

A View Toward Forever

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This booklet was created from a message preached by Pastor Stevens.

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the King James Version. Italics for emphasis are ours.

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INTRODUCTION

Our days are numbered. We have only so many moments upon this planet. God Himself holds the issues of life and death. None of us knows the hour or the moment we will go to be with God, but soon all of us will pass out of time and into eternity.

That is what this booklet represents to me: A consideration of forever. It is a heart-to-heart talk between those of us who know where we are going to spend eternity and those who do not know. The people in that second group are on the other side of the street, so to speak.

I would encourage you to please read these pages with your Bible open. Search the Scriptures for yourself and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Times such as this are very rich and very stabilizing for the struggling soul.

Chapter One

THE VALUE OF OUR SOULS

“For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel’s, the same shall save it.

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

“Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

“Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:35-38).

Why is a soul so important? Why does it hold such value? The reason is that all souls are made for forever. All souls also belong to God, according to Ezekiel 18:4: “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.” A soul that dies is a soul that is separated

from a relationship with God. It is a soul that never gets to know Him. That is true both in this life and in the life to come. The life to come is the life of forever.

This is so crucial for us to understand. A person may take a gun and blow his brains out, but that person did not kill himself. The bullet may take someone out of time, but it did not take him out of forever.

Celebrating Our Differences

For this reason, we planted our church in a city neighborhood. It is a beautiful area in our minds. We had a chance to wind up in the suburbs, but God put us here. He wanted us in a place where people are in need. It looked as if we would not be able to get our building. There were promises of money that never panned out. Some gifts came and others did not come. But God made a way and planted us in the perfect spot.

What has been the result? We have reached people that no one else wanted to reach. We have developed an amazing relationship with the folks in our city. Our community has been transformed because of our presence. Other churches have noticed and appreciated our ef-

forts. We have been knit into a oneness from God. A deep love has developed, and this deep love is something we will carry into forever. You cannot take money, cars, or buildings with you to forever, but the love that we share with members of the Body of Christ is something that will come with us.

One thing we all should realize about our forever in heaven is this: It will be a place of diversity. Diversity is what we have worked toward creating in our fellowship. We have been recognized by one nationwide Christian organization as one of the most integrated ministries in the United States. It was one of the greatest recognitions one of our ministries has ever gotten. To me, it showed that there are no bridges that cannot be crossed and no walls that cannot come down.

Chapter Two

BODY, SOUL, AND SPIRIT

Our soul includes our mind and our emotions. Our mind is designed to do the thinking and to communicate proper responses to the emotions. The mind tells the emotions how to respond. Angry feelings are the result of angry choices. Good feelings are the result of good choices made in the mind. Our emotions are ordered according to our thoughts.

Our thinking is affected by our learning, and learning provides food for thought. Thoughts become responses in our emotions. These things are also regulated by our conscience, which establishes the norms and standards for our minds. These norms and standards help determine the way we think and ultimately influence the decisions we make.

The conscience can be very influenced by our circumstances. Suppose you were raised in an abusive and violent home where you were

beaten or perhaps sexually assaulted in some way. Somehow you covered over those memories and experiences, but you are still deeply affected in your behavior. Why? The norms and standards of your conscience became rooted in fear. This type of conscience manifests itself in various sublimations—provisions made for the flesh such as drinking and drug abuse. People become hooked, then their consciences speak to them and say, “Get more and you won’t feel any pain.”

Self-consciousness is another part of the soul. This is what determines whether I am occupied with God, occupied with myself, or occupied with others.

The Power of Choices

Then, there is the volition. Accountability and responsibility belong to the volition. This is the decider, the button-pusher. It answers this question: What will you do with what you know? This is what you have learned. Will you think along that line? This is what is right. Will you do right?

Volition was the first gift given to people by God. Adam and Eve had the right to choose. They were told the consequences of their choice,

but they were never manipulated or controlled from making any choice. Death—spiritual and physical—resulted from their choice to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, but the right to make that very wrong choice was given to them by God.

Within each of us is our old sin nature, an inner monster that cannot reason in reality. It is the part of us that reacts and gets angry. It is the part of us that goes after pleasure at any cost. Pleasure is really fine if it is pleasure centered in the will of God.

All of these facets of the soul work within our bodies and in conjunction with the human spirit of the believer. The human spirit is really dead until a person is truly saved. This part of us is given by God to develop our capacity for God-consciousness, whereby we receive the words of God.

So our natural makeup consists of the human spirit, which is God-conscious; the soul, which is self-conscious; and the body, which is world-conscious.

This is the reason our souls are so valuable. They reveal our distinctions, and these distinctions are going to continue in eternity. Agriculture reveals something deep about spiritual

things. A seed of wheat goes into the ground and dies and comes up as grain. Our physical bodies may go into the ground, but they will come up and go out of the ground and into forever.

For the Christian, there is the sacred reality that to be absent from our physical bodies is to be present with the Lord. Our sense of self, our soul, will take on a new awareness. The angels will come and escort us into the presence of God, and as believers we will not even taste death.

Chapter Three

ETERNAL REALITIES

“And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

“Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

“And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched:

“Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.

“And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire:

“Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched” (Mark 9:43-48).

“And the beast was taken, and with him the

false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20).

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

“And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

“And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

“And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

“And whosoever was not found written in

the book of life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:10-15).

A second death comes to those who never receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. With the first death, the souls of the unsaved go into a place of torment. The body goes into the grave and is separated from the soul. At the second death, bodies and souls are reunited and cast into the lake of fire together.

This lake of fire is a reality. Heaven is also a reality. By grace through faith, we receive Christ as our personal Savior. We believe with our hearts, and we confess with our mouths. We recognize that Jesus died in our place, that He came as God in the flesh to shed His precious blood. He was crucified and buried and numbered with transgressors. He took upon Himself our sins. He was raised from the dead, and He ascended into heaven. Someday soon, Jesus will come back and meet Christians in the clouds. That’s the Rapture. That, too, is a reality waiting to be revealed in time.

Death for the believer is simply a departure. A Christian who dies is carried away to heaven in an instant. This is another reality.

Because we understand these realities, we are a soul-winning church.

Heaven Rejoices

“What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

“And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

“And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost.

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” (Luke 15:4-7).

When one soul gets saved, there is rejoicing in heaven. This is why I have never liked it when people in the congregation start moving around during the invitation at the end of a church service. It is really very rude. Heaven is waiting for the chance to rejoice, and some people just cannot wait to get to their cars.

As a pastor, I am very concerned about certain perceptions. I do stand or fall before God. I believe that I am doing my level best for the Kingdom of God. When I fail—and I do, and I

will—I am quick to rebound and apologize to any offended party. I am very careful about the church's finances. Others handle everything. I cannot sign a check that is drawn on the ministry's accounts. I simply do not want anyone to ever be hindered from receiving Christ and coming to my church because he might think that I am getting rich off of him. I want the atmosphere in our ministry to allow everyone to see the reality that whosoever will may come to Christ just as he is.

Jesus walked the road of Calvary that we might walk the streets of gold. Christ wore a crown of thorns that I might have the crown of life. He bore all of my sin and my shame so that I might go forward bearing His name. I made a decision for the Lord, and I am forgiven and free—free to live for Him and free to enjoy His people all the days of my life.

God has called us to reveal this reality to a lost world. He needs every one of us. We are precious parts of His vision to seek and to save people. We can do it because He will do it. He will give us all the grace and knowledge and ability that we need. All we need is to see with His eyes and keep our view toward forever.

CONCLUSION

The world we live in now is a place of wildness and wantonness. The news programs show all manner of death and trouble. Someone is shot over at that place, another is killed in this place. Satanic influence runs rampant.

Oh, but what a thrill it is to be part of something that makes a difference. We minister, and some of that activity is stopped. The souls of precious, precious people get delivered. God loves the drug addict and wants to get him off the street and into the house of God. We can go and help lead him to Christ and see him get used mightily in the future.

Why is soul-winning so crucial? Because people are in hell, and they are screaming in torment. There is no way out for them. They rejected Christ and there is no other way for them to enter into any other kind of forever. Their forever is settled—forever.

There are also those rejoicing forever be-

cause their forever is with Christ. The pains are gone. The sorrows and heartaches and defeats and tragedies are gone. That's the Gospel. That's the Good News. And that is what we can share—here, there, and everywhere.

God Really Cares For You

Jesus loves you deeply. However, the fact that all have sinned separates us from God (Romans 3:23; 6:23). Still, God cares for you and He provides a way to share His love with you.

Jesus Christ's love for man was so great that He came and died on the cross for all the sins of mankind. He shed His blood for you so you can be forgiven and have eternal life.

The only thing He requires of you is to come to Him in simple faith trusting His character and love for you, and accepting Him as your Savior. "Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21) .

Simply pray, "Dear Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I receive you as my personal Savior. Thank you for loving me so much that you died for me so I can have eternal life with you. Amen."

He promises that He will never stop loving you and that He will never leave nor forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Develop your relationship with Him by reading the Bible, praying, and attending a good Bible-believing church.

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