feel great, but that's no indication of what's going on in my head. The only thing that shows that is MRIs, and

even that can only show a couple months at a time. So I always want to be very honest with this journey that we're on. There are times when I have a scan the next day, is start getting real anxious. Every time I get a headache, I have to wade through the "Oh no." So when the Spring comes and that pollen hits the air and I get a sinus headache, I'm not thinking, "These are allergies." I'm thinking, "Uh oh. I wonder if this is it. Is this it?" And I want to be straight with you. If it's it, I think I'm at peace with that. But surely you know me after ten years. I just want to know and then let's go. So the former things won't be like that in heaven. They'll just be gone. Death, mourning, loss and pain will be dead, and there will be no resurrection for them. They will be dead and gone. You see this imagery throughout the Scriptures. As a part of this exclusion of the implications of the fall in heaven, there's no fear. Nobody is going to break in and steal anything; nobody is going to hurt you. And the Bible is going to let us know that nothing unclean shall ever enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood (Revelation 21:27). So Revelation is going to tell us that the doors of heaven being always open are not that people just get to continually come in, but that there's no need to shut the gate, lift up the drawbridge and have a moat, because there's nothing coming to destroy you. There's nothing coming to get you. We are protected and covered. Those days are gone. There is nothing more to fear. There will be no murder, and there will be no abductions. That part of existence is over, is done, is through. And that's why Revelations says we don't shut the gate. There's no one who will lay siege to the city. Those days are over. They are former.

And so what's our response to this? Here's what we see in the Scriptures about mankind's response to heaven once he or she is there. The joys of heaven's inhabitants are pictured with a ton of scenes of praise in the book of Revelation. So we are viewed as white robed conquerors waving palm branches (Revelation 7:9). My favorite is we are guests at a wedding supper. I don't know if you've ever been to a lights out wedding, and I'm not even talking about money. It's just where you knew everybody, everybody was together and everybody loved that it was the two of you. And your friends co-mingled and your family co-mingled. I've only been to about three or four like that. It's almost like you don't want it to end. You're eating food, you're laughing, you're catching up and there's all this joy. The one I'm thinking of in particular, we just danced until we were sweaty. It was just spectacular. And He's saying, "Yeah, heaven's like that. It's being surrounded by those you love in this great celebration of something everybody's in on, everybody's rejoicing in and everybody's celebrating." He uses this idea of a banquet feast over and over again. Jesus' parables about heaven are going to constantly compare heaven to a banquet.

So everything we experience that is good, right and beautiful is just the fringes of God's joy. The things that men and women pursue on earth for joy and comfort are just a shadow of what awaits in heaven. And we love us comfort, specifically in the suburbs. Everything is built around comfort in the suburbs. Everything is close, everything is convenient and you can go through the drive-thru at almost anything. Everything is built around your kids. It's hard to teach your kids that they're not God in the suburbs. Because everything else is saying, "Oh no, it's you. You are. In fact, we're going to entertain you." We as parents don't even know how to function if that's not there. "What do you mean you don't have any crayons? What am I supposed to do with this kid?" We don't know. We've been trained by our location that it's the job of businesses to entertain them while we do what we do. And if not, you have your phone. So we seek comfort here. That's a joy to us. When we're comfortable, when we're rested, that's a joy to us. Our culture is absolutely preoccupied by the joys of physical intimacy. And using the word "intimacy" may be a little far fetched in our culture. We love the idea of sex if not sex itself in our culture. But Job is going to start talking about how all those things are just the fringes of His power and the fringes of His creative ability. So when Jesus says, "Enter into the joy of your Master," the implication is you haven't entered into the joy of your Master yet. "You've been at the fringes of it. Now come on in. Come in fully. You've smelled it; now taste it." That's unbelievable. It makes you kind of go, "Come on, life. Speed up a bit." So our response is one of joy. Hebrews 12:22 pictures the believers as having come into the city of the Living God with innumerable angels for a feast. So now you've got an intermingling of the saints and the angels all with the same purpose of glorifying God. Now this is a sharp contrast to how men act around angels before heaven. John, who wrote the book of Revelation, is far holier than you are. He wrote Scripture; you read it. Can we agree? He sees an angel and

he falls on the ground like a dead man. But not in heaven. In heaven, we eat together. In heaven, we enter into the feast rejoicing together. According to the Bible, what they have been gazing into and trying to figure out, they now participate in in heaven. Our response is joy, unbridled, infinite, ever-increasing joy.

And then we have satisfaction. The imagery of mankind's engagement of heaven is not only joy, but satisfaction. We have two pictures of this in the book of Revelation. One in chapter 7 and one in chapter 22. In Revelation 7, a Shepherd leads us to springs of living water. And then in Revelation 22, the Bible talks about the Tree of Life with its twelve kinds of fruit that yields its fruit monthly. Whereas in our understanding, in a fallen world, before we figured out how to genetically modify food, fruits were actually produced in seasons. So there were seasons in which there were strawberries, and during that season you just gorged on them. And you might have even preserved some of them by drying, freezing or canning them so that they'd outlast the season. So when he's writing here that the fruit yielded every month, he's saying that you never had to wait for what you desired. It was there. We are satisfied. And I'll tell you why that's such good news. Because here we're always hitting the ceiling. We're never satisfied for long. Just give it enough time and you will grow bored with it, no matter what it is. So our response is joy and satisfaction.

Now let me just wrap up this way. We said last week that we'll never see death. So if we could just do a bit of a time line here, you and I begin to struggle to breathe. Maybe we're in the hospital. Maybe we were in an accident. Or maybe it was instant, and in that instant before we die, in that moment before our eyes close unto death, the Spirit, Jesus or some angelic representation of God grabs us and pulls us into this reality. And the transition from this life unto heaven is instant and beautiful. And there is some debate about that. There are some people who are like, "No, you kind of sleep until you go." But here's why I would argue against that. One, in Jesus' parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom (heaven) immediately. Now the second one, Jesus in His conversation with the thief on the cross. When would he be in paradise with Him? Today. "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." He didn't say, "Um look, it's going to be like you go to bed at night. You're going to go to sleep and you're going to wake up in 200-300 years. It will seem like an instant to you, but in 200-300 years, you and I are going to be in paradise." That's not what He said. He said, "Today." Like right now. And then we read it last week. "Into Your hands I commit My spirit," and He breathes His last and He's gone. Where? Into heaven. And we're going to walk into heaven.

Now here's how I want you to apply these things that we've talked about. According to the Scriptures, right now, not when you die, you are a citizen of heaven. You are not first and foremost an American. You are not first and foremost a Texan. You are not first and foremost whatever your family name is. Your citizenship is in heaven. You are loyal to that kingdom. You are after that kingdom. On that day when we are ushered from this reality into ultimate reality, there will be no sacrifice that we paid here that will not seem worth it on that day. There will be no amount of toil here now that will not seem worth it on that day. Obedience today, as difficult as it may seem, will not seem excessive on this day. If anything, it will feel unbelievably worth it. Your joy will be increased because the grace of God sustained you in being obedient when everything in you wanted to leave, everything in you wanted to give up, everything in you wanted to make war and everything in you wanted to rebel. On this day, there will be a gratitude that you persevered, you submitted your heart to the Holy Spirit and you followed the commands of God made evident in the Scriptures. The writer of Hebrews says that you and I should desire a better country. We should want this home. We should long for and yearn for it and see this life for what it is, a period between birth and the fulfillment of what we were created for. So there's no amount of pain here, there's no amount of loss here and there's no amount of struggle here. In the end, what comes next is infinitely better than this. This is why Paul is so crazy, because he gets this. Paul, whose sufferings are immense, is going to say, "I don't figure that the sufferings of this present day (which include stoning, some sort of demonic activity in his life that he can't shake, beatings, being hated by those in the church, hated by those outside of the church, knowing what it's like to spend a day and night in the open sea, being shipwrecked twice only to get on an island and get attacked by a snake, being rejected by his countrymen, being burdened for churches that just didn't seem to get it, having the

skin ripped off his back over and over again) isn't even worthy to be compared to the future glory I have waiting for me. I don't even compare it. All of this is worth it." Which is why, in the end, he goes, "My race is run. I did it. I made it." O that you might be the type of man or woman who, with open hands and ferocity of spirit chases the things of God until your race is over and you can say with our brother Paul as you enter into the joy of your Master, "I've run the race. I've kept the faith." Where's your citizenship? How do you view your life? Citizenship is about loyalty, isn't it? You are loyal to the United States of America. You see yourself as that. It doesn't matter what side of the aisle you're on, what type of politics you have, even those positions are about your perception of what's best for the United States. But the Scriptures are saying, "No, that's a secondary citizenship." Now be a good patriot, be a good countryman, but in the end your citizenship belongs to heaven. That's your home. That's why Paul calls this place "a tent" in the book of Corinthians. "This earthly dwelling, this tent." He's saying, "This life is camping. Home is in the future." O that you would get this, that you would let this settle on you, that you would let this fill you with hope and that you would look forward to that day where you get to give up the spirit, you get to be done with your work and you give back the gift that was given to you.

Let's pray. "Father, I thank You for these men and women. We love You. I pray that You would help us get and understand where our citizenship lies. And I pray that we might be about, for and after Your kingdom. So help us repent where we fear, and help us understand where our citizenship lies. I know that for some of us, our loyalty does not lie with You. We're good church folk and we're good people, but our loyalty does not lie with You. We do not serve You, we do not follow You, we do not make much of you, we have not tried to strengthen the church, we have not tried to grow in our knowledge and understanding of You and we have not tried to submit to what You have commanded of us. So forgive us, convict us and draw us near to Yourself. It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."