

SLIDE #1 Heaven Changes Everything (Stadium photo)

Pastor Henry A. Dietterich, was a local person from the Briar Creek area in the nineteenth century, about whom I have been reading lately. He is so local he married a woman with the last name Evans, when he worked at the store in Evansville, before he became a pastor in the Evangelical Association. He spoke affectionately about his mother's life and her Christian walk. He told of his mother's passing from this life in 1866. While in the care of his sister, his mother's last words were these: "I have finished the work given me to do."

This being All Saints' Sunday, we are thinking about saints. In Christian history, they often faced death, even if it was a violent and untimely death as it was for some saints, triumphantly. They departed this life with peace and fulfillment in this life while having faced great challenges. Mary Freas Dietterich (like Freas Ave.), Henry's mother, isn't a canonized saint, but she was a "true Christian believer" according to her son which is the definition of a saint in the Bible.

Mary doesn't face death by martyrdom, but she was the mother of 12 children in her married life, and raised them to follow Christ. That was a pretty saintly task.

The triumphant and peaceful departure of this life by these true Christian believers seems to suggest that they are going on to another, very special place. It is the place we call heaven.

{1} Heaven

St. John, a canonized saint and the only disciple not to be a martyr, says in Revelation 5:11 that he saw what amounted to ten-thousand times ten-thousand angels in his vision of heaven. He said:

"Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders." Rev. 5:11 (NIV)

Of this number, Dr. David Jeremiah says:

To give you a perspective on how many angels this is, the average football stadium in America holds about 50,000 people. It would take some 2,000 stadiums of that size to hold 100,000,000 people. The total number of angels John saw may have far exceeded 100,000,000- "ten thousand" was the highest numerical figure used in the Greek language. "Ten thousand times ten thousand" may have been John's way of describing an inexpressibly large company of angels. (-internet)

Just taken literally, what a glorious place if it takes 2000 stadiums just for the angels. We have seen quite a few stadiums this fall, both football and baseball, with the Phillies in the playoffs and the world series which just concluded, etc. The baseball stadium reminds me of going home. The whole idea of baseball is to get home safely. St. Paul reminds us of that in 2 Corinthians 5:8 [NIV]

"We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." Saints believe they are going home to a glorious place called heaven.

SLIDE #2 Heaven is our home

Saints seem to grasp this article of faith readily. Heaven is a real place. Yet so many will dispute its very existence. Most famously perhaps, is John Lennon's song from the '60's: "Imagine," the lyrics of which say: "Imagine there's no Heaven, its easy if you try. No hell below us, above us only sky...." Place this line, which so many have been led astray by, next to that quote by Jesus which says: (Matthew 6:9 [NIV]) "This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father, in heaven, hallowed be your name."

Our understanding of God is indisputably linked to the place called heaven. Not to believe in heaven is close to not believing in God himself. The Father and heaven seem inextricably linked. Also, we are to pray that his will might be done on earth as it is in heaven. Heaven is real and is supposed to be on our minds. Heaven is our real home so much so, that Jesus is going to prepare a place there for us.

{2} Heaven Has Indescribable Beauty!

SLIDE #3 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV) Again, St. Paul says:

However, as it is written:
"What no eye has seen,
what no ear has heard,
and what no human mind has conceived"—
the things God has prepared for those who love him—

Any earthly description of heaven is going to be wanting for detail and clarity. Heaven by definition is beyond our earthly understanding. It is a place of beauty, a beauty that is indescribable.

St. Stephen in his great speech in Acts chapter 7:48-49, says it this way:
"However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:"
"Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord.
Or where will my resting place be?"

And again: [Acts 7:55-56]

But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

He saw the glory of God and the indescribable sight of the Risen Lord.

Dr. Eben Alexander has taught at Harvard Medical School and has earned a strong reputation as a neurosurgeon. And while Alexander says he's long called himself a Christian, he never held deeply religious beliefs or a pronounced faith in the afterlife. But after a week in a coma during the fall of 2008, during which his neocortex ceased to function, Alexander claims he experienced a life-changing visit to the afterlife, specifically heaven.

"According to current medical understanding of the brain and mind, there is absolutely no way that I could have experienced even a dim and limited consciousness during my time in the coma, much less the hyper-vivid and completely coherent odyssey I underwent," Alexander writes in...Newsweek.

So what exactly does heaven look like?

Alexander says he first found himself floating above clouds before witnessing, "transparent, shimmering beings arced across the sky, leaving long, streamer like lines behind them."

He claims to have been escorted by an unknown female companion and says he communicated with these beings through a method of correspondence that transcended language. Alexander says the messages he received from those beings loosely translated as:

"You are loved and cherished, dearly, forever."

"You have nothing to fear."

"There is nothing you can do wrong."

From there, Alexander claims to have traveled to "an immense void, completely dark, infinite in size, yet also infinitely comforting." He believes this void was the home of God.

After recovering from his meningitis-induced coma, Alexander says he was reluctant to share his experience with his colleagues but found comfort inside the walls of his church. He has chronicled his experience in a book, "Proof of Heaven: A neurosurgeon's journey into the afterlife...."

"I'm still a doctor, and still a man of science every bit as much as I was before I had my experience," Alexander writes. "But on a deep level I'm very different from the person I was before, because I've caught a glimpse of this emerging picture of reality. And you can believe me when I tell you that it will be worth every bit of the work it will take us, and those who come after us, to get it right."

[<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/sideshow/heaven-real-says-neurosurgeon-claims-visited-afterlife-213527063.html>]

Now, I don't believe in heaven because of one neurosurgeon's word on the matter, but there are many witnesses who indicate the reality of heaven.

SLIDE #4 Heaven has unimaginable beauty

Revelation 21:9b-10 says:

"Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high,

and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God."

The beauty of Heaven is compared in Revelation to a bride who is adorned for her husband. What a beautiful sight that is to see a bride coming down the church aisle for the wedding ceremony, dressed in her absolute finest, looking prettier than at any other time in her life! At least, I always thought so, a stunning beauty indeed!

When Thomas Edison lay dying, he could hardly speak, according to his widow. His doctor, who was also a friend of the family, observed that Edison was trying to say something. He bent down very close and heard the inventor whisper, "It's very beautiful over there." Those were his last words. Those could be a person's first words in Heaven: "It's very beautiful here."

{3} Heaven helps us face any challenge in this life.

SLIDE #5 Heaven, no sorrow, no death, no tears

Calbraith Perry ("Cal") Rodgers, an inexperienced 32-year-old pilot, in 1911 made the first transcontinental flight across the United States. He reached Pasadena, California, on November 5, 1911, and Long Beach, California, on December 10, flying between Sheepshead Bay, near New York City, New York, and the West Coast in a Wright EX biplane. He carried the first transcontinental mail pouch and was accompanied on the ground by a support crew that repaired and rebuilt the plane after its numerous rough landings and crashes.

Rodgers was the grandson of the famed Commodore Oliver Perry of the Battle of Lake Erie in the War of 1812.... And somewhat of a risk-taker... Rodgers had taken only about 90 minutes of flying instruction from Orville Wright in June 1911, at the Wright School in Dayton, Ohio, before attempting a solo flight.

Rodgers took off from Sheepshead Bay, New York, at 4:30 p.m. on September 17, 1911. He followed railroad tracks and avoided mountains, storms, and other hazards. Along the way, he landed around 70 times, which included at least 16 crashes some that put him in the hospital. Damage to the Vin Fiz was so extensive that the plane had to be rebuilt at least twice. Only a very few pieces of the original Vin Fiz made it all the way a vertical rudder, a couple of wing struts, and possibly the original engine oil pan.

Forty-nine days later, on November 5, Rodgers landed in Pasadena, California. He had missed Hearst's deadline by 19 days. So that he could say he had reached the Pacific Ocean, he took off again on November 12, to cover the remaining 20 miles (32 kilometers) to the ocean, only to be forced down twice, once suffering a broken ankle. But on December 10, 1911, he flew on to the beach at Long Beach, California, and taxied the Vin Fiz into the Pacific Ocean. The entire trip of approximately 4,000 miles (6,437 kilometers) (authorities differ on the exact number of miles) had taken 84 days, although only about 82 hours were spent aloft! (US Centennial of Flight Commission)

(https://www.centennialofflight.net/essay/Explorers_Record_Setters_and_Daredevils/Vin_Fiz/EX6.htm)

Everything didn't go smoothly for Cal Rodgers. It doesn't for saints either.

SLIDE #6 Heaven Changes Everything

The title of this sermon is from a song I on the radio. “Heaven Changes Everything.” Heaven does change everything for the saints it seems. They persevere by faith through extraordinary experiences and continue in their self-giving attitude. It changes their approach to death. I think that heaven as a piece of the faith can change everything about our outlook in life regardless of how bumpy the journey of this life can become or what challenge we may face. Try it with me, the next time you face a challenge or disappointment. Think about heaven and see if it changes how you view your present situation.