

“What We Will Be”

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

When I was a kid, one of the most vexing questions I faced was, “What are you going to be when you grow up?” It was a question that adults always seemed to ask and it was one that I never wanted to answer. Sure, there were a few years when I was going to be a professional football or baseball player, but as time went by, and reality overtook those dreams, the question remained: “What are you going to be when you grow up?” It was something that I simply didn’t want to think about. I was more concerned with the things that were happening in the present – the trivial details of my nice and tidy, private little world – and the thought of what I would someday be was an uncomfortable and difficult concept for me to grasp.

The search for vocational identity is one of life’s most challenging questions. It ranks right up there with where you will live or who you will marry, and the question, “What are you going to be?” is one we all have to wrestle with. But today, as we listen to God’s Word, our attention turns to an even more important topic. Today, we consider the issue of eternal identity and the question, “*What are you going to be?*” takes on a far deeper meaning than a simple inquiry about the profession you will pursue or the city in which you will live. Today’s question is ultimate. In fact, there is no more important question. What are you going to be? What comes next? What will happen to you when you die? When I take my last breath and this life ends...*what am I going to be?*

This is a question that most of us avoid in daily conversation, but it’s something we’ve all thought about. In fact, it’s probably a question that keeps us up at night and yet the answer to this question is something that even Christians struggle to express. We talk about church things and we use Biblical language of prayer and praise, but when it comes to *what we will be*, we suddenly clam up. We draw back. We look away and politely wait for the next topic to come up. Today, we need to recognize that this silence about our eternal future isn’t helpful and it’s definitely not what God wants.

Throughout Scripture, God calls us to think and speak and sing precisely about *what we will be*. Peter said, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). Paul wrote, “I do not want you to be ignorant brothers about those who have fallen asleep or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Jesus said, “In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2-3). The fact is that Scripture drips with imagery of *what we will be* and the language of heaven is one of the most prominent features of God’s Word. And yet we don’t live in the light of heaven.

Paul said, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ (then) we are to be pitied more than all men” (1 Corinthians 15:19). *This life is not the goal...*but that’s how we live! We go through life with our eyes down, distracted by the immediate needs in front of us, consumed with the urgent details of the present, and we rarely give thought to the eternal context in which God has placed us. Yet the ultimate question remains, “*What are you going to be?*”

One of the reasons we don’t like to think about this future-focused, eternal question is because the answer has profound implications for the way we live today. In a sermon entitled, “The Weight of Glory” C.S. Lewis wrote, “All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to (heaven or to hell)...It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities...that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”

These chilling words tell us that everything we do in this life has eternal implications. The picture of our lives is painted on the canvas of eternity and each day we are called to bear this “weight of glory.” And when you honestly think about your life in these terms, it completely destroys the nice and tidy, private little world you’ve created. It means that everyone you know is on a journey to eternity – everyone you see is going either to heaven or to hell. The families from our neighborhood that came to “Trunk or Treat” last Monday night are on that journey. The people you work with each day are on that journey. The neighbor you greet on your way to the mailbox is on that journey. The person sitting next to you right now is on that journey.

As Lewis said, you and I have never met a mere mortal and that can be a terrifying thought because, the truth is, we have all lived our lives too much in this world. We have all disregarded or neglected our neighbors; religiously minding our own business; turning our eyes from the lives and needs of others. Not only that, but we have also ignored our own need to repent; we have resigned ourselves to live in broken relationships; we have failed to reconcile with our brother. These sins have eternal implications and they simply cannot be ignored. One of the reasons that I dodged the question about what I wanted to be when I was a kid, was because my heart was too much in the present and a genuine answer would’ve required to me to change. Looking to the future requires us to deal with the present and that is not easy; yet living only for today is one of the greatest temptations we face because it allows us to remain in our sin...to put off reconciliation...to ignore eternity.

Today, John reminds us that this is *not* our identity! “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! *And that is what we are!* Dear friends, *now* we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:1-2).

These words pull us out of the present and they place our lives into an eternal context. Today, in these words, God tells us who we are now and today, in these words, God tells us who we will be! When we recognize the eternal journey we are on and the future that we have been given in Christ, the present struggles of this life are put into their proper place. When we recognize the eternal journey we are on we can speak the language of heaven. We can lift our eyes upward. We can repent for our past failings and confess our present sins and we can receive our identity as children of God, forgiven and freed to be like Him!

I had good friend in high school who always wanted to be a pilot and he talked about it all the time. As much as I *avoided* discussing the future, Shawn spoke about it constantly. He’d tell me where he was going to school to study aviation, he took classes that would get him ready for his college program and not a day went by when he didn’t talk about what he was going to be. After high school, I moved away and Shawn and I lost touch until last year when, completely out of the blue, I opened my email and there was a note Shawn. He wrote, “I have thought about you frequently and asked some of our old friends if they had any information on you, but nobody seemed to know much. So I got on the internet and did a little digging and when I saw your picture on the church web page it was like looking at you in 1987. I fly for United Airlines and I had heard that you were in Ft. Wayne, but never knew for sure. One of our arrival corridors into O’Hare goes right over the top of Ft. Wayne. I can’t tell you how many times I have flown over and looked out my window wondering if you were down there and how you were.”

My friend lived his life with a hope for the future that defined who he was and what he did each day. And that is exactly what God has called us to in Christ. Today as we recognize the faithful departed, we don’t have to wonder where they are. Today, we speak the language of heaven and as we commemorate their passing into glory we also proclaim *what we will be!* Today, we are purified with the hope of an eternity with Christ and with all who have gone before us. This Gospel message not only purifies us; it prepares us to live our present lives as God’s children knowing exactly what we are going to be. Amen.

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