

LESSON 9

PART 2: THE LAST THINGS AND MISSIONS

Introduction

Viktor Frankl, an Austrian psychiatrist, found himself in the terrible struggle for survival in one of Hitler's death camps. He soon realized that his main battle was to be with hopelessness. He could win this battle only by finding the meaning, the purpose, the goal of life. As his body weakened from starvation and fellow prisoners lost hope and died or committed suicide, he came to the crossroads in his own life—either he found a purpose or died.

Another time we were at work in a trench. The dawn was gray around us; gray was the sky above; gray the snow in the pale light of the dawn; gray the rags in which my fellow prisoners were clad.¹

Frankl feels that "perhaps I was struggling to find the *reason* for my sufferings, my slow dying."² As he sees the purpose, he has reason for living.

In a last violent protest against the hopelessness of imminent death, I sensed my spirit piercing through the enveloping gloom. I felt it transcend that hopeless, meaningless world, and from somewhere I heard a victorious "Yes. . . ."³

The Christian in today's world must have a firm grip on eternity to allow him to walk hopefully and confidently in time.

God's plan for eternity helps clarify His plan for the present. "History is moving, under God's sovereignty, to an end, to a climax."⁴ Missions demands the concern of the people of God because God has set the end of history and has chosen His people to be His instruments of redemption during history. They are to be used to turn men and women to Christ and, hence, prepare them for eternity. Stagg undergirds this same point of view. "In the eschatological view God is seen to be at the beginning of history, above it yet within it, and moving history toward its goal."⁵ What Christians do about missions is so infinitely important because the eternal destinies of men hang on their faithfulness to God's appointed task.

Viktor Frankl found that man's main battle is with h _____ and that he can win this battle only by finding the m _____, the p _____, and the g _____ of life.

(hopelessness, meaning, purpose, goal)

The Christian of today must have a firm grip on eternity to allow him to walk h _____ and c _____ in time.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Missions demands the concern of the people of God because God has set the end of h _____ and has chosen His p _____ to be His i _____ of r _____ during history.

(history, people, instruments, redemption)

¹ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Meaning* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1959, 1963), p. 63.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ T. Watson Street, *On the Growing Edge of the Church* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965), p. 114.

⁵ Frank Stagg, *New Testament Theology*, p. 306.

Although the Bible uses many figures of speech and sincere Christians differ on details of eternity, the Scriptures clearly teach that eternity entails the ultimate "either-or" situation. Man is saved or he is lost. He is to be with God or to be separated from God. John 3:36 presents the division categorically—each person is destined presently for heaven or hell.

The Call for Rescue

Hell is the place and the state of the unredeemed. It is both the abode and the experience of the unredeemed. It "is the negation or absence in the soul of all that is meant by heaven. . . . Hell is the fulfillment of selfishness."⁶ Hell is the logical consequence of sin and rebellion against a holy God, multiplied by infinity.

The most terrible feature concerning hell is that it represents eternal separation from God (Matt. 25:41). Man, who was made for fellowship with God, rebelled and was excluded from the One who is source of all good. That complete absence of goodness, of compassion, of love, of all that is good would in itself create hell. Hell, according to the Scriptures, is a place of suffering (Mark 9:48). To say that the fires can scarcely be literal because they burn in darkness and that the worm lives in them is to beg the question. Revelation speaks much in figurative language, but the Bible employs figurative or symbolical language to express a reality that is even more than can be expressed in simple description. The character and reasons for a person's going to hell are clearly described in Revelation 21:8.

The word most correctly translated hell is Gehenna. Word studies and lexicons tell us that the original use of the expression was for the Valley of Hinnom—a place used by the Jews as a burning garbage and refuse heap.

Gehenna, with its decaying matter and its continually burning fire, held great repugnance for the Jews because of their concept of purity. This repugnant attitude enabled Jesus to give a perfect illustration of hell. He said that the destiny of the unredeemed is like the Valley of Hinnom. Aside from the terribleness of the punishment described for the unredeemed, one of the most haunting truths about hell is the endlessness of future punishment.

The everlasting nature of hell appears clearly in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). Although some might object to the use of a parable as a source of doctrine, we respond that, while the parables are not to be pressed for the details of an allegory, they certainly do not teach untruths. Intimations of universalism

⁶ Edgar Young Mullins, *The Christian Religion in its Doctrinal Expression* (Philadelphia: The Judson Press, 1917), p. 488.

Eternity entails the ultimate "either-or":

1. Man is _____ or _____.
2. He is to be with God in _____
or separated from God in _____.

(1. saved, lost; 2. heaven, hell)

*Hell is the logical consequence of _____
and _____ against a Holy God.*

(sin, rebellion)

*Hell is separation from _____, and it is
a place of _____.*

(God, suffering)

The punishment in hell is to be _____.

(endless)

or of a second chance come from a philosophical point of view, but not from a clear exposition of the Scriptures.

The fact that people we know, or know of, may be eternally damned cannot fail to affect the Christian conscience and our sense of responsibility to carry the news of redemption to these people. The figure of the watchman in Ezekiel 33 lays the burden of herald and watchman upon the Christian.

Summers points out the significance of the doctrine for missions. He says,

How tremendous is the challenge to those entrusted with the responsibility of presenting to man the full truth of the significance of life, destiny, sin, and salvation. This has been historically and must ever be a part of the imperative of Christian missions. . . .⁷

Heaven: The Call of Promise

The Scriptures do not present all of the details necessary to satisfy human curiosity about the final destiny either of the redeemed or of the unredeemed. Rather, they set forth enough basic principles to guide men in their spiritual and moral lives now and to secure their destiny in the life hereafter.

Heaven "may be gathered up in the two ideas of environment and character, the outward and the inward aspects."⁸ The Hebrew word for "heavens", or "heaved-up things," appears fairly frequently in the Old Testament. Generally it means that which is beyond the earth. In that sense "heavens and earth" (Gen. 1:1) refer to the totality of God's universe. There are times when the word heavens refers to the place of God's dwelling. The Psalmist, in particular, uses heavens in this sense (Pss. 2:4; 103:19; 123:1).

Among the prophets, Isaiah makes the most use of the term and gives promise of the new heavens (Isa. 65:17).

The writers of the New Testament use the term heaven both in the singular and in the plural. Heavens also is used to mean that which is above and beyond the earth. But it comes to mean heaven as the dwelling place of God and the future home of the believer. The Spirit of God descends from heaven (Mark 1:10). Stephen looks into heaven and sees the Son of Man (Acts 7:56). Heaven is the throne of God and His ruling place (Heb. 8:1).

Peter, in his second letter, gives some thought-provoking knowledge about heaven. He states that the present world as we know it, including heavens and earth, will be dissolved for the creation of a new heaven and earth (2 Pet. 3:5, 7, 13). Acquaintance with atomic energy

The fact of hell should call Christians to a sense of responsibility to carry the news of _____ to those who are lost.

(redemption)

The Bible teachings on heaven give us enough basic principles to guide us in our s _____ and m _____ lives now and to secure our d _____ in the life hereafter.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Heaven, or heavens, refers to--

- 1. the dwelling _____ of God*
- 2. the future _____ of the believer*
- 3. the place from which the Spirit of _____ descends*
- 4. where Stephen saw the Son of _____*
- 5. the _____ of God*

(Compare your answers with the text.)

⁷ Ray Summers, *The Life Beyond* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1959), p. 196.

⁸ Mullins, *Doctrinal Expression*, p. 483.

does not make this possibility seem as far-fetched as it once did.

Revelation gives us a brief glimpse into eternity with its new heaven and new earth. While the details are not sufficient to satisfy the curiosity of the person of a speculative bent, they do give us clear indications both of the nature and of the certainty of heaven.

The Certainty and Nature of Heaven

The Bible neither debates nor explains the everlasting reward of the redeemed; it simply states the fact and leaves it there. But the promise we have is enough to make us know that God's heaven is unmistakably wonderful.

Heaven is a place of God's presence. It means freedom from sin, injustice, and suffering. Death will be abolished from heaven (1 Cor. 15:26). Heaven will be a place of constant activity where the sons of God can praise and serve Him. In the two final chapters of Revelation, John describes heaven as a tabernacle, a city, and a garden. These descriptions are most significant. As a tabernacle (Rev. 21:1-8), heaven is the place where man perfectly and continually meets God. For brief moments in the desert tabernacle, the people of Israel beheld the blinding glory of God. At last they would have immediate access to Him through faith.

In spite of our knowledge of the slums, the ghettos, and the danger that lies there, there is no sight quite so beautiful as a great city by night from the air. The general glow stands out in the distance. As the plane approaches, one can distinguish the great buildings, the traced-out freeways, and the flashing fountains. The beauty, the splendour of it, although illusory, is arrestingly lovely. Is it any wonder that the Bible describes heaven as a city, whose Builder and Maker is God?

Heaven is called a city. It is a permanent city, whose Builder and Ruler is God. What a message this symbol must have carried for the Jews! They knew then, as they know today, what it was to be exiles, captives, and wanderers. No more would they fear the desert of sin but would be safe within the beautiful walls of the city, where the gates are pearls and the Gatekeeper is God. No more would they hear the tramp of foreign soldiers within their streets and see their capital destroyed. They would be at rest in God's city.⁹

Heaven is also seen as a garden. Adam and Eve lost the first garden with its beauty, its communion with God, and its abundance. The second garden is perfect, with no possibility of becoming sin-stained. The tree of life stands

Revelation tells of the nature and _____ of heaven.

(certainty)

John describes heaven as a t _____, a c _____, and a g _____.

(Compare your answers with the text.)

Heaven is a permanent _____, whose _____ and _____ is God.

(city, Builder, Ruler)

⁹ See Summers, *The Life Beyond*, pp. 202-207.

in its midst, and God is the light of it. Heaven as a garden is treated in Revelation 22:1-5. Between the two gardens stands the Garden of Gethsemane, where Christ paid the price that the ruined Eden might become the Eternal Garden of God.¹⁰

The Candidates for Heaven

Jesus often preached on the Kingdom of Heaven and gave its entrance requirements. The thief on the cross placed trust in Christ and received Christ's promise to be with Him that day in paradise (Luke 23:43). On the other hand, unbelief expressed in a life is the reason for exclusion from heaven (Rev. 21:8). This rejection or rebellion expresses itself in a certain type of action (Matt. 25:41-46). Entrance into heaven depends on one's relation to Christ (John 14:6).

Heaven is not an isolated doctrine but a part of God's total scheme for the universe. Mullins says,

Now it is clear . . . that God's working in history and grace is purposive. It moves toward a goal. It is the teleology or purposiveness of history and of Christian experience which raises the questions about the last things. . . . So also we can fully understand the kingdom of God only in its outcome. The Scripture . . . has given us a satisfying forecast of the future in its main outlines.¹¹

The concepts of both hell and heaven are pregnant with the thought that this is a moral universe and that God will punish wrong and reward right. Heaven gives the promise of victory to the Christian. It means that God rules in time and eternity. Street eloquently points out that the Christian as he labours in Christ's mission is not struggling to win the victory. He is not called on to rescue a failing cause. He is under God's direction to proclaim the Gospel to the nations. God is in charge of the success of the operation.

Our task is not frantically to rush about gathering wood for the fire in the fear that the fire will go out. The fire belongs to Him and He will keep it going. Our job is to stay close to the flame.¹²

Heaven gives that sort of security. The hope of heaven, rather than cutting the Church's nerve of action, inspires the people to missions with the knowledge that they move steadily towards a heavenly home. In this world they are strangers and pilgrims, but they are also citizens of heaven (Eph. 2:19). As celestial citizens they are to be faithful ambassadors for their Lord in the present time (2 Cor. 5:19-20).

List the three gardens mentioned in the Bible

(Compare your answers with the text.)

The candidates for heaven are those who put their trust in _____ as their Lord and Saviour.

(Jesus Christ)

Because the concepts of heaven and hell tell us that God will punish _____ and reward _____, the Christian is under God's directive to _____ the Gospel to the nations.

(wrong, right, proclaim)

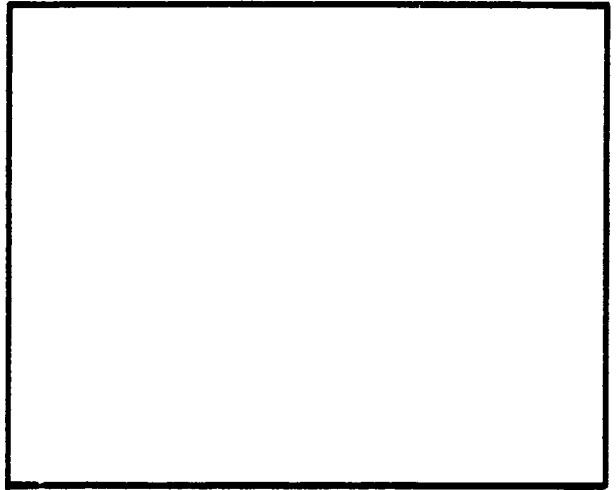
¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹¹ Mullins, *Doctrinal Expression*, p. 440.

¹² Street, *Growing Edge of the Church*, p. 119.

As the Christian drinks at the well of the promises of God, he is refreshed. He goes “on his way with lifted head” to share with a troubled and suffering world—both his neighbours and beyond—the message that this imperfect world is not the end of the story. Those unsolved, knotty problems of the suffering of the just, the misfortune of the innocent, the prosperity of the wicked, and the senseless destruction of the noblest of human efforts, all call for heaven. The Christian finds joy, release, and satisfaction in the proclamation of the divine answer to the human longing.

The Christian’s desire for sharing the good news about eternity, when stretched to world dimensions, becomes his powerful impulse to world missions.



Home Study Exercise

Basic activity (Levels 1, 2, and 3)

After reading the study guide text, answer the following questions.

1. What did Viktor Frankl find out about the nature of men through his suffering? _____

2. How does this need for purpose relate to the Christian? _____

3. How does the consummation of history relate to the Christian’s task? _____

4. What are the two possible destinies of men in eternity? _____

5. What does the reality of hell say concerning future punishment? _____

6. How does hell call us to the rescue of the lost? _____

7. What light do Bible teachings on heaven give us for daily living? _____

8. List figures of speech the Bible uses to describe heaven. _____

9. What three gardens does the Bible mention? _____

10. Who are the candidates for heaven? _____

11. How does heaven provide an impulse for sharing the Gospel? _____

Supplementary activity (Levels 2 and 3)

Read pages 68-86 in *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* by Peter Wagner and answer the following questions.

1. Explain the statement, "Missionary strategy is people."
2. Where are the three key lists of gifts in the New Testament?
3. For what spiritual gifts are you responsible?
4. How do the gifts of the Spirit relate to the fruit of the Spirit?
5. Describe the missionary gift.

Advanced activity (Level 3)

Read pages 68-90 in *Frontiers in Missionary Strategy* and answer the following questions.

1. What are the nature and the purpose of spiritual gifts?
2. Give the gist of the author's concept of the missionary gift.
3. Define the M1, M2, and M3 missionary.
4. Do you think this concept is valid?
5. What is the meaning of culture? Of sub-culture?
6. How is a knowledge of a culture important in sharing a witness?

Seminar Discussion

1. What was the central purpose in the life of Jesus?
2. What should be the central purpose of a Christian?
3. How does our concept of eternity affect the way we live in time?
4. Discuss the Bible's use of Gehenna.