

Good evening everyone. Welcome back. I hope your afternoon was a wonderful one. I know I'm starting to sound like a broken record, but I again want to thank Kirk and you all for the privilege of getting to preach the truth here. Kirk and I were discussing on the way to the football game yesterday, how over the last decade or so, both of us have come to realize what a true privilege it is to serve in the Lord's Kingdom. If you would please open your bibles to Matthew chapter 8. The text for this evening's lesson will come from there.

When we preach the Gospel, we talk about how Christ came to save the lost. That's all of us. We talk about how the saved go to heaven and the unsaved go to hell. What we often forget to do, is actually talk about heaven and hell themselves. We refer to heaven as a good place and hell as a bad place, but we really don't do much to describe them. So tonight, I decided to entitle my lesson "A Glimpse of Heaven and Hell".

(Matthew 8, 5-12): And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this *man*, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*. When Jesus heard *it*, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

A centurion was a soldier in the Roman army. The Romans had power over the Jews at this time. The Jews were a conquered nation and so the land of Israel had many soldiers traveling up and down its roads. They were there, of course, to keep order and to keep the peace; very much as we have soldiers in different parts of the world; perhaps Iraq would be an example of that. However, a centurion was not just a soldier. He was a soldier who had the power and the authority over one hundred soldiers; hence his name. The word 'centum' is the Latin for one hundred. Therefore, a centurion is an officer who has control over a hundred Roman soldiers.

This particular centurion obviously had a servant who had fallen ill. When Jesus Christ came to this village in the north in Galilee called Capernaum, the soldier came to Jesus and explained. "Master," he said, "I have a servant who is ill." Jesus Christ offers to come immediately and to heal him. The centurion says something that makes Jesus marvel. "O," he says, "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come into my house. I wasn't asking you to travel to my house or come under my roof. I am nobody. I am nothing. All you

need to do Lord, is just to say the word, and from this very place where you are standing, he will be healed. I don't expect you to trouble yourself to come into my very house."

Then he uses this illustration. He says, "I am a man with authority and I know that when I command my servants to do something, they do it. If I say to him, "Go!" he goes; if I say,

Let's look the other way round. Not just the east. Let's turn from Jesus' point of view to the west. What could He mean? Which countries had He got in mind in the west - Great Britain, Scotland, England, Wales, Ireland, United States of America, Canada, Brazil and so on. In all these countries, and many others like them, the Bible is now translated into these languages. There are churches in all these countries today. Jesus knew that that was going to happen.

A LINE OF ARGUMENT

Let's stop for a moment and think. As Christians, especially the young ones back there in the back row, are going to meet people who will say to you, "How do you know Christianity is true. It's a lot of guesswork. How do you know there is any truth in the Bible? You prove it!" Well, here is a line of argument. "Well, in Matthew chapter eight, Jesus says they are going to come from the east and the west, and they are going to become Christians: they are going to sit down at the kingdom of God. They are going to become believers in the Gospel." So then, you can say to them, "If what Jesus says is a lot of rubbish, how do you explain that two thousand years after He said it, it came absolutely true. True to the very letter: from the east and from the west." You need to be more than a good guesser to know that that was going to happen, and Jesus wasn't guessing, He was prophesying. He was foretelling future events. You tell them, "How could He do that?" Because of what He is: He is God come down into human nature; God in our flesh; God in our nature; the God man; the Son of God; God the Son. He had prophetic powers and He saw very well that this was going to happen.

"AND THEY OF THE CITY SHALL FLOURISH LIKE GRASS OF THE EARTH"

But back to the point I was making. Heaven, in the end, is going to have lots and lots and lots of people in it. Not only thousands, but perhaps millions. Perhaps even billions, although that's probably pushing it. Let me just give you some verses from the Bible to prove that this is what the Bible says all through from Genesis to Revelation. The whole Bible tells us that heaven is going to have lots and lots of people in it. Can you remember now what God said to Abraham in Genesis chapter 12? I'll tell you. God said to Abraham, "In you and in your seed ALL the nations will be blessed." The seed of Abraham is Christ who was to be born of that family. So this is really what God said to Abraham: The day would come when all the nations of mankind would be blessed in Christ. That is exactly the same point, isn't it, that Jesus is making here?. No, no, in heaven, it says in the book of Revelation, an innumerable multitude, uncountably great: thousands upon thousands, millions upon millions of people are in heaven. That is what Jesus is saying here: Heaven is going to be full of people. "They shall come," He says, "from the east and west" (text).

Now I know right now it doesn't seem like there would be many. Jesus tells us in [Mat 7:14](#) Because strait *is* the gate, and **narrow** *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.

The Greek word here could be translated “puny”. But, “few” is a relative term. Look at it this way. Do you know today, standing up upon the earth, there are probably almost as many people living today and breathing, as have ever lived in all the previous generations. It may not be exactly and precisely true, but the population of the world is growing, growing, growing so fast by geometrical progression that the day could easily come soon in which there are more people living and breathing and walking on the face of the earth, than all the other generations put together. Are you with me? Now, because that is so, as you look into the future, all it would take is for a great revival of religion to occur at that point in history when there is a massive world population, far greater than ever before.

Therefore, it is not so foolish to think that there are going to be a very large number of souls in heaven.

SMALL FLOCK MENTALITY

What is the good of telling you that there are going to be so many people in heaven? What's the point of saying that? Well, two or three reasons. Firstly, because some people sometimes get the 'small flock' mentality. They think to themselves, "What's the point of being a Christian? What is the point of going to church? What's the point of reading the Bible? There are only a few people doing it." No, no, no. Don't you believe it! Yes, in this country now, at this time, there may be only a few doing it; but if you take the world as a whole, you might be amazed.

When South Korea hosted the Soccer World Cup, Korean Christians passed out millions of tracts on Christianity in attempt to bring the Gospel to them. They were not so interested in the soccer as in the souls of the people. That's their attitude. So, my dear friends, don't allow anyone to give you a 'little flock' mentality or to browbeat you into thinking that Christianity is dying on its feet. Not at all! There are going to be great numbers in heaven in the end. Perhaps not compared to the number of people that ever lived, but great numbers none the less.

2. A GLIMPSE OF HEAVEN

Well that is the first thing. Let me come to the second. Not only does Jesus say that there will be many, many people in heaven, but He also tells us a little bit about what heaven is like. I call this a glimpse of what heaven is like. You understand the Bible tells us there is a place called heaven, and it tells us just a little bit about what it's like, but don't expect the Bible to tell you everything about heaven. It is impossible for us to understand very much about what heaven is like, impossible. It would be like a little child of three being given lessons in atomic physics or brain surgery. A little child doesn't understand higher mathematics or how the brain works. You'd be a fool to try to teach a primary school child about these academic subjects; they are quite beyond their capacity - so it is with us. We are like babes when it comes to the subject of heaven. We know so little about heaven, and even if we were told, it would make little sense to us.

HEAVEN: THE END OF A JOURNEY

The Bible tells us just a little, giving us a glimpse of what heaven is like. This very verse of Scripture here gives us a glimpse into heaven. What does it tell us? What does the glimpse tell us? First of all, Jesus here tells us that heaven is the end of a journey. How does it do that? Well, look at verse eleven. "Many shall come"; so they are traveling. It's the journey of faith. It's the journey of the pilgrim going through this world. It's essentially the same journey for everybody, whether they are Chinese, or Americans, or Australians or whatever; it is the same journey. Every Christian has a journey through this life. The journey begins the moment they are converted, and it goes on until the moment when they die: that's the journey of faith. Ah, but, when they get to heaven, my dear friends, it is the end of the journey. There is no more journey then. They come to heaven. They come to their desired haven.

Oh, my dear Christian friends, the lesson for you is, don't get weary but keep on going. You are very close to the end of your journey. It can be a very tiring thing to keep the faith - year in, year out; day in, day out; it is no easy thing. Unbelievers have no idea how difficult it can be for the Christian to go on steadfastly, all the way through life. But heaven, my dear Christians, heaven - whatever else we don't know about it - heaven will be the place where your journey will end. As soon as your feet get inside the City of Glory, your journey is over forever more. That is the first thing our Lord tells us.

HEAVEN: A PLACE of EVERLASTING REST

What is the next thing? The second thing said about heaven is, it is a place of everlasting rest. Did you notice that? It is in verse eleven. "Many shall come from the east and west." And what will they do when they get there? They "shall sit down." Strong's concordance says that word means to "lean back". It is a place of rest. Heaven is a place where the weary people of God sit down. O, I hope you understand that being a Christian is not a picnic. We don't, as Christians, expect to go through this world in silver shoes or in fair weather every day or treading upon royal red carpets. No, no, it's a thorny world. It's a difficult journey: difficult to be praying every day. The alarm clock goes; out of bed you get, dressed, downstairs, and spend the day praying with God, reading His Word. Not simply on a Monday and a Tuesday, but on a Wednesday and a Thursday; not simply in 220 but in 2004, 2005: over and over again, all through life - reading, fighting, and resisting sin and temptation. But my very dear friends, this is what is said about heaven. When they get there, what do they do? They sit down. No more fighting, no more struggling, no more praying of that kind. Their fighting days are done. No more wrestling to get a sermon, no more struggling to get a decision as to what to do, what to say - to this one and to that one and to the other one. They sit down, lean back.

HEAVEN: A GREAT FEAST

The third thing Christ tells us here is that heaven will be a great feast for eating and drinking and being everlastingly happy. "They shall sit down." They are sitting down, of course, at a table. We are told this from other passages of the Bible. When you study the parables of Christ, it is very clear He represents heaven as a place where they sit down to feast: to eat and to drink in glory, so it will be. I am not suggesting it will be literal eating and literal drinking, but it is a way of putting it. At a feast people laugh, they are happy,

they are glad - of course, they are. Christians will be glad to get to heaven because now they are in their heavenly Father's House, and what could be better news? All the angels will be gathered there and we will be made to eat and to drink of the blessings of the kingdom of glory and that is what heaven will be: eternal happiness with God and with His angels.

HEAVEN: THE BEST OF COMPANY

What else is here? Well, the next thing I notice is this: In heaven the very best people will be there who ever lived. You know it is very important to your happiness, as to what the company is that you keep. Some people are so difficult to live with that you can't be happy, ever, in their company. But the company of those in heaven will be the best company. Jesus tells us who they are. He says, "Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob" (text). They will sit down, lean back, feast, and hang out with these people.

We know a little bit about these people from the book of Genesis. Abraham, He was the friend of God. We know that He put God first. God came first in Abraham's life. At every decision in his life, God came first. He was even prepared to sacrifice his own son when God commanded Him to do so. God came first. That's not easy. I wonder if we are living our lives like that: if we are putting God first conscientiously? Well this man Abraham did. Abraham we are told, believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. Here was a man who had faith; he lived by faith. He is the very embodiment of living by faith. When you get to heaven, Christian, you will be with that sort of man. Isaac was the same, Jacob was the same: men that prayed and wrestled with God; men who loved worship; men who built altars to praise God; men, and women later on, who had their whole hearts' desire in God. So that is the kind of people we are going to meet in heaven. Of course, there are far more than these three as I said earlier. These are a specimen, if you like, of the quality of people in heaven: those who lived for God, those who believed in God, those who served God here below.

HEAVEN: A KINGDOM

There is one further thing Jesus tells us. He says, these people will come, they will sit down with Abraham and others, where? Where will they sit down? "In the kingdom of heaven" (text). 'Kingdom', notice: a 'kingdom'. It is a well-ordered country with a great King, and the King is Christ. Heaven is a well-ordered country - no crime there, no misery there, no poverty there, no illiteracy there, no graffiti on the walls, and no dirt on the street. The street are paved with gold. Everyone content. Everyone ecstatically happy for evermore, and all in the presence of their own great King; seeing the King Himself, Jesus Christ our Lord; with Him, in His presence, under His smile, enjoying His love in their hearts. O, this is heaven, and this is the way Christ portrays it. Heaven is all of this, says Christ, and they will come from all countries of the world to sit down in this place.

Well this is only a glimpse, but it is a wonderful, wonderful glimpse of heaven, is it not? Is this not something that whets our appetite to be there? Is it not like seeing a photograph of some wonderful island in the Caribbean and you would say, "What a place! Look at the sand. Look at the blue sea. Look at the blue sky. Look at the palm trees. I long to be

there." Well, heaven is a million times better than the Caribbean Islands, which are so attractive in the photographs you may have seen. Christ tells us this to whet our appetite so that you and I will desire to be there. That is why He is telling us this, to give us a desire and an appetite to be in heaven.

3. CHILDREN OF THE KINGDOM SHALL BE CAST OUT

Then, Jesus Christ uses a word that must have made these people cringe. He said "But," ah, the word 'but' means there is a change of tone here. "But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (text). Our Lord is telling us this: My friends, not everybody will be in heaven. He says, "The children of the kingdom shall be cast out." Now, at the time, he was referring to those that lived in Israel that did not recognize him for who he was and were not converted. But other verses indicate that this also applies to anyone who heard the Word of God in this life: who came to church; who had the Bible at home in their own language; who may have had a Christian father or mother or grandparent; who went to Bible Classes and worship. They were possibly baptized and they lived where the gospel was preached. They knew quite a bit about the Gospel. They heard it from time-to-time. These are "the children of the kingdom." But, Jesus says, many of the people who are like this will be cast out. You are entitled to ask me, "But why would God cast them out?" The answer is very simple, "Because they were not like this centurion. They didn't believe in Christ."

Faith comes first. The thing which is being praised here is this centurion soldier's faith, isn't it? That's how we began. Do you remember how he said to Jesus, "Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only". This is exactly what happened. Jesus said to the centurion, "Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour" (verse 13). This was a miracle. All Jesus needed to do was to say to this man at a distance, "Be healed!" and because Jesus is God, His power was such that this man was healed at a distance. Of course, Jesus could have come along to the house; He could have put His hands on the man; He could have put spittle into his eyes, or any of these things which Jesus did on various occasions and for various reasons best known to Himself. We may not always understand, but on this occasion He did not do any of that, He simply spoke the words, and He was healed. It was a miracle.

The thing that Jesus was praising here, is not that this centurion was a brawny soldier - that wasn't important; it wasn't that he had a brilliant intellect - that doesn't enter into it; it wasn't that he was born in a wonderful city like Rome or somewhere, and had all the prestige of a first class education - that doesn't come into the story in any way. The one thing this soldier had was FAITH! You need to believe in Christ for Who He is: the Son of God. The moment you believe, and repent of your sins, and are baptized, all your sins are forgiven. That is the moment you become a child of God. But on the other hand, here is the meaning of verse twelve here: you can come to church, and hear the preacher, and have a Bible, and have a Christian father or mother, and all these other things; it is possible to have all of that and more and not to believe - and not to obey Christ's words. However, some of you will go on your way home again and say, "Oh, that was an interesting sermon about a centurion. I always wondered what "centurion" meant. Great stuff." When you get home, you forget all about it. If that is all people do, you see, it's

just so much waste of breath as far as you are concerned - you get no good. On the contrary, you get terrible judgment and that is what Jesus talks about.

WEEPING and GNASHING OF TEETH

If you don't believe the Gospel, even though you might have been 'a child of the kingdom' in the senses I've explained, look at the end of verse twelve. Terrible words. Jesus said, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth". Whereabouts will all that be done? He tells us in the middle of verse twelve: "They will be cast out into outer darkness." I don't like being in the dark, do you?

Most of us don't like to be in the dark. My dear friends, if you don't first believe the Gospel the end of your life will be in outer darkness. That means darkness forever more, away from God. 'Outer' means away from God and angels and parents and loved ones; away in darkness, which never ends. That's what the Bible says. It means it. It is not a joke. What do people do in the darkness? He tells us. He says, "They weep," which means cry. They cry because they are utterly, utterly miserable. You see they are in hell. You understand it is hell: utterly, utterly miserable. Not only do they weep but they grind their teeth. They gnash their teeth. You do that when you are in terrific pain, you gnash your teeth. That is how they will be forever, says Christ, in hell.

TAKE IT TO HEART

Why did the gentle, loving Jesus tell us this? Not to give us nightmares. That is not the purpose. He told us this, my dearly beloved, that we may take it to heart. That you may realize that you mustn't live without Christ; you mustn't live without God. We need to be truly converted to faith so that this will never happen to us. It starts with faith, like the centurion, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It starts with faith in God, faith in Christ. To believe that He is the Saviour Who shed His blood on the cross, for you and for me, and for the world. When you believe in Jesus Christ, and obey the Gospel, you cross from death unto life, and from darkness into light. You become a child of the kingdom, not only in a general sense, but in that special sense of being heirs of the everlasting kingdom of glory and of heaven of which our Lord tells us, "That many shall come from the east and west," and enter there (text).

HAVE YOU THOUGHT

As I close, let me ask you, "Have you thought of your life in the light of these words? Are you going now to seek the Lord when you get home, and to pray to Him to give you this faith?" You can't produce it without His own help and without His own grace. Seek the Lord and He will give you blessing on earth. He will give you your heart's desire, and in heaven, you will sit down, lean back, and everlastingly be at rest.