

“Better Than Christmas”

Franklin Church of Christ
Edwin Crozier
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AM Worship

Introduction:

I want to tell you about a conversation I had with Tessa about three Decembers ago. Marita had gone to the store. Ryan was in his crib asleep. Tessa, Ethan and I were out in the front yard admiring the lights we had put out and having fun chasing one another around with Ethan's toy light sabers. Out of the blue Tessa said something along the lines of, "I miss Granddaddy Crozier. I want to talk to him again." "Me too," I replied. She went on to say, "I wish the Judgment Day would come soon, so I can see him again." "Me too," I replied. She said, "I wish the Judgment Day would happen every day, so he could come back and I could see him every day." I said, "Tessa, the Judgment Day happens only once." Before I could explain that after the Judgment Day Granddaddy Crozier would be alive forever, she exclaimed, "What? But what happens if I die after the Judgment Day, does that mean I won't ever come back to life?" At this point, I decided that the fatherly thing to do was read the Bible to her and discuss what it said. We opened up to **I Thessalonians 4:13-18** and I explained to her that on the Judgment Day, those who are dead will come back to life and those who are alive will simply be changed and go to be with the Lord in heaven. "But I don't want to do that." "You don't want to go to heaven?" I asked. "No, because then I won't be in my house with Mommy and Daddy and Ethan and Ryan." I responded, "Sweetie, we won't need to be in our house, we will all be together in heaven with God." "But, Daddy, we won't have any of our pictures there." "Honey, we won't need any pictures there. We will all be together." "But, Daddy, we won't have Christmas anymore in heaven." And so, I replied, "Do you like Christmas?" "Yes sir." "You think Christmas is cool?" "Yes sir." "Can you think of anything better than Christmas?" "No sir." "Well, guess what, heaven is better than Christmas." "But Daddy, I like Christmas because we get to open presents and we have a tree with lights ..." I interrupted her and said, "I know it is hard to grasp this, Tessa, you are just going to have to trust me on this one. Heaven is better than Christmas." You know what? I don't think she believed me. In her five and a half year old mind, she wondered how there could be anything better than Christmas. She saw and grasped Christmas but she didn't see or grasp heaven. So, at that point she did not want to go to heaven, she wanted Christmas. Tessa was five years old, so I was really not bothered by that. I like to think that as she grows up so will her concept of heaven. One day, she will understand heaven is better than Christmas. I will tell you, however, what does bother me. This struggle with heaven does not seem to disappear naturally with age. When I look at myself and those around me, it seems many of us, even in adulthood, struggle with heaven. It seems we all have our personal "Christmas" causing us to struggle with heaven. I do not know about anyone else, but I wonder why I have that mindset sometimes and what I can do about it.

Discussion:

- I. Lack of details about heaven.
 - A. What do I know about heaven? I know God is in heaven (**Matthew 6:9**). I know righteousness dwells there (**II Peter 3:13**). I know there is an inheritance reserved there for Christians, so my brethren will be there (**I Peter 1:4**). I know heaven is going to be a rest (**Hebrews 4:11**). I know it is eternal (**I Thessalonians 4:17**). I know God says it is better than anything down here and worth any suffering I will go through (**Romans 8:18**).
 - B. Perhaps I could find a few more passages to go along with these. But God did not provide a lot of details about heaven. I think that causes me to struggle sometimes. I have a hard time picturing what I am striving for. But I have lots of details about my "Christmas" down here. In the end, what I have is the assurance of a heavenly Father who looks at me and says, "Edwin, you are just going to have to trust me on this one. Heaven is better than Christmas."
- II. I am limited and distracted by what I see here on earth.
 - A. I have a finite capability to imagine what heaven is going to be like. I am limited by what I have seen here on the earth. I imagine the most beautiful and majestic sceneries. And yet, the only things I can envision are things which I have already seen here on earth. I believe this causes a struggle. Because I can envision all of these things right here on the earth.
 - B. This limitation can cause a distraction. There are lots of great things to see, handle and own here on the earth. When I look around, it is sometimes like Christmas everyday. It is a lot easier

to grasp those things, desire those things and strive for those things because—here they are. The great claim of the Christian is “We walk by faith, not by sight” (**II Corinthians 5:7**). But, I have to admit my sight too often intrudes on my faith and alters my walk. Like Tessa, I can see my “Christmas.” I do not have to imagine or walk by faith with it—here it is. Even though I cannot see heaven or even imagine it, my heavenly Father assures me saying, “Edwin, you are just going to have to trust me on this one. Heaven is better than Christmas.”

III. I do not know what I am going to do there.

- A. I remember being asked by a friend about what we are going to do in heaven. At the time, I responded based on what I had seen in **Revelation 4-5**, speaking of worshipping God for eternity. And I am certain that is going to happen. But is heaven an eternal worship service around the throne? I am not so certain anymore. I have read the parable in **Luke 16:11-12**. As Jesus talked about what will happen in judgment, He talked about being entrusted with true riches and being given what is our own. I do not know what that means. And so, I have to answer that question now by saying I simply do not know exactly what we will do in heaven.
- B. I think that causes a struggle. Because it is unknown, it is hard for me to get my mind around it and be captivated by it. I know what is going on down here. I know how this life works. I know, in general, what to expect. Therefore, it is too easy just to focus on the “Christmases” in this life. But my heavenly Father continues to assure me, “Edwin, you are just going to have to trust me on this one. Heaven is better than Christmas.”

IV. I do not know how it is going to work.

- A. We all have all kinds of questions about what it is going to be like in heaven. Will we know one another? Will we know who is there and who is not? I think there is some indication we will retain our identities and be able to know one another. I read about what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration (**Mark 9:2-13**) when Jesus spoke with Elijah and Moses. If they were still Elijah and Moses and the three apostles were able to recognize them, I am relatively confident the same will be true about us after our deaths. But how is it going to work? I don’t know. How am I not going to be sad about those I know aren’t there? I don’t know.
- B. This causes some struggle with heaven. There is a certain amount of “unreality” in my mind. We struggle with things we cannot figure out. If I simply cannot tell how it is going to work, sometimes I am tempted to believe it must not work at all. But, my heavenly Father assures me, “Edwin, you are just going to have to trust me on this one. Heaven is better than Christmas.”

V. I simply have to trust my Father in heaven—Heaven is better than Christmas.

- A. If I am going to go to heaven, I know I have to have a picture in my mind that captivates me. I have to have something firmly entrenched in my mind that says I want to go there because of how great it is going to be. And yet, if there is one thing you have heard in this lesson, it is that it is hard to have a captivating picture of heaven. He has simply said, “You are going to have to trust me on this one. Heaven is better than Christmas.”
- B. I’ll tell you what does captivate me—the One who has asked me to trust Him. This is a Father who cannot lie (**Hebrews 6:18**), who gives good gifts (**Matthew 7:11**), whose ways are above my ways and whose thoughts are above my thoughts (**Isaiah 55:8-9**). He is a Father who has already demonstrated His great love and concern for me (**Romans 5:6-11**). When I consider who is asking me to trust Him, I am captivated. If this Father is telling me heaven is better than anything I can see, fathom, grasp or even imagine, then I am captivated to go there. I am willing to say I do not know the answers to all the questions I have in my mind about heaven. But I trust God and I want to go there and find out those answers. Frankly, I am ready to sacrifice all my “Christmases” to go there. I am just going to trust my heavenly Father on this one, heaven must be better than Christmas.

Conclusion:

What “Christmases” hinder you from wanting heaven above all other things? Consider our Father in heaven, do you think He would lie to you? He is telling you, “Heaven is better than Christmas.” Do not miss out on it.