

What Is Forever For?

After the Wednesday evening service, Edmond Cortright waited patiently in line to talk to his pastor. I can always tell when something is on his mind as his head twirls this way and that way, lays his hand on his chin like the statue of the thinker, relates what on his mind, and then gives me a question or two. I have not been able to get what he asked me last Wednesday off my mind. He said, "Forever! It blows my mind when I think about forever! I mean, what is it going to be like?" I talked further with Edmond and he provided more of his musings as he said, "Say a man fights in a war and one day he dies; what happens? What is it going to be like? What happens?" Good questions, Edmond.

Over forty years ago, Rafe Van Hoy wrote these words, "So what's the glory in living? Doesn't anybody ever stay together anymore? And if love never lasts forever, tell me, what's forever for?" Over nine other artists recorded that song. One artist who did the cover of that song had just under 400 million hits on YouTube (The population of America is estimated at almost 330 million people). It appears a lot people wonder what "forever" is for, and rightly so. Worldwide, 3 people die every second, 180 people every minute, nearly 11,000 every hour. That means more than 250, 000 people die every day and go to Heaven or Hell. So, what is forever for?

1. DEATH SHALL ULTIMATELY BE REMOVED FOR THE BELIEVER FOREVER.

I Corinthians 15:26 declares, "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." In 1648, John Owen resounded this truth in the title of his most famous work, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*. I love the words by Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend in the song, *The Power of the Cross*, "Oh, to see my name, written in the wounds, for through Your suffering I am free. Death is crushed to death; life is mine to live, won through Your selfless love."

France's Louis XIV (The Great, also called the Sun King) decreed that the word death not be uttered in his presence. People live, by nature, with the fear of death. Only in the safe haven of God's salvation through Christ can we truly be delivered from the fear of death. Hebrews 2:14, 15: "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

2. ETERNAL EXISTENCE IN A LITERAL BODY AWAITS THE BELIEVER FOREVER.

Revelation 6:9-11; 7:9; 5:8; 8:6; 15:8; 19:14; II Kings 2:11.

The Greek philosopher, Plato stated, "Soma sema," (a body, a tomb). Plato considered reality only in the spiritual realm; he believed the body not only not necessary, but rather a hindrance. He "...believed that material things,

including the human body and the Earth are evil, while the immaterial things such as the soul and Heaven are good. This view is called Platonism. The Christian church, highly influenced by Platonism through the teachings of Philo (ca. 20 BC-Ad 50) and Origen (AD 185-254), among others came to embrace the “spiritual” view that human spirits are better off without bodies and that Heaven is a disembodied state” (Heaven, Randy Alcorn, p. 52).

Luke 24:39: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.” I John 3:2 encourages us with these words, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

3. BOREDOM IS REMOVED FROM THE BELIEVER FOREVER.

Psalm 16:11: “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”

Science-fiction writer Isaac Asimov writes, “I don’t believe in an afterlife, so I don’t have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would even be worse.” In Mark Twain’s, *The Adventure of Huckleberry Finn*, the Christian spinster, Miss Watson did not appreciate Huck’s fun-loving spirit. According to Huck, “She went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was go around all day long with a harp and sing forever and ever. So I didn’t think much of it....I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.”

Simone Weil said, “Imaginary evil is romantic and varied; real evil is gloomy, monotonous, barren, boring. Imaginary good is boring, real boring; real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating.”

In his book, *Things Unseen*, Mark Buchanan inquires, “Why won’t we be bored in heaven? Because it’s the one place where both impulses - to go beyond, to go home - are perfectly joined and totally satisfied. It’s the one place where we’re constantly discovering where everything is always fresh and the possessing of a thing is as good as the pursuing of it, and yet where we are fully at home, where everything is as it ought to be and where we find, undiminished, that mysterious something we never found down here...And this lifelong melancholy that hangs on us, this wishing we were someone else somewhere else, vanishes too. Our craving to go beyond is always and fully realized. Our yearning for home is once and for all fulfilled. The *ahh!* of deep satisfaction and the *aha!* of delighted surprise meet, and they kiss.”

Victor Hugo wrote, “I feel within me that future life. I am like a forest that has been razed; the new shoots are stronger and brighter. I shall most certainly rise toward the heavens the nearer my approach to the end, the plainer is the sound of immortal symphonies of the worlds which invite me. For half a century I have been translating my thoughts into prose and verse: history, drama, philosophy, romance, tradition, satire, ode, and song, all of these I have tried. But

I feel I haven't given utterance to the thousandth part of what lies within me. When I go to the grave I can say, as others have said, "My day's work is done." But I cannot say, "My life is done." My work will recommence the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley, it is a thoroughfare. It closes upon the twilight, but opens upon the dawn."

God created man and woman to stay happily occupied. Genesis 1:27, 28; 2:19. 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." Would good works cease while in Heaven? Of course not, it will be a continuum without monotony.

God created this gigantic sea creature for the specific purpose to observe him play before Him. Psalm 104:26: "There go the ships: *there is* that leviathan, *whom* thou hast made to play therein."

Isaiah 11:8 gives us an exciting glimpse of the Kingdom of God when it is established upon the earth. "And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den." Children at play are never bored.

4. GLORY SHALL BE GIVEN TO CHRIST FOREVER.

Revelation 11:15b, c: "...The kingdoms of this world are become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. Revelation 21:24: "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it." Colossians 1:18: "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all *things* he might have the preeminence."

Louis XIV ascended to the throne of France at age four to rule for the next 72 years. He enjoyed the longest reign in modern European history. He was so intoxicated with his own power and rule as king that he called himself the "Great Monarch" and declared, "I am the state!" But in 1715, King Louis XIV, like all other rulers, vacated his throne to death. He arranged his own funeral and it was nothing short of spectacular. Bishop Jean-Baptiste Massillon was requested by King Louis to preside over the state funeral. No one in the packed Notre Dame Cathedral will ever forget the funeral's ending.

-Pastor Pope-