The Need for a Heavenly Perspective

1. Introduction

Ecclesiastes 3:11 *He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.*

a. God has placed something within us that causes us to reach beyond ourselves to the eternal, to the infinite, to that which can only find resolution and completion in God himself. Our desire is to find ways in which we can connect with eternity and with heaven, to find meaningful ways in which we can reflect here on earth what we see happening there.

b. From God's perspective, the bible tells us that he is constantly watching, his eyes run to and fro across the earth seeking those whose hearts are wholeheartedly for him (2 Chronicles 16:9). Only in small isolated places and times has God found some kind of reflection of what constantly surrounds him as he sits upon his throne – the ceaseless cry of day and night worship. That is what he is seeking, and ultimately that is what we will see across the face of the earth.

Malachi 1:11 *For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.*

i There will come a time when there will be an expression of worship and prayer that will be found in every place globally. Incense is the offering of worship in prayer that rises from the earth to the throne room of God like the sweet-smelling incense in the tabernacle.

c. The global expansion of prayer rooms we see today is the first-fruits of the fulfilment of this verse. God is raising them up now as part of his strategy for the end times. Saints are gathering together with a growing desire to establish altars for the incense of worship and prayer.

i What we do on a Monday morning and Wednesday evening is just a small part of this big thing that God is doing, but we must recognise that it is also right at the centre of God's end-times plans. What is the purpose of night and day worship and prayer? Why is it so deeply significant? Why now? What are the biblical and theological implications?

d. We have become conditioned to think in a particular way. Many have been in the church for a number of years, and assume the western church model is "normal" so we evaluate everything against that framework.

i There is a profound difference between the familiarity of the church model and the radical demands of unceasing devotion to Jesus as expressed in the house of prayer. Many find this a conceptual barrier, so the unfamiliar is rejected in favour of the familiar.

ii What we have for so long accepted as being the way church should be done is really quite far removed from the intention and purpose that Jesus intended (Matthew 16:13-19 – we'll look at this in a later session). Just because something has been done this way for hundreds of years doesn't necessarily make it authoritative.

e. To understand what God is calling us to in the house of prayer requires us to look outside the comfortable and familiar landscape of the church and lift our eyes to the unfamiliar and the

unknown. To make sense of what God is calling us to we have to look to the place where we can see it happening – heaven.

2. Heaven – our starting point

a. The subject of heaven is vast and will take us time to study. Since it will be our ultimate destination, God has given us some glimpses in his word that help to prepare us so that we have some idea what to expect.

b. For most of the church the subject of heaven is a vague and woolly concept that is rarely considered in any depth. But there is much revelation of heaven to be found throughout the bible, and if we seek it out it will transform our understanding. Without a biblical view of heaven, we will not understand its nature, its function or its purpose. A biblical understanding of heaven will radically change the way we walk out our life, and how we view many other things. As we gain a vision of heaven from Scripture we will find both the basis of unceasing devotion to Jesus and its purpose in God's larger plan.

c. Developing a revelation of heaven begins with three very important questions, giving us an orderly sequence of progressive understanding.

i **WHY?** Why heaven is important and why it must be the starting point for considering unceasing ministry to the Lord.

ii **HOW?** How heaven should be viewed or considered – this must precede actually developing the substance of what Scripture reveals about heaven or else the latter will be misinterpreted and misapplied.

iii **WHAT?** Understanding how the Bible speaks of the subject of heaven and what conclusions can be drawn from that revelation.

3. Why we need a proper perspective of heaven

a. We have to start with God. Scripture reveals that God himself is the ultimate centre of all things. He dwells in the glorious solitude of self-existence, and compared to his absolute necessity everything else pales into transient insignificance.

1 Peter 1:24 *…for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls"…*

i Contrary to the secular and atheistic worldview prevalent today, if God did not exist, nothing else would. Embracing this reality immediately puts us at odds with the way the world functions. Our world mostly functions without knowledge of or reference to God.

b. Only God has meaning in and of himself – his existence alone is essential. Any significance that the creation possesses is either a bestowed significance, or a derivative significance, and not inherent to them. We only exist because God wills it; every breath that we take is because God allows it. Even heaven itself is dependent on God's sustaining power.

Hebrews 1:3 *He [Jesus] is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*

i We are all on a level plane, upheld only by his sovereign word. If all of mankind's combined knowledge across the span of space and time could be brought together in one place it would be like the smallest droplet compared to the limitless ocean of God's creativity and wisdom.

c. So the importance or value of someone or something hinges solely upon its relation to the Creator. These are big concepts that we have to get our heads round and come to terms with. All of this requires a shift in our thinking because we typically do not view the world from this perspective.

Isaiah 40:14-15, 22-25 *Whom did he consult, and who made him understand? Who taught him the path of justice, and taught him knowledge, and showed him the way of understanding? Behold, the nations are like a drop from a bucket, and are accounted as the dust on the scales; behold, he takes up the coastlands like fine dust.*

It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

d. When it comes to God, we find ourselves with a problem. A.W. Tozer summed it up in his book "Knowledge of the Holy" – "*If we took all the problems under heaven and earth and they were to confront us all at the same time, they would be nothing compared to the overwhelming problem of God: that he is; what he is like; and what we, as moral beings, must do about him."* As we partner with God in the house of prayer, we are seeking to do so according to his will and to his ways.

e. Unlike the earth, God's desires are perfectly expressed and fulfilled in heaven. This total conformity to His will gives it the utmost relevance and meaning to our understanding of heaven itself. And because it is where God is to be found its level of importance is something we must take note of. The whole focus of heaven is on God and his glory. There is a dynamic synergy between the person and the place.

   i We often pray for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done "on earth as it is in heaven" – if we want to fully understand and enter into all that means, we have to know what we are dealing with in the first place, otherwise we will impose our earth-bound concepts and ideas over the reality of the heavenly pattern, especially when we consider our understanding of worship.

f. As we view heaven as revealed in the scriptures, and observe how worship flows in that place, the conclusion that we come to is that worship is responsive. Whether spoken or sung, it is always a response to a Person. In heaven all worship is initiated by and directed to the one on the throne and to the Lamb of God.

Revelation 4:8 *And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!"*

Revelation 5:11-12 *Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, [12] saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!"*

g. The Tabernacle and the Temple were earthly copies of heavenly realities – they were intended to give us a glimpse of how things are ordered in heaven, so there are many things we can learn about heaven from them. They were the focal point of the worship of Israel because that is where they encountered both the presence and the revelation of God. These two things that are key to us understanding worship and prayer – presence and revelation.

h. The 4 living creatures around the throne demonstrate this. They are full of eyes, all around and within, eyes that capture the beauty and glory of what they are seeing. As they are in God's presence they are constantly receiving revelation of his glory. Presence before the throne leads to revelation of glory resulting in worship. That is the heavenly pattern.

   i It is impossible to develop an accurate theology of worship and prayer apart from a theology of presence and revelation. That is why heaven must be our starting place for any consideration of worship and prayer.

i. What do we mean by worship and prayer? Worship is a response to a person, and comes through presence and revelation. That response can take many forms, it's not only about music and singing. It is much bigger than that. In the book of Revelation we see that sometimes worship is sung, at other times it is spoken, sometimes shouted, sometimes it is one person, sometimes it is many thousands of voices. Sometimes they bow down, or fall on their faces, or cast their crowns.

   i Singing our worship is important because we have a musical God. But worship can be expressed in many other ways – through spoken words, though love for others, through service and ministry, through obedience, even through our thoughts and attitudes.

   ii Prayer is simply communion with God in whatever form it is expressed. In many ways prayer and worship are interchangeable. We can sing prayers as well as speak them. Telling God we love him is prayer. Paul tells us that there are many kinds of prayer:

Ephesians 6:18 *…praying at all times in the Spirit, with <u>all kinds of prayer</u> and supplication.*

We should use them all; he makes a distinction between prayer and supplication, which is asking God for stuff. While this is a vital element of prayer, it's not the sum total of what prayer is. Sometimes prayer will be very specific and God will put clear burdens on our hearts. But at other times just being with God in his presence is all that is needed.

4. Towards a heavenly theology of worship and prayer

a. The problem is that we have become conditioned to view worship and prayer from an experiential perspective rather than a theocentric one. In other words, it is more about how we feel rather than who it is for. So the reason heaven does not readily come to mind when considering worship and prayer is because He does not come to mind very frequently when considering the subject. But the worship of heaven is a consuming pre-occupation with God himself. Grasping hold of this theme will rescue us from a self-focused approach to worship.

b. Our worship must evoke a flood of thoughts about a Person, not opinions about an activity that we get something out of. Meaning there are times in worship when we start in the wrong place. We come into the prayer room, or the church meeting carrying all the niggles and issues that have been bugging us, or we're mindful of stuff that we have got to do – our focus is horizontal. To worship from that place we quickly hit a ceiling and become disillusioned.

   i Instead of starting in heaven and bringing heaven to earth we approach from an earth-bound perspective, and we find it difficult to transition our focus to the heavenlies. By lifting our eyes and entering the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Psalm 73) we will gain a changein perspective.

Colossians 3:1-2 *If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.*

c. This is our glorious invitation to enter into the heavenly sanctuary and be inspired and motivated by the things that we see there. We need to lift our eyes and behold the glorious object of our worship. He himself is our Great Reward. Worship cannot be evaluated by the experience it produces in the participants, but only by the extent to which the glory of God is truly seen and magnified as a result.

Jeremiah 9:23-24 *'Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."'*

i Our first priority is to worship God for who he is. Worship in heaven is a response first and foremost to the person of God – celebrating his goodness, his holiness, his justice, his uniqueness and supremacy comes before anything that he has done.

Psalm 150:1 *Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens!*

5. A revelation of the throne of God

Psalm 103:19 *The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.*

a. We need a revelation of the throne of God. In worship and prayer, we are approaching the supreme Governor in the governmental centre of the universe, seated on his throne.

Hebrews 4:16 *Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Ephesians 3:11-12 *…according to the eternal purpose that he [God] has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, [12] in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.*

i All worship and intercession is oriented around a real throne and occurs in a real governmental context. We are making requests that are being heard in a real place by a real Person – the sovereign King of all things.

Psalm 11:4*: The LORD is in his holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.*

b. When we worship and pray we are addressing the Lord enthroned in heaven, in the place where he rules and has absolute power. From this vantage point he sees everything that goes on and he evaluates and judges all people on the earth.

2 Kings 19:15 *And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said: "O LORD, the God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, you are the God, you alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; you have made heaven and earth.*

Psalm 145:13 *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.*

c. God's kingdom is everlasting and his resources are limitless. So when we approach his throne we are coming to both a king and the full extent of his kingdom resources which will never run out. It is a kingdom where all things are possible if the king wills it.

2 Chronicles 29:10-14 *David blessed the LORD in the presence of all the assembly. And David said: "Blessed are you, O LORD, the God of Israel our father, forever and ever. [11] Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the dominion, O LORD, and you are exalted as head above all. [12] Both riches and honour come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. [13] And now we thank you, our God, and praise your glorious name. [14] "But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able thus to offer willingly? For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.*

d. Dominion is about ruling and having authority. God has absolute dominion over everything that he has created, he has the power of life and death itself. We are approaching the one who has real power to get things done.

e. The Lord is on his throne and his kingdom rules over all. God reigns over all things, he upholds all things, he sustains all things and he possesses all things. But we have a problem of unbelief which keeps God's throne and his sovereignty and his dominion at a distance. Only a radical revelation of God's throne and what it means, together with unwavering faith in his total, absolute sovereignty will dismantle this deep-seated unbelief.

6. Conclusion

a. We've just begun to scratch the surface of the revelation of heaven and why it is so essential for us to grasp hold of. There is much more for us to discover. Everything we see in the bible concerning heaven is there because God wants it to be, it's what he wants us to know.

b. The critical extension of this understanding is that the reality of heaven and its worship is to serve as the model for worship and prayer on earth. This is precisely what we find God commanding in many different scriptures. God desires worship and prayer to be on earth as it is in heaven:

Exodus 25:8-9 And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. [9] Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

i There is much value in investing time to gain clarity on what heaven is and what happens there. God has always planned to dwell among his people and until that plan is fulfilled we have this glorious way of connecting with the realities of heaven through worship and prayer. In the house of prayer, we are seeking to make these realities known and to make a way for the revelation of the glory of God to be made known in all the earth.

Malachi 1:11 *For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.*