

Christians, how much does heaven mean to you? What price would you be willing to pay if it meant having heaven? That's the question that Ezekiel asks us today in the Old Testament reading, a question that we should consider especially on this All Saints Day when we remember those who have gone before us, some of whom have paid a great price for the kingdom of heaven. So how much does heaven mean to you? And what price would you be willing to pay?

Because Ezekiel in our Old Testament reading lived during and after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. And despite all of his warnings, the people of Israel refused to listen. They wanted to do things their own way. They wanted to continue in their sins. And so Ezekiel saw a vision of God leaving the temple, heading towards the east. He was leaving behind the place where he had been because of the sins of his people, because he meant so little to Israel. And he points us to these sins in our reading for today, especially in verse 7, where he says: "And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their whoring, and by the dead bodies of their kings at their high places, by setting their threshold by my threshold, and their doorposts beside my doorposts, with only a wall between me and them. They have defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed, so I have consumed them in my anger."

And so Israel was showing just how little God meant to them by these sins. God meant so little to Israel that they were whoring after other gods. If God was their husband, Israel was like a faithless wife going after other men, seeking after other lovers, and not being faithful to the one to whom she belonged. That's how little God meant to them. God meant so little to Israel that their kings were building their tombs at the high places, the places where these false gods were being worshiped. Even in death, the kings were showing their allegiance to gods other than the Lord. Because that's how little God meant to them. And God meant so little to Israel that they were building right next to the temple, putting their threshold by his threshold, their doorpost by his doorpost, with only a wall in between them. In other words, they were treating the temple like any other building. It wasn't special. It wasn't God's house. It was just something that they had to build around. And so they treated it as if it was their own house, and they treated God as if he was nothing special. Because that's how little God meant to them. And for these reasons then, God left the temple. Left it behind because he meant so little to his people.

But Ezekiel also saw another vision fourteen years after the destruction of the temple. And in that vision, he saw a new temple, a perfect temple, a heavenly temple, something far greater than anything that could be built on earth. What Ezekiel saw was a vision of what God was going to do for his people. You could call it an Old Testament vision of heaven. And in this vision, Ezekiel saw God coming back from the east, returning back to his people, returning back to his temple, going into that temple and dwelling there, never to depart again. Because God was going to show Israel just how important he was to them, and what he had waiting for those who were faithful to him.

And that's why we hear the purpose of this vision in verse 10, where it says: "As for you, son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and they shall measure the plan." When they heard about Ezekiel's vision, they would come to repent. They would turn away from their sins, because they would see what God had promised for those who are faithful to him. They would see the glory of what was to come. And they

would realize in that moment that all the things of this world are nothing in comparison with what God has prepared for those who love him.

So Christians, I ask you again: how much does heaven mean to you? What price would you be willing to pay if it meant gaining heaven? Now, of course, heaven is not something that we earn. Heaven is a free gift of God. But how much does that gift mean to you? Because how much you are willing to do or not do for the sake of that gift says much more than just your words.

Is heaven worth your life? If following after Jesus meant that you had to die, even a very horrible death, would you be willing to pay it? Or do you find yourself flinching and hesitating, wondering if there's any way that we could possibly get out of it? How much does heaven mean to you?

Is heaven worth going to prison? If saying the right thing or doing the right thing meant you had to go to jail, that you would lose your freedom, would you do it? Or do you find yourself wanting to keep your freedom, even giving in if that's what it means to avoid going to prison? How much does heaven mean to you?

Is heaven worth your job? If following after God or listening to what he has to say meant you had to lose your job, would you be willing to pay it? Or do you find yourself wanting to keep that job at all costs, because that's what you want? How much does heaven mean to you?

Is heaven worth your reputation? If following after Jesus meant that people would hate you and that you would even lose relationships with your own family, are you willing to do that? Or do you find yourself trying to downplay these things so that people will like you, so that you can get along with everybody? How much does heaven mean to you?

Is heaven worth your comfort? If Jesus meant you had to lose your entertainment, if Jesus meant you had to lose your home, if Jesus meant you had to lose your warm bed, would you be willing to pay it? Or do you find yourself wanting to always be comfortable, no matter what that costs? How much, Christians, does heaven mean to you?

And as you consider that question, I want you to think about those who have gone before us. Those who have gone before us and died in the faith, especially the martyrs, those who have given everything, even their very lives, for the sake of the kingdom. Think of a martyr like Stephen, who was stoned to death because of Jesus. Think of a martyr like Polycarp, who was burned at the stake simply because he was a Christian. Think of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, who were left out on a cold winter night to freeze to death because they followed after Jesus. And think of all the numerous martyrs who were beheaded, who were hung, who were shot, who were starved to death, and died in lots of different and horrible ways, all for the sake of the Gospel.

And yet in the midst of that, they could still pray for their persecutors, calling on God to forgive them, to not hold that sin against them. And even in the midst of all of that, they could stand unmoving, unyielding, even though there was great pressure for them to just give in and it would all go away. And even in the midst of being tortured, they could sing and laugh, even in the

midst of all of it. Well, why? How could they do these things? Because, Christians, they knew that heaven is worth the cost. They knew that no matter what they were suffering through right now, what God had promised them in the life to come was far greater than anything that they had lost. They could face all things without wavering, because God was going to give them far more than they had lost. Because what is death, knowing that heaven awaits those who are faithful to God?

So Christians, heaven is indeed worth any cost that we may have to pay. There is no price too great, because it will all seem like nothing in comparison with what is to come. Because consider what God promises to those who are faithful to him in our epistle reading for today, from Revelation chapter 7, where we hear in verse 13: "Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?' I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb.'" It was a picture of those who had suffered much for the sake of the kingdom, those who had lost everything, whether their lives, their reputation, their possessions, their families, whatever it may be. They had suffered much for Jesus. And yet look at what is promised to them: "Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple. And he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore. The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Their suffering has ended, Christians. The things they have gone through are gone, and the joy of heaven goes on forever. There will be no more hunger. There will be no more thirst. There will be no more pain. There will be no more suffering. There will be no more death, because God has made all things new!

And more than this still, as we hear in Revelation 22: "No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads." We will see God's face, Christians. We will see Jesus with our own two eyes. What could be possibly greater than that? To see Jesus with our own eyes and to hear him say: "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful in a little. I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master!" What is anything that we suffer now, any cost that we pay now in comparison with seeing our Lord face to face forever?

So Christians, let us stand firm and not waver. Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. Because no matter what it costs us right now, heaven's worth it. And even if we have to suffer now, we will see Jesus face to face, and that is worth anything that we go through now.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have promised us heaven in your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us to remain steadfast even unto death, following after those who gone before us, knowing that you will take care of us in all things, and that the glory of what is to come will far exceed anything that we suffer in this life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.