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Sermon Notes

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Heaven is a World of Love, Part I

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

1 Corinthians 13:9-13 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. ¹² Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Paul is speaking of the eternal future of love. He has shown that all the spiritual gifts are temporary... they all have a temporary function in the saving work of Almighty God in the human soul. They play a vital role in delivering truth to the soul as part of our salvation from sin through faith in Christ. But when Christ returns and ends the world, and when he ushers his elect into the New Heavens and New Earth, which will be our eternal home, all the spiritual gifts will become obsolete... even faith and hope will be obsolete... fulfilled by the reality of heaven. But love will remain eternally.

Jonathan Edwards culminated his seventeen sermons in 1 Corinthians 13 with a forty-page message entitled "Heaven is a world of love." It is one of the greatest pieces of theological reasoning and explanation I have ever read. It moved me over five years ago to begin a similar theological, exegetical, and rational exploration of heaven that continues to this day. I drank in Edwards's approach and methodology, and sat at the

feet of the master... my angle, that a large part of our experience of the glory of God in heaven will be LOOKING BACKWARD at God's mighty actions in history, Edwards never mentions or even alludes to!! But what he does do it take us on a tour of heaven as it will be... a world in which the love taught in the New Testament (and especially in this love chapter... 1 Corinthians 13) will be perfectly fulfilled – "Heaven is a world of love."

This sermon (and next week's) are just my own restating and simplification of and interaction with Edwards's essay. I swam in the sea of his words and have understood some aspects of it. I will follow his outline and quote him freely. Occasionally, I will use my own illustrations or words to describe what I think Edwards meant or where his words took me.

My desire is that my efforts will stimulate you to heavenly meditations and to a much more heavenly lifestyle... that as much as possible you will begin to live a life of love because you have understood what heaven will be like... a world of love.

Brief exegesis: Paul has been showing the superiority of love to all spiritual gifts... so much so that, even if you have an extreme, even supernatural level of the spiritual gifts (speaking in the tongues of angels, or fathoming all mysteries of theology, or having all theological knowledge, or dying in the flames as a martyr after giving away everything you possess to the poor and needy)... the greatest displays of each spiritual gift known to the history of the church... even if you did all this, if you had no love – you would be nothing, you would accomplish nothing for Christ's Kingdom, and you would receive nothing – no rewards from God.

Paul then goes on to give fifteen descriptions of love... some positive, but mostly negative:

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸ Love never fails.

Having described what love is and isn't... what it does do and what it doesn't... Paul then speaks of the limitations of the gifts: the gifts are TEMPORARY and deliver at best a limited, immature, imperfect knowledge of God... like we are little children, babbling "dadda" and trying to understand the person that our Daddy is... like we are squinting through a mirror which gives to our minds a slightly distorted and limited picture of God

NOT THAT the words given us by the prophets are flawed... not at all, for all scripture is God-breathed, flawless like silver perfectly refined in a crucible. BUT words themselves are limited, and the knowledge they deliver of God limited, imperfect, and immature compared to the level of knowledge we will have of God and of Christ when we see them FACE TO FACE... then we shall have a mature, perfect, limitless knowledge of God – we shall know him fully, even as we have been fully known.

Alright. Now we have some introductions out of the way. Let's get to the insights that came from the pen of Jonathan Edwards in 1738 ... 282 years ago

Edwards divided his essay into six headings:

- 1) The Cause and Fountain of the Love that is in Heaven
- 2) The Objects of that Love that is in Heaven
- 3) The Subjects of that Love that is in Heaven
- 4) The Principle (or Nature) of that Love that is in Heaven
- 5) The Circumstances in which Heavenly Love is Exercised, Expressed, and Enjoyed

6) The Happy Effects/Fruits of that Love that is in Heaven

Let's see how many of these we can get through today.

Let me say one thing about listening to Edwards... he works and works and works the details, in ways that sometimes seem repetitive... sometimes he says things that seem to be obvious, but as he begins to put things together, suddenly your eyes start to widen and you start to see things you never saw before and in the end, it's like you've been escorted into a new world. Like the "wardrobe" ... the stand-alone clothing closet in C.S. Lewis's classic *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*... you slip into the closet to hide in your game of hide and seek; you feel the brush of coats and other garments on your face as you push further and further back into the closet... then suddenly you feel tree branches and it seems like it's winter and you push out and look around – you have stepped into another world

Edwards takes "seeing through a glass darkly" and steps through the looking glass into a future world... defined by theology and exegesis of scripture and reason – logic.

So follow me as I follow Jonathan Edwards into the future world... heaven... a world of love

I. The Cause and Fountain of that Love in Heaven

A. The God of Love HIMSELF Dwells in Heaven

1. Heaven is the place where God dwells and where he most clearly reveals himself
2. The New Heavens and New Earth and the New Jerusalem will glow and be completely illuminated and will radiate with the glory of God
3. So, heaven is a world of love because the God of love especially dwells there

- a. Now of course you will say, “But God is omnipresent...” As Psalm 139 says “Where can I go from your Spirit, where can I flee from your presence?”
 - b. But God especially chooses to reveal himself more in one place than another
 - c. In the Old Testament, God was in that sense MORE in Israel than in any other nation on earth
 - d. And God was more in Jerusalem than in any other city in Israel
 - e. And God was more in the temple than in any other building in Jerusalem
 - f. And God was more in the holy of holies than any other part of the temple
 - g. And God was more in the mercy seat above the ark than any other part of the holy of holies
4. BUT God is MORE in heaven than in any other part in the universe... for it is said to be his throne and his dwelling place
 5. In our eternal future, when God brings in the New Heaven, the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem... God will in some sense DESCEND forever to make heaven and earth become ONE... and there God will dwell in the midst of his people
 6. Since God is a God of love, so heaven will be a world of love... a concentrated experience of love... God the perfect source and fountain of all love

1 John 4:8 God is love

7. All true love ultimately has its source in God, the Almighty Creator of all things
8. Because God is all-sufficient, he will be a limitless source of love... the love that fills heaven will never end, even out to eternity... full, eternal, overflowing
9. In this sense, it will be like the river of the water of life

Revelation 22:1-2 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city.

But also picture this heavenly love which flows from the throne of God also as filling up an endless ocean in which we can swim forever... a picture of complete saturation in the love of God

B. The Triune God is a God of Love

1. From eternity past to eternity future, the three persons of the Trinity have been loving each other
2. The Father loves the Son and the Son loves the Father; and the Father loves the Spirit and the Son loves the Spirit... so on
3. The persons of the Trinity are infinitely dear and precious to one another, with an incomprehensible love flowing and reflowing within the godhead
4. The Father: loves the Son with a perfect love; in fact the depths of the Father's love for his only begotten Son cannot be measured or captured in any words... it is hotter and brighter than the sun shining in space; but the Father also loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son on the cross for the salvation of all who believe in him
5. The Son, Jesus Christ, perfectly loves his Father... loved him so perfectly as to die to fulfill his will; but he also loves his people... having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end; he loved his Bride enough to die for her; Jesus is perfect in love
6. The Holy Spirit is the one who has personally delivered the love of God and of Christ directly to the minds and souls of the elect in every generation; the fruit of the Spirit is love
7. So, heaven is a world of love because this perfectly loving Triune God is a God of love

C. Perfect Fellowship with the God of Love

1. In heaven, our fellowship with God will be perfect, face to face, without any blockage or hindrance or distance
2. We will see God and drink in God's love and swim in it for all eternity

II. The Objects of Love in Heaven

A. There Will be Nothing but LOVELY Objects in Heaven

1. There will be nothing odious, ugly, blemished, disgusting, malformed, corrupt, diseased, repulsive, broken, dark, or evil in heaven

Revelation 21:27 Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

2. All the angels in heaven will be holy, good, glorious, radiant, filled with love for God and for Christ... all of the evil angels (including the devil himself) will have been thrown into the Lake of Fire
3. The only people permitted in that world will be the redeemed from every nation on earth
4. There will be no hypocrites, false professors of Christianity, nominal Christians... there will also certainly be no open rebels, or wicked people, or followers of other gods and goddesses
5. Not only so...

B. All the Redeemed will be Perfectly Lovely... Radiantly Glorious

1. All the redeemed in heaven will be perfectly lovely, radiant, beautiful... for Jesus said "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father" (Mt. 13:43)
2. The present world is flawed and imperfect... even the sun has sunspots... in the same way, in this world even the most eminent saints have flaws and imperfections and failings; as James said "We all stumble in many ways" and King David said "My sins are more numerous than the hairs on my head"

3. But in heaven, the saints will all have been glorified... perfectly conformed to Christ mentally, morally, physically, emotionally, spiritually... perfect in every way
4. Love will be fulfilled in every single one of them: they will be perfectly kind, perfectly free from envy, boasting, pride, rudeness, anger

Edwards: "No string in the heavenly symphony shall vibrate out of tune"; not a single discordant note in the heavenly song of worship to the Lamb

C. The Place Shall Be Perfectly Beautiful

1. The world shall be perfectly beautiful: the New Heavens and New Earth shall be free forever from its bondage to decay... the creation shall be perfectly radiant, glowing with the glory of God in the details of creation; it will attract our love and delight continually whenever we look at it in heaven
2. So also the city will perfectly beautiful: even the most spectacular city in this present age—maybe Paris (the City of Lights) or Prague—has dirt on its streets and filth in its alleyways; but the New Jerusalem is described in its radiant beauty in Revelation 21-22... it will attract our loving admiration for its beauty and proportions forever

D. The Things We Loved THE MOST will be There, Perfectly Beautiful

1. The deepest desire of our hearts as Christians was the glory of God... to see the source of all beauty will ravish our resurrected eyes forever
2. So also the saints we cherished the most in this world will be there, free from all sin and decay of age and disease... the Christian spouse; the Christian friend; the Christian father or mother; the Christian leader; all the best people we knew in this world will be perfected in the next world

So... the OBJECTS of our love will be perfectly beautiful in heaven

III. The Subjects of our Heavenly Love

By this, Edwards means the HEARTS of those who love... both the HEART of God and the HEARTS of the redeemed...

A. The Heart of God is the original seat of Love... the capacity to love

B. Love is in God as Light is in the Sun

1. Not as the moon or the planets which reflect the light of the sun

2. But God generates his own love... his heart is attracted to the inhabitants of heaven... it moves out in love toward all his perfected creations

C. God is TRULY ATTRACTED TO all the Redeemed in Heaven

1. He loves all the saints truly and deeply and fully

2. None of the redeemed will be merely tolerated by God or ignored or slighted by God... but God will have a full, rich, comprehensive love to each and every one of his redeemed children... he has graven them in the palms of his hands; they are the apple of his eye, the delight of his soul... all of them

By contrast: we could imagine some art collector that has a vast art collection, many of the items bought by his employees at galleries and auctions with his permission and money but without his knowledge; they are bought according to certain criteria he gives, but he never sees the actual pieces or delights in them at all... they are wrapped up in bubble wrap and stored in one of his vast repositories in some city he never visits... but he displays his favorite art pieces in his mansion on the California coastline... he looks at them every day, gazing and at them, for "a thing of beauty is a joy forever."

THAT IS NOT how it is with God and the redeemed.... Rather God has an intimate and personal knowledge of each and every one of his children; he knows each of them by name... they are fashioned by his hand, sanctified carefully by his direct activity, and he delights in each one as a masterpiece of his grace and

power... he truly and perfectly and individually KNOWS and LOVES each one BY NAME

Isaiah 43:1 this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine."

John 10:3 He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.

Another opposite example: Some kings may allow former enemies to live in his kingdom... even in his capitol city; he may even pay for their needs from the royal treasury; but the king has no desire for a relationship with them... he does not invite them to dine with him at his personal table; he does not get to know them or allow them to know him or call him by his first name.

Think of David with his rebellious son Absalom. He banished him after he murdered his half-brother Amnon... then he was persuaded to bring him back to the Kingdom; but David never invited him back into his life; Absalom was back home, but not back into his father's heart. He had to burn Joab's field to get his attention, so that Joab could intercede for him to his own father, to ask if he might be welcomed back into the palace.

NOT SO the redeemed in heaven! God will have a full, rich, complete delight in every single one of his children... allowing full access to them, pouring out his affection on each one. His limitless mind and limitless heart allows limitless access and limitless love relationship with each and every one of the multitude greater than anyone could count from every tribe, language, people and nation.

D. So also the HEART of Christ delights fully and personally in all of his saints

1. They are united to him as he is their HEAD and they are all members of his Body
2. They are intimately one with him as the mystery of marriage pictured the mystical union of Christ and his Bride

3. The heart of Jesus is expanded to include and delight in every single one of his redeemed
- E. In the Same Way... the Hearts of the Saints and Angels will be perfectly full of love
1. Love toward God... and to each other
 2. All members of the glorious society of heaven will be united perfectly in love for one another and for God
 3. Not a single open or concealed enemy in their midst; none out in the cold or shunned or despised or outcast or lonely

IV. Of the Nature and Degree of Heavenly Love

A. Nature

1. Altogether holy and divine... totally conformed to God's love
 - a. Not carnal, lustful, impure, or corrupt
 - b. A love that is pure as light
2. Love for God perfected
 - a. The saints in heaven love God with a holy and perfect love... finally we will fulfill for all eternity the first and greatest commandment... we will love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, and with all our strength
 - b. Our love for God will be based on a perfect KNOWLEDGE of God... we will see him face to face and know him fully as he has known us fully

Edwards does not mention this, but let me interject here: we will never be OMNISCIENT... therefore, our knowledge of God will keep expanding for all eternity... as we keep learning new things God has done, new reasons to praise him; therefore our love for God will also keep expanding and improving

c. So the saints' love for God in heaven will be pure, accurate, based on truth, free from idolatrous conceptions and false motives

3. Love for others is perfected as well

a. The second great commandment will be perfected in heaven as well

b. All the redeemed will love all the other redeemed with a perfectly pure love... free from all evil motives; no base carnal lusts or selfish principles; no pride, no envy, no greed, no boasting

c. We will also love the angels purely and perfectly; we will not worship the angels, but will delight in their beauty and power and perfect service to God

B. Degree

1. Our heavenly love will be perfect in degree

2. Simply put, we will love God vastly MORE in heaven than we ever could on earth; our intensity of love toward him will be overpoweringly strong

3. As a spark becomes a roaring inferno, so our love for God here on earth is a weak fragile spark that will become a powerful inferno in heaven

4. As I said, it will be based on truth... so our love for God and for all radiant creatures in heaven will be PROPORTIONAL to their glory

a. Infinite and ultimate glory is God's alone... so we will worship God and God alone

b. BUT other created beings will have proportional levels of glory, and our love for each of them will be intelligent and proportional

c. What is MOST glorious will be loved the MOST; what is LEAST glorious will be loved the LEAST, but every glorious

thing will receive its appropriate level of affection from the hearts of the saints... PROPORTIONAL LOVE

A wildflower standing with simple beauty in a field in the New Earth will have a measure of beauty and glory given it by God... Jesus said "Consider the lilies of the field"; in heaven we will have plenty of time to "stop and smell the roses"... so if we pluck that wildflower and gaze thoughtfully at it, knowing that God made it, we will love it as such – a simple display of my Father's creative power; I will love that heavenly wildflower at one level; but I will love a redeemed martyr who died for the spread of the gospel in a Muslim country MORE... I will have a more ardent attraction to their glory, because they will display MORE of God's glory than the simple wildflower will

C. Key Concept: DIFFERING LEVELS OF GLORY

1. It was from Edwards's "Heaven is a World of Love" that I first considered the possibility that the saints in heaven would all be perfectly glorious but not equally glorious
2. I used to have an underdeveloped theology of heaven... very simple... just we'll die and go to heaven and be happy there; then I learned about glorification, and I added... "We'll all die and go to heaven and be glorious and happy there." I just assumed we would all be equal.
3. But it was Edwards that pointed out to my mind that there will be differing levels of glory in the resurrection, for as 1 Corinthians 15:41-42 says "Star differs from star in glory... so will it be with the resurrection from the dead."
4. Edwards spends a great deal of time on the differing levels of glory for the saints in heaven, and how heavenly love will be perfect in reference to that reality
5. Glorification will drive away all enmity, distaste, coldness toward God... we will at every moment be ardent in our love for him; but it will also be gone toward other saints; no ENVY or ARROGANCE toward other saints

6. We will totally delight in the honors and blessings and rewards and crowns bestowed by God on each of our brothers and sisters in heaven; the greater the prosperity and blessedness of each in heaven, the greater will our delight be for that person
7. Those that are HIGHEST IN GLORY will also be those that are HIGHEST IN HOLINESS; so the more radiantly they display the glory of God, the more the other saints will delight in that superior glory

Edwards: "It will not be a grief to any saint to see another saint elevated and honored above himself; actually it will draw forth greater love and admiration and honor because God has done it and God is revealed and glorified by that person."

D. Variable Experiences in Heaven

1. This varying level of glory in heaven opens up the concept of varying levels of experience in heaven
2. Edwards said "All shall have as much love as they desire and as great manifestations as they can bear; and so all shall be FULLY SATISFIED, and where there is perfect satisfaction, there can be no envy."

Illus.: Imagine a perfectly pure and wonderful feast in which there are a vast number of different dishes, with different spices cooked of a different style... but plenty of each dish; and each person at the banquet can eat as much or as little of each dish as he or she wishes; some like a little of this and a lot of that; others have a smaller appetite; others like just one dish and eat a lot of it, but there's still plenty of that dish for anyone else to share as well... at the end of the meal, after each has eaten his or her fill and can't eat another bite, but there is still plenty of each dish left over... how could there possibly be any ENVY or JEALOUSY about how someone chose to eat? So in heaven, each will have as much of God and of the varying aspects of his glory as he desires...

Interesting factor: HOW WE LIVE ON EARTH WILL AFFECT HOW MUCH OF GOD'S GLORY WE EXPERIENCE AND ENJOY IN HEAVEN! "The measure you use on earth will be the measure you receive in heaven."

3. There will be some saints vastly more honored and radiantly more glorious than I will be... there service to Christ on earth will merit such glory; but I will not be jealous in the least, but will feel absolutely delighted that they are so glorious... and will see the justice and rightness of the way God honored them above me

E. Perfect Love for the Saints

Edwards: "There is undoubtedly an inconceivably pure, sweet, and fervent love between the saints in glory; and that love is in proportion to the perfection and attractiveness of the objects beloved."

F. Perfect in Glory = Perfect in Humility

1. In the same way, those most glorious in heaven will also have the greatest vision of the glory of God and a clearer sense of their own LITTLENES before him... so they will paradoxically be the most HUMBLE... the most HONORED in heaven will also be the most HUMBLE!
2. Those that are most glorious will have the greatest capacity to understand God in his infinite majesty... that will be deeply fully completely satisfying and humbling to them

Edwards: "Such will be the sweet and perfect harmony among the heavenly saints, and such will be the perfect love reigning in every heart toward every other, without limit or alloy or interruption; and no envy or malice or revenge or contempt or selfishness will ever enter there, but all such feelings will be kept as far away as sin is from holiness and as hell is from heaven."

Let's stop there... we will resume next week, God willing!

V. Applications

A. If heaven is like this, the see how repulsive ought to be our present sinfulness with each other

1. Look at your family life... start with your marriage... are you displaying a heavenly selfless love toward your spouse? Of course not! But in whatever ways you aren't, you are hurting your sense of heavenly hope
2. You own assurance of heaven is dependent on the degree to which you imitate this heavenly love NOW by the Spirit

B. See How HAPPY Must Be All Who are ENTITLED to Heaven as their Inheritance

Revelation 22:14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

C. Note How the Spirit Marks Those on the Road to Heaven

1. Deposits guaranteeing full inheritance (Eph. 1:14); foretastes
2. Love for the world is exposed, dims and is strangled in a delightful way
3. They struggle after holiness so that they may enjoy as much of heaven NOW as they can

D. Alarm and Awaken All On the Outside!

1. There should be no greater "fear of missing out" than this
2. The alternative is hell... a world of HATRED
3. Come to Christ