

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH

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Heaven on Earth_ Ephesians 6

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On the afternoon of March 26, 1913, something curious happened in Columbus, Ohio. Around 4:30 in the afternoon, a man started running through town. It was discovered after the fact that he was running because he was running late for an appointment. Regardless of the reason a little boy started running after him and that's when someone is alleged to have yelled, the Storage Dam has burst. Classic case of crying wolf. The next thing you know, thousands of citizens are running who knows where who knows why. The next day the Columbus Citizen ran a story about this bizarre blip. Never before in the history of Columbus was there such a scene of panic through alleys, down stairways, out of windows. People hurried, shouted and fairly fought each other in their almost mad rush. Now that story was buried on page eight, probably out of embarrassment. In all fairness, the Midwest had just experienced torrential downpours, flash floods, had caused several levees to fail. Nonetheless, it was a false alarm. It was fake news. And here's the irony - even if the Storage Dam had burst, it was several miles out of town. So worst case scenario, they would have gotten their feet wet but that's about it. There was no need to panic. But what happened? They lost their sense of perspective. Now so easy to look back at an incident like this and kind of chuckle at those silly Colombians, right. We play Monday morning quarterback. But I think the same thing happens to us on a much larger scale. In fact, maybe it's happened in 2020.

Listen, fake news is as old as Eden. It's one of the tactics the enemy uses. Its one branch in this thing called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and it takes a lot of different forms. Advertisers use click bait to get us to think that we need what we want. Social media uses algorithms that keep us in our echo chambers and feed our confirmation bias. Entertainment occasionally will normalize sin and demonize truth and even the news media will occasionally stir the pot, right with whatever is going to be the most sensational story. Welcome to 2020. And that's the tip of the iceberg. If we ever needed a spirit of wisdom and Revelation, the gift of discernment, or an Issachar anointing it is now. We need to understand the times and know what we should do.

And so this weekend, we begin a series called heaven...we wrap up a series, wow has it been that long, we wrap up a series on Heaven on Earth. And what I want to do is pop the periscope and see if we can gain a little bit of perspective on where we are, when we are and who we are. And so let me do a quick recap. Over the last 13 weeks we have walked through the book of Ephesians verse by verse, day by day. First half reveals our identity, our destiny and our authority in the heavenly realm. The second half is about heaven invading Earth. And that's where we discover unity, maturity and security in Christ and in Christ is the key to the whole book. Paul uses this phrase 164 times in his 13 epistles, 36 times in the book of Ephesians. I'm in Christ; Christ is in me that is the hope of glory. And so Paul is writing that letter from a prison cell in Rome right around 62 AD.

But let me back up the bus. About a decade earlier Paul goes on these three missionary journeys, and he spends more time in Ephesus than any other city. In fact, he sets up shop in the lecture hall of Tyrannus five hours a day, six days a week for two years - that's 3,120 hours. This may be the most disciplined church in the ancient world.

Now week one of this series, I mentioned four distinctives that set the church apart. One, they practiced radical repentance, more on that a little bit later.

Two, they had a daily rhythm. Now, the only ceiling on your intimacy with God and impact on the world is daily spiritual disciplines. That's why we launched this thing called NCC Daily at the beginning of this series. By the way, it's going to continue, okay. We're going to begin a new series on Advent. You can sign up NCC.re/daily.

Three, they exercised moral courage by living counterculture.

And four they experienced unbelievable miracles, again, because of their radical repentance, daily rhythm and moral courage.

Can I suggest that the recipe for revival has not changed? If we do what they did in the Bible, God is going to do what he did. And so I pray Psalm 126. Do it again, Lord.

So week one, we hit the rewind button gave us some backstory from the book of Acts. What I want to do this weekend is fast forward almost four decades after Paul writes this letter. The Apostle John is on the Isle of Patmos, he gets this vision that we call the book of Revelation, writes seven letters to the seven churches. The first church is the church at Ephesus and so it's almost like we get a postscript to the letter. We get to check back in on this church at Ephesus and see how they're doing.

So ready or not, here we go. You can meet me at the back of your Bible, Revelation chapter two, verse one. "To the angel of the church in Ephesus..." Let me stop right there. Evidently, there are angels that are given unique assignments for unique places at unique times. Just as we have guardian angels, whose portfolios include protection and guidance, 'It's a Wonderful Life'. I know you're getting ready to watch it in about a month. This salutation seemed to suggest that there are angels who have a corporate responsibility over a defined geography. I mean, what is the message of Ephesians - we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities. It's why we need to put on the full armor of God like Dr. Foth talked about last weekend. I think all of that to say this; I think angels deserve a little bit more credit than they get okay. In the immortal words of Amy Grant "Angels watching over me every move I make Angels watching over me Angels watching over me every step I take Angels watching over me" Listen, if you're a child of the 80s you're singing it in your head right now.

By the way, did you see what Chris Nikic accomplished a few weeks ago? The first person with downs syndrome to complete an Ironman triathlon. He swam 2.4 miles, bike 112 miles, ran 26.2 miles in 16 hours and 46 minutes. And I love what Chris said after crossing the finish line. He said, "Goal set and achieved. Time to set a new and BIGGER Goal. Whatever it is the strategy is the same. 1% Better every day." I love that. And I love what Chris said next. "I did the work but I had angels helping me." Come on, come on, and I believe he did. I love the fact that Chris acknowledges the role that angels played in his accomplishment.

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand who goes among the seven golden lampstands which are the seven churches."

Can I just step back for a moment and say what a joy and privilege for Lora and I to lead this church for almost 25 years. Now that is a lot of water under the bridge and I can honestly say I wouldn't want to be anyplace else doing anything else. It was after a failed church plant attempt in Chicago when I was in seminary that we packed everything in a U-Haul made the move to Washington, DC. And God gave us a second chance called National Community Church and when he did I prayed a prayer God, would you give me the privilege of pastoring one church for life? You know what, I have no idea how long God is gonna allow us to lead this church but I am keenly aware, I want you to hear this - I'm an interim pastor. Every pastor is an interim pastor. It doesn't matter how long you lead. I'm an under shepherd. There is one Shepherd of this church and his name is Jesus. And he didn't say I will build your church. He didn't say you will build my church. He said, I, I will build my, my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. That's who we're talking about. The one who holds the seven stars in his right hand, it is his church.

Verse two, *"I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance."* This church is being you know, applauded right for blood, sweat and tears. They've got some bumps and bruises, some wear and tear, but they have stood the test of time, good old fashioned grit. The Ephesians get an A for effort and the applause continues. *"I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles, but are not, and have found them to be imposters and liars."*

A few weeks ago, I talked about biblical tolerance. It's giving other people the same measure of free will that God has given us. It's against my religion to impose my religion on anyone else. You know, I live by this little Oswald Chambers maxim, let God be as original with others as he was with me. That said, biblical tolerance is not putting a stamp of approval on anything that's outside the good, pleasing, perfect will of God. That would actually be called a sin of toleration. In fact, fast forward to verse 20, I think it is, and you can read a little bit more about it. It's calling something that is wrong, right and something that is right wrong. And there's a lot of that happening in our culture. So again, we need this spirit of wisdom of Revelation to discern what the difference between what is politically correct and what is biblically correct because they aren't always the same thing. We need the moral courage to live according to our convictions with compassion.

Verse four - *"I have this one thing against you."* All of these compliments look at all the things you're doing right, A for effort, A for truth. Ah, but what kind of grade are we getting for love? "I have this one thing against you. You have forsaken your first love." Paul flips the script. I think what happens and it happens to us you tell me is it not easy to at some point major in minors, minor in majors, you lose the forest for the trees and you kind of forget what the heart of the thing is. You learn how you forget why and we lose our first love. "No amount of activity in the king service," said G. Campbell Morgan, "will make up for neglect of the king."

First tenet of the Westminster catechism says, the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever". And I think we get the first half right. You're like, okay, I get it. You know, the goal is to glorify the one who created everything that is. It's the second half that I don't think we're as good at. In fact, we almost feel like it's wrong to enjoy God. No, no, no, no. How much are you enjoying God? That's a pretty good measure of your spiritual maturity. You know what I love being in the presence of my wife, Lora, I don't care what we're doing. I just love being with her. Okay. It's about loving someone's presence so much that no matter what you're doing that's who you want to be with. It's enjoying God's presence.

Eric Gilmour offers four barometers of first love. And why don't you just kind of take this as a little self evaluation right now and I'll give these four to you.

- Number one, nobody and nothing captivates your heart like God.
- Two, time with God, it's more important than anything else.
- Three, his words mean more to you than the words of others.
- And four, his desires mean more to you than your desires.

Here's the bottom line... If we aren't careful, we can relate to God for all of the wrong reasons. What are the wrong reasons? Well, it's anything besides love. So here's the bottom line, you are worth the cross to Christ. And newsflash, he doesn't just love you, he actually, are you ready for this? - likes you. He likes you and He loves you. And so how do we recapture that first love rekindle that first love?

Verse five. *"Remember the heights from which you have fallen. Repent and do what you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."*

Two keys to recovering first love remember and repent. Now, in social media, there is a phenomenon called doomscrolling or doomsurfing. It is consuming an ever increasing amount of negative news. Now I promise you I see the upside to social media. But I also see a dangerous downside, and I'm just gonna shoot straight, okay. I just I'm not convinced that we were created with the capacity emotionally,

intellectually or spiritually, to know everything about everything all the time. It's almost like we have eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We get a taste of omniscience like in real time but we don't have the capacity to process all of it, especially when it turns negative. Average person spends 142 minutes on social media that represents 15% of our waking hours. Now again, some of it adds value relationally and intellectually, but we're also being trolled, and shamed and baited and bullied and canceled. And instead of putting our phones down, we touch them on average, are you ready for this? 2617 times.

One third of Americans are depressed or anxious, 71%, angry, 66% fearful. I'm going to go out on a limb of that tree of the knowledge of good and evil and suggest that occasionally social media hurts more than it helps. All too often it feeds the fear, feeds the anger and even when it's a positive message that we care about, or a cause that is really, really important. Here's the downside risk there. We can tweet about it and think we actually did something about it. No, we've got to do better than that.

And so let me pop this periscope right here, and try to get some perspective. We have a tendency to remember what we should forget and forget what we should remember. And if you remember wrong, you lose perspective. And when you lose perspective, now we're living in the past, instead of living in the present, which is one of the enemy's tactics. We need to see the past from the far side of the cross from the far side of the empty tomb. That's how we regain our sense of perspective.

Let me lean into this just a little bit. If you want to regain a sense of perspective, which is what the writer of Revelation I think is aiming at; you need to remember two things. Okay? You need to remember the past and remember the future. What? Well, history is remembering the past, prophecy is remembering the future. You need to remember where you come from and where you are going otherwise, we're lost. We're like the pilot who comes over the intercom and says, I have some good news and some bad news. The bad news is we're lost. The good news is we're making great time. I think a lot of us fall into that trap. By the way, I love this story Foth told last week about the pilot who said, "We're not going down. We're going to Philly". That's what I'm talking about church, we are not going down his kingdom is going to come, his will is going to be done. Heaven is invading Earth right here, right now.

So one key is history. And I would suggest everything from church history to World History begins to give us perspective. And I'll give you an example; maybe I'll pick on politics. Yes, we are more polarized than ever. I cited those statistics a few weeks ago, but let me maybe put this in perspective as well. Between 1830 and in 1860 just a few blocks from where I preaching right now just a few blocks away 70 incidents of violence are you ready between members of Congress on the Capitol grounds or nearby streets a 70 assault and battery charges, including a few casualties. There were actually dueling grounds until 1839 when a law was passed by Congress to outlaw it in DC. So what did they do? They moved it north to Bladensburg, Maryland where they had dueling grounds. What? I mean, at least we're not doing that, I guess. And so well, Pastor Mark, what about COVID? What about COVID? I want you to hear me right here. I am not minimizing the impact. This has impacted all of us in profound ways.

But I also want to give some perspective. 100 years ago, 1919, Spanish Flu we've had in America, now about 12 million cases and about 250,000 deaths. Those are staggering numbers. 100 years ago, the Spanish flu, killed 50 million people. And that was on the heels of World War One, which claim 20 million civilians and soldiers. I mean, that was a mass devastation and this is devastating. But we've got to keep a sense of perspective. I think history helps us put this cultural moment into perspective. In the immortal words of George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." What does that have to do with this verse? I think the writer of Revelation is jogging their memory. May the Holy Spirit right now, jog your memory, back to those moments of radical repentance, of moral courage, back to those moments of unbelievable miracles where God moved in your life. He's exercising their muscle memory; we need to go back to those moments where we're on fire for God like nothing compared with being in his presence, being in His Word where we crave the Holy Spirit. May God help us remember those moments that we would be motivated by God's love for us and our love for God above all else.

And so we need to know history but we also need to know prophecy. What is prophecy? Its history before it happens. We need to remember; especially when it seems like the world is going to hell in a handbasket. That the kingdoms of this world Revelation 11:15 are becoming the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ. That's how we stay calm and carry on. That's where our holy confidence comes from. Prophecy reminds us that we are here for such a time as this, such a place as this. I'm telling you, this makes all the difference in the world.

Let me have a little bit of fun. In 2010 Green Bay Packers won the NFC Championship, and I tweeted half joking that I would preach for tickets. Well, some pastor in Texas took me up on it that the Super Bowl was in Dallas. And so I went and preach and he gave me two tickets. I took Josiah to Super Bowl 45 on his ninth birthday, okay. Now great thing is, you know, Father of the Year award right there, but I don't think I'm ever going to be able to top his ninth birthday. And so it was it was incredible. In fact, one of my favorite moments was when he cried, is that okay for me to say that because it showed me that he actually cared about the game and the outcome. It was intense, okay; it was kind of going back and forth. And, man, I swear I lost like 10 pounds just in stress during that game. But here's what I did, I recorded the game. And so we hopped on the plane flew home and guess what I did the next night? I watched the recording of the Super Bowl. Can I tell you how much I enjoyed it? I loved watching it. Why? Cause I knew the outcome. I already knew the final score. I knew that we won. Prophecy is a reminder that God's got this and God's got you. Come on, go to the back of the book and remind yourself his kingdom is going to come his will is going to be done. We know how this ends. That's how we regain perspective.

And so remember the height from which you have fallen, and then repent and do the things you did at first. And I'm going to have to move fast but we're going to get a little detailed right here and so let me give you some dictionary definitions, actually Pastor Mark's definitions. Let me make a distinction

between a couple of different things. Conviction is a feeling of guilt over unconfessed sin. And it's a good thing. It actually comes from the Holy Spirit. Why? To get us back into right relationship with him. Condemnation is something different altogether. It's a feeling of guilt over confessed sin. There is no condemnation to those who are in Christ. And so, conviction is a good thing. It's the Holy Spirit wooing us. It's God's love language. Condemnation that is the language of the enemy.

Let me make a couple of other distinctions. Between when you experience conviction, the next step is confession. But I want to make a distinction between confession and repentance. And this is actually really critical, because I think we've got to know how to navigate these things, spiritually. Confession is one and done. What do you mean? I John 1:9, *"If we confess our sins, he's faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all on righteousness."* God doesn't just forgive God forgets. We are justified just as if I had never sinned. And so when you confess a sin a second time, all you're doing is reminding God of what he has already forgiven and forgotten.

And so confession is one and done. Repentance is a little bit different. It's this Greek word *metanoia*. It means change of mind. I think one of the biggest breakthroughs in neuroscience over the last 50 years is the fact that neurogenesis persists in the adult human brain. Makes your day doesn't it? Let me delineate the technical term is neuro plasticity. It's the brain his ability to continually form new connections. And I think that's a good picture of what repentance is, it's renewing our mind. Well, how do you do that? Well, I think there are different ways to do it. And so just celebrated Thanksgiving, I think a gratitude journal can renew your mind. I think prayer and meditation are a form of repentance that renews your mind. I think studying scripture renews our minds. In fact, let me give you a little different way of thinking about this. I think reading God's word is a form of repentance. You certainly have to put it into practice. But when you download the Word of God, you are upgrading your mind until it becomes conformed to the mind of Christ.

Okay. Conviction, condemnation, confession, repentance while we're talking about all of those things, let me make one more distinction. Confession and repentance are our response to individual sin. Lament is our response to corporate sin, or even generational sin. Now we live in such an individualized society that this seems strange to us. And I promise you, the Bible does not ask us to make a false confession because that would be false humility. You don't confess something you didn't do but you do lament. And there are instances of this where the prophets people like Daniel and Ezra, they lament the sins of previous generations. You see this in Leviticus 26:40 *"At last my people will confess their sin and, and the sins of their ancestors."* So we have to repent and lament. And then it says, *"Then I will earnestly remember my covenant."*

Let me make this personal. This summer, our entire staff went through Be the Bridge. And one of the exercises was writing a lament as it relates to our original sin as a nation, as it relates to slavery and it was powerful to me. And I think the reason it was is because I'm just not as good at feeling it if it's someone else's words, I think I needed to personalize it, I needed to put it in my own language. And

because of that, somehow I owned it, and it owned me if that if that makes sense. Now, psychologists would call this the generation effect. We demonstrate better memory from material that we have generated ourselves as opposed to material that we've read. And so writing your own lament and I would say this goes for confession too it has a generation effect that is really powerful, you need to write it down. And there's also a biological effect called encoding that determines what goes into long term memory. Writing is a part of that encoding process. And so there are so many applications to this all the way from lament to a gratitude journal. When you write these things down, it has a generation effect where it produces everything from confession, repentance to gratitude.

All right, let me see if we can land this plane. There's one more piece to this puzzle. We remember, we repent and we do what we did at first. T. S. Eliot said it this way, "we shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all of our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and know the place for the first time." Simple prayer at the end of this series, may we fall in love with a God who loves us all over again.

Let me close with the Ephesians 6:13. I want to double back, double down, and we'll be done. "Having done all, to stand, stand." It's kind of the opposite of the Storage Dam has burst and you know, everybody is running out of town, right. Paul says, "*Stand and having done all to stand, stand.*" It's an {inaudible} infinitive active verb, in case you care. And it's this idea I'm not moving. In fact, it can mean to withstand, it means to resist temptation, to resist the enemy, to take a moral stand. It's refusing to bow to culture, to bow to political correctness; it's living according to your convictions.

And so, I'll paint a picture we'll be done. John L. Sullivan, one of the greatest boxers in history, last heavyweight champion of Bare Knuckle boxing, first heavyweight champion at gloved boxing. Undefeated until September 7, 1892 when I met a boxer named Gentlemen Jim Corbett. Corbett did what no one else had done. He went 21 rounds with Sullivan. And he didn't just beat the champion he knocked him out, he ended Sullivan's career. He won the heavyweight championship of the world and I love this he gave the prize money to his church. Come on somebody. Now that followed against Sullivan as his most famous fight. But it's the fight before that that gets me. May 21 1891 he's fighting Peter Black Prince Jackson across town rival and check this out. That fight went 61 rounds - 61 rounds and ended in a no contest. So we could have just called it even right from the get go right. Corbett had a life model fight one more round. Please hear this; this is for someone's fight, one more round. He said when your arms are so tired that you can hardly lift your hands to come on guard. Fight one more round. When your nose is bleeding, your eyes are black and you're so tired, that you wish your opponent would crack you one on the job and put you to sleep. Fight one more round. Remembering that the man who fights one more round is never whipped.

I think what Paul is saying in Ephesians six is come on fight one more round. Fight for your marriage. Fight for your faith. Fight for your family. Fight for your children. Fight for the promises of God. Fight for the dream that God has put in your heart. It's time to stand and having done all this stand to stand

again. You're going to lose a round or two. You're gonna get knocked down. But are you gonna get back up? Are you gonna get back in the ring? Are you gonna come out of the corner one more time but I'm so tired. I'm so spent. I'm over it.

Paul starts his letter with grace and peace. Paul ends his letter with grace and peace. It's like the Department of Redundancy department, my favorite department Ephesians 6:23 and 24 last two verses. Receive it today. Would you receive it?

"²³ Peace be with you, dear brothers and sisters. ²⁴ May God's grace be eternally upon all who love our Lord Jesus Christ."

Jerry Bridges says, "Our worst days are never so bad that they are beyond the reach of God's grace. And our best days are never so good that they're beyond the need of God's grace." Every day is a day of relating to God on the basis of his grace alone. The Gospel starts and ends with grace. His grace is sufficient. That's a word for someone this weekend and so would you pray it with me right now? Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name. Amen.