

## GOD'S PLAN FOR US IS TRANSFORMATION

Imagine a world where there is no **anger**—ever! Everyone gets along...all the time...and there is no danger of anyone “goofing up” and ruining it!

It is also a place where there is no **bitterness**. No one—ever—has even **one** feeling of pent-up anger because of how they were betrayed or treated unfairly in the past.

It's a place where there is no **covetousness**. Everyone is **content** with what they have...all the time...and forever! No one will ever—even once—**want** what you have. And you will have **no desire** for what someone else has.

There will be no **disappointment**...or discouragement...or despair—in you or in anyone else that is there. No **bad news** to bring disappointment—ever! No **failure** on your part—or anyone else's—that leads to discouragement. And no **overwhelming circumstances** that drive us to despair.

No **evil** exists in this place. That means **not one** evil action...or **attitude**...or thought will be committed ...ever...by anyone! And it will **remain like** that...forever and ever and ever!

Sounds **heavenly**, doesn't it? And that, of course, is **the place** I'm referring to—and I just barely scratched the surface of describing it! But we're not there yet, are we? Heaven is our **future**—if we have Christ as our Savior. Theologians refer to our future state in heaven as **glorification**.

**Does everyone** go there? No; they don't! Jesus Himself tells us that in Matthew 7; let's turn there. Notice what it says in verses 13-14. Mt 7:13-14 “Enter ye in at the strait [narrow] gate: for **wide** is the gate, and broad is the way, that **leadeth to destruction**, and **many** there be which go in thereat: Because strait [narrow] is the gate, and **narrow** is the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few** there be that find it.”

Pretty hard to miss the point: The gate to hell is **wide**—and **many** go there; the gate to heaven is **narrow**—and **few** go there! **But why?**

Doesn't God **want people** to go to heaven? Yes; **God wants people** to go to heaven—and the Bible plainly states that! II Timothy 2:3-4 “For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; <sup>4</sup>**Who will have all men to be saved**, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”

II Peter 3:9 “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, **not willing that any should perish**, but that **all should come to repentance**.”

So...if God's desire is that **all men** be saved—and if He is not willing that any should perish and that **all should** come to repentance, **why** did God make the **gate to heaven** so narrow?

**How narrow** is the gate to life—meaning eternal life in heaven? Not as narrow as the gate to get into **the military**! **Why** do I say that? Because the military has **many requirements** that heaven does not!

--The military has **age** requirements—heaven does not!

--The military has **education** requirements—heaven does not!

--If you are underweight—or overweight—you can't get into the military—but you can get into heaven!

--If you are on certain **medications**—or have certain **medical problems**, you can't get into the military—but you can get into heaven.

--If you can't pass an **aptitude test**—or have a **criminal record**—you can't get into the military—but you can get into heaven!

So...in one sense...the way to heaven isn't really all that narrow! But in another sense, it is **extremely narrow**—and here's why. Whereas **some people** are qualified for the military, **no one** is qualified to get into heaven! Sin **disqualifies everyone** from heaven—and we cannot get rid of our sin to **become** qualified!

But God provided the way—the **only way**—for our sins to be paid for—and that way is Jesus! He died in our place—He paid the price that He Himself required—so that we can be justly forgiven. Our sin is counted as being placed on Christ—and Christ's righteousness is credited to us. That truth is stated in II Corinthians 5:21.

**II Corinthians 5:21** “For He [God] hath made Him [Jesus] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made [might have] the righteousness of God in Him [Jesus].” Theologians refer to this great exchange as **salvation and/or justification**. For me, salvation took place 50 plus years ago when—as a 12-year boy—I received Jesus as my Savior. For some of you, it’s been **even longer** than that!

Regardless of how long you have been born again—if you are indeed born again—it happened in the **past**, right? Whether it was 50 years ago...or 5 years ago...or 5 weeks ago—or even 5 minutes ago—it was still in the **past!** Why do I bring that up?

Before I tell you “why” I brought up **salvation** being in the past—if you are indeed saved—and **glorification** being in the future—again, if you are indeed saved—I feel the need to give a **disclaimer**. Here it is: This is going to be a **different kind** of sermon! Maybe you’ve already sensed that, but here’s what I mean.

As you well know, my normal “style” (for lack of a better word) is to **teach**—and once in a while I **preach** while I’m teaching! But today I’m **not going to do either!** In fact, today is going to be more like a “fire-side” chat than a sermon.

So the **rambling style** that you are getting today is technically **not rambling** because it is **planned**—and even written out! And, no—**it doesn’t mean** that this is how the sermons are going to be in the future! But...I do want to **share with you** some things that God has been **working on me about** and explaining that takes on more of a **conversational tone** than preaching or teaching does.

A couple of weeks ago, I ended my sermon with a quote from a book entitled “*How People Change*” by Timothy Lane and Paul Tripp. I read the book 11 years ago for a college class and on Monday of this past week, I decided to read it again. While doing so, I came across this **quote**: 1. “The good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ is a ‘then-now-then’ gospel. First, there is the ‘then’ of the **past**. When I embrace Christ by faith, my sins are completely forgiven, and I stand before God as righteous. There is also the ‘then’ of the **future**, the promise of eternity with the Lord, free of sin and struggle. **The church** has done fairly well explaining these two ‘thens’ of the gospel, but it has tended to **understate or misunderstand** the ‘now’ benefits of the work of Christ. What difference does the gospel make in the here and now?” (Pages 3-4)

When the authors refer to “the church,” they are using it in the general sense of Christian teaching as a whole. But...the teaching of the church **as a whole** is made up of the teaching of **individual** churches—which led me to ask **myself** this question: ‘**Am I understating**—or **misunderstanding**—the “now” benefits of the work of Christ?’ My assessment is that **I need to do** a better job.

After the authors ask a few more questions, the **next paragraph** began like this: 2. “It is in the here and now that many of us experience a gospel blindness. Our sight is dimmed by the tyranny of the urgent, by the siren call of success, by the seductive beauty of physical things, by our inability to admit our own problems, and by the casual relationships within the body of Christ that we mistakenly call fellowship. This blindness is often **encouraged by preaching that fails to take the gospel to the specific challenges people face.**” (Page 4)

Notice again that last sentence. Eleven years ago when I read this statement, I was a seminary student—not a pastor—so it didn’t **apply to me**, per se. But **now it does!** And I had to ask myself, ‘Does my preaching of God’s Word **help you**—or does it **fail to help** you—with the **specific challenges** you face?’

Once again, **my assessment** is that I need to do a better job of personally applying God’s Word to **my daily living** so that I can **help you** do the same.

One more quote—this one from a couple of weeks ago. I didn’t have room to put it in the outline at that time, so here it is now: 3. “The Christian life is a **state of thankful discontent** or joyful dissatisfaction. That is, I live every day **thankful for the grace** that has changed my life, but I am **not satisfied**. Why not? Because, when I look at myself honestly, I have to admit that I am not all I can be in Christ.” (Page 119)

This last paragraph describes quite well where I am at right now: **discontented**—but thankful; and joyfully dissatisfied. But I am **not discouraged**! In fact, I can't remember the last time I've been **this encouraged** and **excited and hopeful** about seeing what God is going to do!

It's as if God has given me **spiritual** "cataract surgery" where something I've looked at and seen before is clearer now than I ever recall seeing it before! **What** is it? Come back next week and you'll find out!

You're in Matthew 7; turn back to Matthew 5. So far in this "fireside chat," I've given you **more quotes** from books than I usually do. Now I'm about to do **something else I don't usually do**—have you turn to verse...after verse...after verse...after verse!

I've said it once, but I feel it is necessary **to say it again**: Today's sermon **is not** what sermons will look like in the future! Reading several quotes from a book—then reading a bunch of Bible verses to you—is not what I consider a sermon. But I really need to **lay the groundwork** for what we will be looking at in the weeks ahead.

As we go through these verses, my hope—and prayer—is for **four** things to happen.

- 1) That we will be thoroughly **convinced** that God expects us to change.
- 2) That we will **admit** that we **are not** what God wants us to be.
- 3) That our **desire to change** will grow; it will increase and intensify.
- 4) That we **will believe** that since God wants us to change, He will help us change.

On the flip side, I hope no one walks out of here with the thought: "I know God wants me to change—but I don't **want** to change."

### ***God's Plan for us is transformation***

The following verses—and many, many others—demonstrate that God wants us to be different now than we were before we were saved. God wants us to be changed; He wants us to be transformed.

Mt 5:5-8 "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

<sup>6</sup> Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

Mt 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Mt 5:48 "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

Mark 8:34 "And when he had called the people unto him with his disciples also, he said unto them, Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Mark 11:22 "And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God."

Mark 12:29-31 "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: <sup>30</sup>And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. <sup>31</sup>And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."

Luke 6:31 "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."

John 14:15 "If ye love me, keep my commandments."

Acts 1:8 "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

Romans 12:2 "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."

I Cor 10:31 "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

II Corinthians 7:1 "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Galatians 5:22-23 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, <sup>23</sup> Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

Ephesians 2:10 "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Philippians 4:6-8 "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. <sup>8</sup> Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

Colossians 3:8 "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth."

I Thessalonians 2:12 "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto His kingdom and glory."

II Thessalonians 3:13 "But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing."

I Timothy 2:8 "I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

II Tim 3:16-17 "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: <sup>17</sup> That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

Titus 2:12-14 "Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world <sup>13</sup> Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; <sup>14</sup> Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."

Philemon 1:7 "For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother."

Not a command, per se, but God expects us to be a blessing to fellow believers.

Hebrews 13:15 "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name."

James 1:22 “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

I Peter 1:15-16 “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;  
<sup>16</sup> Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.”

II Peter 1:5-7 “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;  
<sup>6</sup> And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; <sup>7</sup> And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.”

I John 2:1 “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not....”

I John 2:6 “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”

II John 1:5 “And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that **we love one another**.”

III John 1:11 “Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good...”

Jude 1:21-23 “Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. <sup>22</sup> And of some have compassion, making a difference: <sup>23</sup> And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.”

Revelation 2:4 “Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.”

Revelation 3:17 “Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:”

You see what we just did, right? In **every book of the NT**, God tells us that we are to **do certain things**—or **not do** certain things. And please know that we **skipped** more verses than we looked at that teach the same truth!

Back to the four things I mentioned that I’m hoping and praying will happen today.

- 1) Does God **want you** to change? Yes; He does! Are you **personally convinced** of that?
- 2) Are you willing to **admit** that you **are not** what God wants us to be?
- 3) Has your **desire to change** grown—has it increased—after looking at all these things God expects us to be?
- 4) Do you **believe** that if God **wants you** to change, He will **help us** change?