

More than Wishful Thinking

Philippians 3:20-4:1

Aiming Higher, Part 7

Five billionaires are currently investing in ways to not only extend human life, but end death.

One of them invested heavily in organizations devoted to developing – quote – “rejuvenation biotechnologies”. One article I read admitted nothing has panned out quite yet.

Another billionaire founded a Silicon Valley nanotechnology company with the promise to investors that he personally planned to live for “millions . . . of years.” His company quietly went out of business about 14 months ago.

Then there’s the Eastern European multimillionaire who launched what he called, The 2045 Initiative. This initiative promises that humans will be immortal by the year 2045 – just as soon as they – quote – are able to “make a leap into artificial, machine bodies.”

All these guys have obviously watched the Terminator movies – perhaps too many times.

But the billionaire who seems the most determined is the founder and CEO of a data processing company. He has personally invested more than \$40 million dollars in his own Medical Foundation dedicated to understanding – quote – “lifespan development processes.” That’s code for – beating death and never dying.

According to recent adjustments, his net worth was 48 billion dollars, ranking him one of the richest men in the world.

Recently he said in an interview, “Death makes me very angry. It doesn’t make any sense.”

So here’s 40 million to put death out of business . . . frankly, all of them will eventually wish they had invested more of their money - in fact, all of their money – in order to try and gain one more moment of time.

He reminded me of Queen Elizabeth I who died in 1603; during her 45 year reign she never took off her coronation ring – her most-prized possession – and one week before she died she allowed her physicians to remove it because it had literally eaten into her flesh. She had 2,000 dresses hanging in her

closets which had revolutionized the world of fashion; she had attendants in her massive kingdom waiting on every wish.

As she struggled with her terminal infections and approaching death she was remarked off handedly, “All my possessions for one moment of time.”

The human race intuitively tries to evade what God has ordained – the Bible says, *It is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment (Hebrews 9:27).*

Death isn’t the end – it’s only a doorway. And the doorway leads to a destiny determined by your relationship with the living God. And there are only two eternal options.

When the Titanic went down, more than a 1,000 people went to a watery grave. After the news of the Titanic’s tragedy reached the world, the challenge was how to inform the relatives whether their loved ones were among the dead or the living. Without news reporters or cell phones, the information was slow in coming.

At the White Star Line’s office in Liverpool, England, a huge board was set up; on one side was a cardboard heading that read: Known to be Saved; and on the other side of the board was the heading, “Known To Be Lost.”

Hundreds of people gathered to closely watch the updates. When a messenger brought new information, those waiting held their breath, wondering on which side the messenger would write that person’s name; “Known to be Saved” or “Known to be Lost”.

Although the travelers on the Titanic were either first class, or second class, or third class passengers, after the ship went down there were only two categories; the saved and the lost.

Beloved, this old ship of earth which is hurtling through space at 67,000 miles an hour – which is faster than I will ever be allowed to go on Kildaire Farm Road – but the earth is effectively hurtling toward its final destination.

And every passenger on this planet will belong to one of two categories. It won't matter how nice your room was or how much luggage you had; it won't matter if you rode first class or third class; mopped the kitchen floors on your hands and knees or ate in the dining hall with the VIP's.

What will matter to every human being is simply this: in which column was your name written; Known to Be Lost, or, Known to Be Saved.

The Apostle Paul refers to these same two categories. And Paul is taking us into the roll call of immortality.

And we could rewrite these two categories this way: "Those who Belong to Earth" and "Those who Belong to Heaven."

If you were with us last Lord's Day, Paul described the earth dwellers in Philippians chapter 3. If you turn back with me, Paul describes these who reject the cross-work of Jesus Christ four ways:

- Their condemnation is settled – **verse 18 – I tell you now even weeping, they are enemies of the cross – vs. 19 – their end is destruction – that is – eternal separation from God.**
- Their cravings are sensual – **verse 19** as well
- Their commendations are shameful – that is, they glory in shameful things – **verse 19**, the middle part; and finally:
- Their captivations are short-sighted – Paul puts it this way at the end of **verse 19 – they set their minds on earthly things.**

Simply put – they are captivated with whatever the world says and the world does and the world loves and the world endorses and the world considers important.

They are earth focused:

- Materialism was their highest religion;
- Fashion was their sacred liturgy;
- Celebrities were their priestly guides;
- Possessions were their greatest reward;
- And earth was really the only heaven they wanted

B.B. King, the famous blues musician who died this past year was asked about the afterlife and he responded, and I quote, "I don't know what happens after this life . . . but I think hell is hell on earth; and heaven is enjoyment with a beautiful lady."ⁱⁱ

In other words, hell is suffering pain on earth, and heaven is experiencing pleasure on earth. Many people would agree; a literal hell is simply not going to happen; and a literal heaven with King Jesus enthroned forever is simply wishful thinking.

Another musician sarcastically wrote a song in 1911 to mock the popular evangelistic hymn about Heaven entitled, *In The Sweet By and By*ⁱⁱⁱ; his words coined the phrase that heaven was only *pie in the sky*.

Immortality in Heaven is nothing more than wishful thinking. At this point in the text, Paul doesn't really take time to answer all the objections. He simply delivers these four descriptions of those who will be known to be Lost with tears streaming down his face.

And now Paul turns his attention to those who belong to Heaven . . . and in like manner, he effectively describes them four different ways. First, he describes:

1. The place to which we belong

Notice verse 20 – Paul writes, *For our citizenship is in heaven.*

In other words, here's the great contrast that separates us.

Those who are lost cling to earth; those who are saved belong to heaven. People are either earth bound and earth focused – or heaven bound and heaven focused.

The word **citizenship** is from the noun *politeuma* – which gives us the transliterated words, politics . . . politician . . . metropolis.ⁱⁱⁱ

In fact, the Greek word for *city* is *polis*. Caesar Augustus had conferred on Philippi the impressive status as a colony of Rome – and they were proud citizens of Rome, though miles away from the capitol city.

When a baby was born in Philippi, it was important that his or her name was registered in the legal records. If you look over at chapter 4 and the end of verse 3, Paul refers to this custom by referring to the names of believers being written in the book of life – the registry of Heaven.

Paul is drawing from their culture and applying to the believer some wonderful similarities:

- the people of Philippi were loyal subjects to their emperor
- they were registered citizens in the roll book of Rome

- their city was an extension of Rome;
- the believer is a loyal subject to his Emperor – Jesus Christ;
- we are registered citizens in the roll book of Heaven – having been born again by faith in Christ –
- the church is to be an extension and a representation of Heaven.^{iv}

Or to put it another way; the Christian has been assigned by God as an ambassador, to an embassy – the local church – which is located in a foreign country, representing the interests of the home country. ***Your citizenship is in heaven.***

Sam Gordon wrote, “You live on planet earth, but you belong to another world. You set up your tent here, but you don’t put down roots here. Christians are not vagabonds, without a home; we are not fugitives, on the run from home; we are pilgrims, traveling home.”^v

So listen, whenever you travel and wherever you travel through life – don’t forget to carry along your mental passport. You are representing another country as you travel through this one. You are a citizen of Heaven.

2. Secondly, Paul goes on to describe the Person for whom we wait

Verse 20 again; For our citizenship is in heaven, - now notice – from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Listen, for the believer, heaven isn’t just about a place, it’s about a Person. And the believer is eagerly awaiting Him.

And for whom are we waiting? Paul describes the Person we’re waiting to see by listing a host of titles for Him.

He’s ***Christ*** – *christos* – the word for anointed Messiah. He’s ***Savior***. A rare term for Paul – only a dozen times in his letters; most Bible scholars believe it could be the simple fact that this was one of Caesar’s favorite titles for Rome had bestowed on Caesar the title, *Savior of the world*.^{vi}

Roman coins during the days of Paul bore the image of the reigning emperor and all the coins minted in Greek-speaking regions often bore this title, *Savior*.^{vii}

Add to that the next title – also given to the emperor – the title *kurios* – or ***Lord***. During times of disaster – earthquakes, famine, times of war – the empire looked to their Lord and Savior to rescue them – to save them.^{viii}

What Paul is effectively contrasting is the fact that those bound to earth have a Savior and Lord and the believer has his Savior and Lord – as if to ask the question – which Savior and Lord would you rather have?

But listen, Paul was a scholar of Old Testament scripture. He knew exactly what he was doing as he referred to Jesus with these titles – it would have been staggering to the Jew, especially.

Listen to this text from their revered prophet Isaiah – and as you listen, you’ll recognized statements and titles that Paul has already used in his letter to the Philippians. Listen to ***Isaiah; Surely, God is with you, and there is none else, no other God . . . O God of Israel, Savior! Turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other . . . to Me every knee will bow and every tongue will confess allegiance; they will say of Me, “Only in the Lord are righteousness and strength” (Isaiah 45:14-15; 22-24).***

Listen to the parallels . . .

God is our Savior – Isaiah 45:14

Jesus Christ is our Savior – Philippians 3:20

God is the Lord/Jehovah – Isaiah 45:24

Jesus Christ is Lord/Jehovah – Phil. 3:20; 2:12

And before this Savior and Lord, one day every knee will bow and every tongue confess the truth of His glory; Isaiah 45:23 & Philippians 2:11

It’s as if Paul tells all of them – and all of us – We have an infinitely better Savior than Caesar; He’s bringing us something Rome . . . and Washington . . . and Beijing . . . and London cannot supply – we’re going to the place where we truly belong; to be united eternally with the Person for whom we eagerly await.

And now, follow this . . . because Jesus is more than a prophet or a priest or a good man or a great teacher – because He is the incarnation of Jehovah Himself and the sovereign Lord of all that is – He is capable of pulling off something incredibly miraculous that will affect every one of us whose names are in the registry of Heaven.

3. Paul now describes the promise to which we cling

Let's start back at verse 20 and get a running start toward this incredible promise; For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21. Now notice, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Whoa, slow down. See what happens when I read a whole verse at one time – it's just too much.

I imagine the Philippians, had they not yet learned of the future resurrection of their bodies from the grave –

- or if they were living, the immediate transformation of their bodies at the rapture of the Church –
- a transformation from mortality to immortality – from weakness to strength – from dust to shining glory –
- had they not read the letters to the Corinthians yet or the letters to the Thessalonians which described in detail this transformation –
- if those letters hadn't circulated their way yet –
- they would no doubt at this point shout out for the reader of this letter in the assembly at Philippi to stop –
- and repeat what he'd just read – only slower.

We eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; 21.who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory (how?! Is this just wishful thinking? Is this pie in the sky? Oh no – here's how) by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Who is it that experienced power over death and the grave? Who is it that demonstrated the activity of a resurrected body? Who is it that revealed the brilliance of a transfigured body? Who better to perform the miracle of transformation for all who believe? Jesus Christ – our Savior and Lord.

The verb ***transform*** here envisions a dramatic, supernatural event when Christ will change the form of our body from lowly or humble to glorious.^{ix}

How? ***By the exertion of the power that He has*** – listen, this would be pie in the sky if Jesus Christ did not have all the omnipotent, omniscient and

omnipresent attributes of none other than Creator God.

And notice carefully here – Paul is looking forward to the transformation of his current body. In other words, God isn't going to discard Paul's body, or yours either; God is going to transform Paul's body.^x

We don't know how He'll do it – I mean exactly how the dust and ashes and bone fragments of millions of believers that would be scattered all around the world and throughout the oceans of the world; we don't know how, but we do know WHO.

And because He is omniscient, He knows where every strand of DNA resides – every atom and every cell. And Paul says here our immortal bodies will be conformed to the likeness of the Lord's glorified body.

That's a big clue. The Gospels record for us that when Jesus Christ was resurrected, there was a continuity of His physical body; His physical appearance – in fact, He had even chosen to keep the scars in His hands and in His side. And He of course remembered events and names from his pre-glorified life.

So when you receive your glorified body there will be a continuity of DNA – a continuity of physical form – a continuity of memory – a continuity of personality. It will all be perfected in glory, but you will still be uniquely you.^{xi}

If you die as Susan, you won't wake up as Cindy . . . or Frank.

And if you die as Frank, you won't wake up as Bill, or Cindy.

If you were tall dark and handsome like me – you're glorified body will be the same – you will be you – only glorified and immortalized and perfected without a sin nature.

Is this wishful thinking? John the Apostle wrote, ***We shall be like Him because we shall see Him as He is (I John 3:2).***

The angels told the disciples as they watched Jesus ascend through the clouds in ***Acts 1:11 – This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.***

In other words, the body the disciples saw after Jesus' resurrection is the same body that will be seen when He returns for them and the rest of the church.^{xii}

Which means – among other things – the body of Jesus that went back to Heaven 2,000 years ago – if

He came back in the clouds for us today– His body would not have aged one second more.

What else do we know about our future immortal bodies? Jesus preached that the believers, ***Will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father (Matthew 13:43).***

How brightly will you shine – I mean, is that even literal? It is absolutely literal; in fact, we have a glimpse from the biography of Moses of what happens when you're in the presence of God's glory; ***Exodus 34*** reveals Moses' encounter with the glory of God and as a result his own physical body experienced just a taste of transformation. The face of Moses literally shone so brightly he had to wear a veil because he was blinding the eyes of the Israelites.

When the three disciples saw the glory of the resurrected and transfigured Lord on the mountain top – and it was just for a few moments that the Lord revealed to them His transfigured body – the prototype glorified body that we have been promised – Matthew records that ***the face of Jesus shone like the sun and His clothing became as white as brilliant light (Matthew 17:1-3).***

You, beloved, will one day be a shining immortal in the kingdom of God – your face will shine like the sun and your clothing will blaze with brilliant light.

Oh this promise is so much more than not having aches and pains and bunions and arthritis . . . your body which is now temporary, weak and sinful will be transformed in the power of His presence and you will become brilliant, sinless, glorious and never ending.

Now . . . think for a moment about what it means for Jesus Christ to take the dust of bodies that have died thousands of years ago – and reconstitute and refashion and transform who you were into who you will become forever.

God isn't going to discard your body – He's going to transform your body. So in that transformation, Jesus Christ will create and craft again by, Paul writes, exerting the power that He has.

Only this time He'll work with material on hand that he has for all of us – much like He created Eve – with material on hand. Genesis 2 informs us that He created Eve by using a rib from Adam.

God took a rib:

- not something from Adam's head, as if she should rule over him;

- not something from Adam's feet, as if he should trample on her;
- but from Adam's rib – as if to say, she belongs at his side.

I love that kid I read about who was running around the yard and he developed a cramp in his side and he ran in the house and said, "Mommy, I think I'm having a wife."

Before I leave this idea of the divine attributes of Christ in this miraculous recreation of you and me; one medical doctor provoked my thinking when he wrote, "the body contains perhaps as many of 100 trillion cells. Each one of them carry's out thousands of different chemical reactions. Thus a resurrection would require phenomenal power to energize life into all these individual cells, but it would have to do so in such a way that specialized nerve cells could resume their unique function; heart cells to perform theirs, blood cells and bone cells and so on.

At death, he writes, all these cells not only halt, but they crumble into microscopic dust; thus, a bodily resurrection would require that thousands of processes in trillions of cells must be put back together and then restarted all at once; this would require not just incredible power, but also unimaginable knowledge. It is still a mystery how the cells in our bodies interact . . . Jesus Christ will have to know all of the information in trillions of cells in each of our bodies and then have the power to refashion all of it – and then restart all of us, all in same split second.^{xiii}

Paul writes it this way to the Corinthians, ***"in the twinkling of an eye . . . (blink – that's how fast) the dead shall be raised imperishable . . . this mortal will put on immortality . . . and we shall all be changed (1 Corinthians 15:50-54).***

I think this is what Paul implies when he writes that all things are subject to Himself (verse 21) – that is, every molecule; every cell; every atom; every strand of DNA; every element; from the microscopic to the gigantic – everything will be transformed by Jesus Christ.

- **This is place to which we belong,**
- **This is the Person for whom we wait**
- **This is the promise to which we cling**

And in the meantime, fourthly, this is

4. The priority on which we stand

Chapter 4 and verse 1 belongs in this paragraph – verse 2 begins a new paragraph.

Paul is now summarizing with a principle of application: **4:1 – Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long to see, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.**

Don't waver . . . don't give up . . .

- no matter what Caesar throws at you
- no matter what Rome puts your through
- No matter what your body can no longer do
- No matter the struggles you face and the opposition you encounter
- No matter the sin you struggle with and the battle than never seems to get any easier
- No matter the challenges and corruptions around you –

Stand firm

- There's a place where you're going to end up
- There's a Person who might come for you at any moment
- There's a promise that you can't even imagine – of what you are going to become

You belong to Heaven; You're going to Heaven; You're going to be given a new body for Heaven You're waiting even now to be taken to Heaven by the Lord of Heaven.

Are you one of those Known to be Lost? Or are you one of those Known to be Saved? At the end of your life, this categorization will be the only one that matters.

- It won't matter where you slept on board the Titanic;
- How much food you got to eat;
- How much money you had in your pocket;
- How important you were in the eyes of other people
- How many friends you had on board
- Where your family stayed
- Or even how healthy you were on the voyage

What will matter when the ship of your human history ends her voyage – is whether your name was written in the registry of Earth – and you are among those forever lost; of if your name was written by faith in Christ into the registry of Heaven; and you will forever be among those who are saved.

And one day – glorified . . . perfected . . . sinless . . . immortal . . . shining forever like the brilliant light of the sun . . . worshipping forever the glorious majesty of the Son – of God.

Listen, Heaven is not wishful thinking . . . it is not pie in the sky - in fact, one day, Heaven will take the cake.

So unimaginably glorious, Heaven will take the cake!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 2/28/2016 by Stephen Davey.

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ⁱ Adapted from Nitasha Tiku, *Billionaires Will Disrupt Death If It's The Last Thing They Do*, Valley Wag (8-22-13)

ⁱⁱ Daniel Silliman, *How the Church Gave B.B. King the Blues*, The Washington Post (5-15-15).

ⁱⁱⁱ R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians* (Crossway, 2007), p. 158

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- iv Adapted from Warren W. Wiersbe, Be Joyful: Philippians (Victor Books, 1978), p. 105
- v Adapted from Sam Gordon, An Odyssey of Joy: The Message of Philippians (Ambassador, 2004), p. 141
- vi Temper Longman III & David E. Garland; General Editors: The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 12 (Zondervan, 2006), p. 250
- vii Dennis E. Johnson, Philippians (P & R Publishing, 2013), p. 238
- viii Ibid
- ix G. Walter Hansen, The Letter to the Philippians (Apollos, 2009), p. 27
- x Ibid, p. 273
- xi Adapted from Hansen, p. 273
- xii John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians (Moody Bible Institute, 1984), p. 439
- xiii Adapted from Thomas A. Miller, Did Jesus Really Rise from the Dead? (Crossway, 2013), p. 133