

"PERSPECTIVE"

Heb 12:12-29

June 9, 1996

What's the goal of your life?

Seriously, "What's the goal of your life?"

What are you living, working, investing to accomplish?

Get into a certain kind of a job or profession?

Obtain a comfortable amount of money?

Live in a particular part of the world or a certain kind of house?

Retire early and travel?

Experience a lot of exciting adventures?

Come on, engage me - what is your goal in life?

What are you striving for ?

What would you most like to be known for?

If you ever dream of being known for one particular thing - what would it be?

to be known as a great athlete? - like Michael Jordan?

to be known as very intelligent? - like Bill Gates of Microsoft Corp.

to be known as a person of great compassion? - like Mother Theresa

to be a person with a phenomenal voice? - like Pavoratti or Whitney Houston?

To what do you aspire?

Most of us dream, or at least have dreamed, of being extra good at something or being recognized for something in life.

If you overheard others talking about you and they described you the way you most want to be described, what would they say?

"Above everything else he (or she) is..." what?

Or they would say, "His(her) greatest goal in life is to..." what?

I think the answers to those questions, "what is your greatest goal in life"

and "what would you want to be known for" are most easily answered when we determine what we most value in life.

I would suppose we most value what we think is most valuable-
 what will last the longest, what will give us the most pleasure,
 what will most likely meet our needs.

If most valuable to us, is the positive opinion of us by others, we will likely do whatever it takes to gain their approval.

If most valuable to us, is the freedom to go to the places we want to go and buy the things we want to buy then we will likely do whatever it takes to get the necessary money.

What is most valuable to us is shaped by our perspective.

A little child has no perspective on tomorrow and what saving and waiting can bring, so a gumball machine in front of his eyes and 25cents in his hand look far more valuable than anything you can tell him.

Our perspective shapes what we consider most valuable.

So again, what is most valuable to you in life? What is your goal?
 What would you most want to be known for?

Do you believe in God?

What God do you believe in?

Do you believe in the God who created everything? - Who is in control of everything?

Do you believe in the God who has given his laws by which people are to live?

Do you believe in the God who will hold people accountable for the way they act?

Do you believe in the God who will draw history to a close and open a new age in which only some people will experience his love and grace?

If you truly believe in that God it will have serious implications for what you say you most value in life.

It will have important ramifications for what you say is your goal in life.
It will affect what you want to be known for!

I can say it another way, "What we value most in life, what we are living for, and what we most want to describe us - reveals the God we believe in.

Again, "What is your goal in life?" and "What do you most want to describe you?"

The author of the letter to the Hebrew Christians wrote to them these words: "Be holy for without holiness no one will see the Lord!"

In that sentence he captured what over and over again in the Bible we are told about the Christian's goal in life and the characteristic by which true Christians most want to be known:

We want to know God and we want to be holy for he is holy.

Have you ever thought of it that way?

More than anything else in life, I want to know God.

That is more valuable to me than career, or health, or possessions.

Have you ever thought of it that way?

When people described you the thing you most would want them to say is, "Above all else he (she) is HOLY."

When I think of Michael Jordan I think awesomely athletic.

When I think of Bill Gates I think brilliant and rich.

And when I think of you, I think "holy".

The people to whom the letter we call "Hebrews" was written were people who professed to be Christians.

In a world of pagans and Jews these people like a minority elsewhere in the known world accepted the teachings of Jesus and called themselves Christians.

But in addition to the great personal benefit they derived from experiencing the grace of forgiveness and peace with God - they also began to experience great persecution.

Neither the Jews out of whose families most of these Christians had come nor the Romans with their wholly different religion wanted anything to do with Christians except exterminate them - if possible.

To become a Christian meant the loss of family in many cases but it also, at times, meant the loss of jobs, homes, and even lives.

It was one thing to be a Christ-follower when things were going well in life but when the roof began to cave in - that was another matter.

Striving to be like Christ, working to live in obedience to his will, aiming at holiness in their lives was o.k. until the price went up.

Being a Christ-follower became too hard, too costly.

They were being asked to give up too much to be a Christian.

To answer the question this Author/Pastor to the Hebrews gives them
PERSPECTIVE!

And in a sense after giving that perspective he asks them to decide for themselves - Since what I am telling you is true, do you think following Christ is worth it?

He uses an example from a long time ago to illustrate a person who doesn't have the right perspective and the consequences of that.

Esau was the firstborn but twin brother of Jacob.

These two sons were born to Isaac and Rebekah.

Because Esau was the firstborn, centuries old cultural law said that he would get by far the largest share of his father's estate when Isaac died.

But even more significantly Esau would become the leader of the family.

To his grandfather Abraham and to his father Isaac God had given the promise that out of their family God would make a

great nation and bless all the peoples of the world.

But the Genesis account of what happened informs us that Esau "despised" those rights of the firstborn.

That means he didn't think of them as valuable but as worthless!

The Hebrews text, like the Genesis one, tells us that for a single meal he sold his birthright.

They were of such little value to him that he sold them for a bowl of soup.

He came in from the field hungry and consistent with his brash, devil-may-care, attitude and consistent with his think-with-his-belly logic - he agreed when his brother Jacob offered to feed him if he would give up his firstborn birthrights.

Here was the prototype of modern godlessness -

The here and now is all that counts.

According to verse 16 this man's perspective was limited to the next meal and the next female.

I don't think it helps to paint this man as an uncouth slob - the point is that even if he had been sophisticated, he lacked perspective.

He made his decisions on what is most valuable in life from what he could see or feel, what he could reason out, and what was right before him.

Worst of all, he didn't believe God!

A bowl of soup was more valuable to him than God's promise of the future.

And when he finally woke up to the problem, it was too late.

Esau was an example of what God didn't want his people to do.

He didn't want them thinking with their bellies, their nerve endings, or

their natural perceptions -
 he wanted them to have a much broader perspective by which
 to decide what is most important in life.

This he sets out to do in the next verses.

I want you to compare verses 18 and 22.

In V18 he says "You have NOT come to" something.

And in V22 he says, "You HAVE come to" something else.

In both verses the "something" to which they "have not" or "have" come is a mountain.

In V18 it is obvious from the description that this mountain is Mt. Sinai where God gave the Law.

And in V22 it specifically says it is Mt Zion - the hill on which Jerusalem is situated.

But according to this same verse (22) the earthly Mt Zion is only a symbol of the real Mt Zion the author has in mind - In this case Mt Zion is a euphemism for the coming Kingdom of God.

But again it is obvious that he intends to contrast these two mountains.

The first one, Mt Sinai, can be touched - it is tangible and temporal.

The second one, Mt Zion can't be touched - it is heavenly and it is eternal.

The words in vv18-20 are clearly a reference to the giving of the Law at Mt Sinai.

What the Israelites got there was an experience of God that did little more than frighten them nearly to death.

And what they got there was the law of God that showed them how unholy they truly were.

Mt Sinai gave them a view of the holiness of God and a view of their own sinful-unholiness.

By those two things alone the people would be condemned not saved.

I think the point is that you Hebrews don't want to build your perspective on the basis of Mt Sinai.

If you determine what is most valuable to you on what can be touched, on the here and now - only on the things you can see with your own eyes you will miss it.

Like Esau you will lose.

BUT in v22, the author says, you have NOT come to that mountain, you have come to a different mountain.

You have come into the kingdom of God.

In verses 22-23 we are given a picture of the future.

Do you remember that earlier I asked, "What is your goal in life?" I also said your goal in life will be determined by what you consider most valuable.

This word picture painted in verses 22&23 is intended to give the Hebrews and us such an accurate perspective of the future that we will not build our lives around the temporal, the tangible (the Mt Sinai) but around the eternal, the yet intangible, the real.

What God shows us is a place where he lives.

He shows us a place where thousands upon thousands of angels are gathered together and joy characterizes their attitudes and conduct.

This is a grand celebration - there is an air of exuberance, of excitement, - this couldn't get any better.

In this place are gathered not only angels but "the church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven."

These are all the believers, you and me - we are right in the middle of all that celebration.

And as we already noted but again it is stated in V23, we are in the

presence of the living God, "the judge of all men".

The God who is sovereignly Lord over all is there.

And the fact that he is the "judge" is not frightening but reassuring to the Christian - because we stand no longer condemned.

And at the end of v23 we find that all the saints of all the ages are present in this place.

Millions and millions from every tribe, tongue and race are gathered together in the presence of the living God.

And most importantly there is Jesus - the one who mediated, who brought us and God together.

There is Jesus who by his blood cleansed us from our sin - forgave it.

And the blood of Jesus doesn't speak of vengeance like Abel's blood but it speaks forgiveness.

Listen carefully to Revelation 21:1-4 and see if your mind's eye doesn't capture the same picture. READ

Do you believe that?!

Let me ask you again, "Do you believe that?!"

Does that vision shape your life?

Is that perspective so valuable that it dictates what is most important to you?

Have you noticed who is at the exact center of that picture?

It is God.

If that picture is truly a picture of the future, what could possibly be more important or more exciting than knowing God and being holy like he is holy?

The Bible says we were made to know God.

Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that they may know God and Jesus Christ whom the Father has sent."

J.I. Packer wrote: "Once you become aware that the main business that you are here for is to know God, most of life's problems fall into place of their own accord." (Knowing God p29)

He went on to say that for too many life is either a great big problem or it is a great bore.

"What makes life worth while is having a big enough objective, something which catches our imagination and lays hold of our allegiance;

"And this the Christian has, in a way no other person has. For what higher, more exalted and more compelling goal can there be than to know God?" (Knowing God p30)

Like Esau we spend too much of life being enamored of goals and activities that don't matter.

We are wholly distracted by the immediate.

We are too easily pleased with the temporary that we miss out on the eternal.

We want a bowl of soup today more than we want a feast tomorrow.

And we take the bowl of soup because we don't believe God!

Will you please now look at V25.

God, in these verses, not only gives us a picture of the future but he also gives a warning.

I am convinced there are millions of people in the evangelical churches of America who have been snookered by a perversion of a teaching called "eternal security".

There are too many who are truly convinced that once they ask Jesus into their hearts, as they put it, or they get saved, it doesn't matter what they do after that - they are guaranteed a place in heaven.

The Bible does not teach that.

The Bible teaches that those who truly belong to Christ will persevere - they will remain faithful to Jesus Christ - they will walk in obedience to his will.

The warning of these verses is to those in the church who so thoroughly misunderstand what being a Christ-follower is that they miss the grace of God.

Look at verses 15-16a. READ

Look with me to Deut 29:18-19. (don' read yet)

Just as in many evangelical churches so here in Israel there were some who thought that going through the motions of saying the words of the covenant was all there was to it.

READ 29:18-19

Those who are true Israel, those who are true Christians will follow Christ.

Now back to Heb 12:25 -

If we refuse the grace of God to forgive our sins AND the grace to lead us into a life of holiness in following Jesus Christ, we will not escape any more than those Israelites did back in the wilderness and any more than Esau did.

The author concludes by reminding us that the God who shook Mt Sinai as noted in verses 18-20 is the same God who in (verse 26) will not only shake the mountain but everything.

Everything we now see, touch, hear, taste, and smell will be removed.

Peter wrote, "The day of the Lord will come like a thief.

The heavens will disappear with a roar;

the elements will be destroyed by fire,

the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.

That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire,

and the elements will melt in the heat."

If life on this earth or anything in it is your goal than your future will go up in smoke.

"Our God is a consuming fire!"

"But we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken."

or as Peter said it, "But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of the righteous."
(2Pt3:10ff)

Do you believe that?

NO, Do you really believe that?

Does that truth shape the goal of your life?

Do you desire more than anything else to be a holy person ready for the coming of the Lord?

Is the goal of your life to know God?

If it is then as it says in V28 we will become thankful people rather than bitter, complaining people.

"We will worship God acceptably with reverence and awe."

And this worship clearly is a worship not just of the lips but of the life.

It will be worth it all! Look at the future for those who are Christ-followers!

Prayer

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