

3:16

The Numbers of Hope

Max Lucado

Sermon Series Outline 1

Hope for the Hard Heart

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world ...”

A. Introduction

You’ve heard it said that “it is better to give than to receive.” When it comes to humans and love, the saying could be similar: “It is easier to give love than to receive it.” You love your children unconditionally. You are delighted by them. But the idea of being delighted in or being loved despite your faults and shortcomings ... well, that can make you squirm.

Yet the Bible says this is exactly how God loves you! Not because you deserve his love, but simply because he wants to love you. He chose to love you—and continues to do so—every day. Often, the only thing standing in the way between you and God’s love is you.

Max Lucado shares a story from his youth, “Growing up in the oil fields of West Texas, my father was convinced that school holidays were made for boys to earn money. Like it or not—be it Christmas, summer, or Thanksgiving—he would wake me and my brother up before sunrise and drop us off at one of the local roustabout companies that hired unskilled laborers to see if we could join on for the day.

I remember the stifling heat I endured in those oil fields. And I remember many of the people that I met. One man stands out—a supervisor on the job. His khakis and clean shirt set him apart from us roustabouts, who were covered in sweat, dirt, and oil. In the pecking order, we were at the bottom. He was the boss. We were the workers. He read the blueprints. We dug the ditches. He ate with the bosses in the shed. We ate with each other in the shade.

Except for one day, when he walked over to where we were eating lunch and playing cards. I could tell that he was nervous. ‘Uh, fellows,’ he started. We turned and looked up. ‘I, uh, I just

wanted, uh, to invite . . .’ He was way out of his comfort zone. ‘I just wanted to tell you that, uh, our church is having a service tonight and, uh . . . I wanted to invite you to come.’

At this point in my life, I had drifted from the faith given to me by my parents. I couldn’t believe this man was talking church . . . out here on the prairie . . . with *us*.

We stared at the dirt. Snickers rose inches from the surface. When he turned and left, we turned and laughed. We called him *reverend*, *preacher*, and *the pope*. We poked fun, daring one another to go. He became the butt of the day’s jokes.

I am sure he knew this. I am sure he went back to his truck knowing the only good that he had done was to make a good fool out of himself. I’m sure he thought there was no hope that his words had gotten through to our hard hearts. Still, he took the risk to extend the invitation.”

B. Teaching

All of us, at one time or another, have been guilty of having a hard heart. Consider, for a moment, all the wonders of our modern world.

Take your phone, for example. Just by pulling a little rectangle out of your pocket or purse, you can gain a level of access to information that is unprecedented in human history.

You have access to all the information of the world at your fingertips. Yet how do we tend to respond to this wealth of abundance? *By complaining*. We mumble when it takes an extra second for our email to load. We grumble when an expired coupon costs us an extra seventy-five cents. We whine and bellyache. We are hard-hearted and stiff-necked.

- 1) In many ways, we suffer the same afflictions that affected the Israelites after their incredible escape from Egypt. Remember in the story that God had given his chosen people a front-row seat at the Exodus extravaganza:

- They saw water transform into blood,
- High noon change to a midnight sky,
- the Red Sea turn into a red carpet and the Egyptian army become fish bait,
- God gave manna with the morning dew and quail with the evening sun.

He went over and above to earn their trust. The former slaves witnessed a millennium of miracles in a matter of days.

But did they appreciate what they had received? No. When God called Moses up on Mount Sinai, the people panicked. According to the text, “They rallied around Aaron and said, ‘Do something. Make gods for us who will lead us. That Moses, the man who got us out of Egypt—who knows what’s happened to him?’” (Exodus 32:1)

How did Aaron respond? He crafted a metal cow—a golden calf—and made an impossible

proclamation: “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”
(Exodus 32:4)

He was talking about the *cow*. We shake our heads when we read these words. *This* was their god? The golden idol that they had just crafted? But are we really any better? Any wiser?

No, we simply opt for more sophisticated therapies: belly-stretching food binges or budget-busting shopping sprees. We crash on the couch and stream endless shows about other people’s lives. We bow before a whiskey bottle or lose ourselves in our work. Is that progress? Hardly. We’re still facing fears without facing God. We’re still hardening our hearts.

- 2) It’s a disease we all carry, and it’s more perilous than any earthly pandemic. Jesus himself witnessed the effects of such spiritual sickness firsthand. One day when he was teaching in a synagogue, a man came in with a withered hand. Men in Jesus’ day built their livelihoods through their hands. They planted and harvested. Built and repaired. They fed their families with ten dexterous digits, two working wrists, and a strong right arm.

But not this man. Five fingers splayed out to open the door of the synagogue. But five more were pulled close to his chest, limp and useless. Jesus noticed. So did the Pharisees and other religious types—the spiritual leaders of the day. Jesus’ heart was filled with compassion. But their hearts were filled with suspicion. After all, this was the Sabbath. A day of rest. Since Jesus was a healer, it meant healing a withered hand must be work. A violation of God’s law!

Jesus responded to this hard-hearted attitude with a question: “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” (Mark 3:4) The Pharisees stayed silent. They didn’t want to admit the harshness of their own beliefs. But they kept watching. They kept judging.

The Bible says that Jesus was angry with those silent accusers. But he was also saddened. The text says he was “grieved by the hardness of their hearts.” (Mark 3:5) He is still grieved today. Grieved when we turn our backs on hope and healing so we can wallow in the mud of misery.

- 3) Thankfully, there is a cure for our hardness of heart. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16) Let’s focus just on the first six words: “For God so loved the world.” Actually, let’s boil things down to just two terms: *loved* and *world*.

- a) First, God *loved*. In the Hebrew language of Moses and the Israelites, the word translated *love* was *Hasaq*. It meant a tethered and binding connection. Love as strong as an iron chain. When Moses told his people that the LORD chose your ancestors as the objects of his love, he let them know that God had bound himself to that community. God had “chained” himself to Israel.

Now, did God do this because the Israelites were so lovable? So worthy of affection? No, God loved Israel for the same reason he loves you and me: because he chose to do so. And his choice was permanent. Don't neglect this truth. God will not let you go. He has handcuffed himself to you in love, and he owns the only key. You need not win his love. You already have it! And since you can't win it, you can't lose it. You are tethered to your Savior.

John used the Greek term *agape* to describe God's love in his Gospel. This is a specific term for a specific type of love. It refers not to the love between husband and wife, or the love between two close friends, or any other type of love we experience on this earth. *Agape* is a divine love. A perfect love. Less an affection and more a decision. Less a feeling and more an action.

Agape love is a reflection of God's own nature. He is still in the business of *agape*. He is still reaching out to us. If you sense that he is reaching out, allow him to do so . . . and respond.

- b) Second, mark it down: God loves you with an unearthly love. You can't win it by being winsome. You can't lose it by being a loser. But you can be blind enough to resist it. Don't reject him. For heaven's sake, don't do it. For your sake, don't do it. Open your heart and say *yes*.

The object of God's love is the *world*. The Greek term that John uses is *kosmos*, and he employs it here to define the scope of this love that God offers. This love is *universal*. It is extended to all humanity. Now, in the mind of the first-century Jewish person, this idea would have seemed novel and unlikely. After all, it was Israel who was the recipient of God's special favor. But in Christ, all boundaries had been demolished when it comes to who is able to receive God's *agape* love.

God loves "the world." This includes you, and this includes me. It comes with no restrictions or qualifications. Just like the Israelites, God doesn't choose to love us because we're lovable. He doesn't choose to love us because we're perfect or because we deserve his affection.

All of us are actually *unworthy* of his love. Wherever you go, you will find violence, greed, and corruption. The more people you meet, the more people you will encounter who have stubborn minds, dehydrated hearts, and malnourished souls. Just turn on the news and you'll witness a parade of gossip, scandal, slander, and pride.

This is the world in which we live. And this is the world God loves. Not the sin in the world, but the people in the world. He wants to bring home the sinner.

C. Application

The apostle Paul stated it well when he wrote, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) God didn’t wait for us to try and clean up our act before he chose to love us. He doesn’t remove his love if we fall into old habits, temptations, and fears. No, he demonstrates his love by continually reaching out to us—extending his invitation to get us back on the right path when we falter.

Max Lucado shares this, “I still think of that West Texas oil engineer who extended an invitation for me to go to his church those many years ago. I wish today that I could thank him for the offer he made to me back then. I wish I could tell him that the seed he planted on that dusty oil field actually took root. I wish I could relate that I thought about his courage some five years later as a college student when God sought to melt my hard heart and called me to return to him.”

“For God so loved the world.” He has always loved—and always *will* love—this hard-hearted, stiff-necked world. We bow before gold-plated cows, and still he loves us. We stick our noses where we shouldn’t, and still he pursues us. We run from the very one who can help, and still he does not give up. He loves, pursues, and persists until hard hearts start to soften.

Are you living with a hard heart? Take it to your Father. You’re only a prayer away from tenderness. You live in a hard world, but you don’t have to live with a hard heart. Simply accept the offer of love that he extends to you. For if you do, your life will never be the same.

3:16

The Numbers of Hope

Max Lucado

Sermon Series Outline 2

The Heart He Offers

John 3:16

“He gave his one and only Son ...”

A. Introduction

What is your “one and only”? An item of which you only own one? How much more valuable are these one-and-onlys as compared to your one-in-severals? They are items you treasure and protect. You keep them close to you and in a safe place.

In John 3:16, we read that Jesus is God’s “one and only Son.” The one and only. If we want to be saved, if we want to be healed, and if we want to know the way to eternal life, then we must believe in the one and only—and that one and only is Jesus.

Max Lucado and his wife, Denalyn, lived for a time in Rio de Janeiro as full-time missionaries. During their time there, Max met a man in a Brazilian jail cell named Anibal. Max tells the story of Anibal:

“As you might imagine, I had many adventures in Brazil and met a lot of interesting people. Among the more unique was a man I encountered in a jail cell. His name was unusual: *Anibal*. But even more striking was the man himself. The tattoo of an anchor on his forearm symbolized his personality—cast-iron. The slightest move of his arm bulged his biceps. His face was leathery in texture. His glare could blister a foe. His smile was an explosion of white teeth.

But on the day I met him, the glare was gone and the smile was forced. Anibal had killed a man. A ‘neighborhood punk,’ as he called him. A restless teenager who sold marijuana to the kids on the street and made a nuisance of himself with

his mouth. One night the drug dealer had used his mouth one time too many, and Anibal had decided to silence it. He was guilty of murder.

I went to the Brazilian jail cell to share about Jesus with Anibal. Our discussion centered on the cross. We talked about guilt and forgiveness. I watched as the eyes of the murderer softened at the thought that the One who knew him the best loved him the most. His heart was touched when we discussed heaven—a hope that no executioner on this earth could take from him.

But Anibal didn't like my statement that the first step in coming to God was an admission of guilt. He was uneasy with words like 'I've been wrong' and 'forgive me.' In a final effort to reach him, I asked, 'Don't you want to go to heaven?' He stared at the floor for a long time, meditating on the question. I thought his stony heart was cracking. But I was wrong.

The eyes that lifted to meet mine weren't tear-filled. They were the eyes of an angry prisoner. 'All right,' he shrugged. 'I'll become one of your Christians. But don't expect me to change the way I live.' Anibal liked the idea of eternal life. But not the idea of admitting he was wrong.

As I watched Anibal pace in the tiny cell, I realized his true prison was not made of bricks and mortar but of pride. His stubbornness was preventing him from receiving the new life that God wanted him to have."

Before passing too much judgment on Anibal, we first need to ask whether we are guilty of the same. This starts by considering the condition of our hearts.

B. Teaching

Why is this important? A practical example might help to explain. Imagine you are in the middle of a cardiologist appointment. You've done all the exciting stuff. The chagrin of stepping on a scale. The squeeze of the blood pressure cuff. The prick of the needle. Now you're sitting in an uncomfortable chair as the cardiologist scans the results. "Oh my," he says. "Never seen that before." Your breath comes a little faster and your palms start to sweat. You know that if there is even a *small* problem with your heart, there is a *big* problem for the rest of your body.

The same is true with your heart in the spiritual sense. When there's something wrong with the core of who you are—with your inner self—it's a big problem. It is a condition that cannot be ignored. So you need a spiritual checkup—and not from the cardiologist down the road but from the God of heaven. "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind," he tells us. (Jeremiah 10:17)

- 1) So the Lord runs the first test. The results are not encouraging. God says, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure." (Jeremiah 17:9) He then confirms the presence of disease: "For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts." (Mark 7:21) Even worse, our loved ones have been stricken with the same condition! God describes the problem in nothing less than pandemic proportions: "There is no one righteous, not even

one; there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.” (Romans 3:10-11)

Talk about a dire diagnosis! We need help. But how do we find that help? We find the answers in John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.”

The Greek term for “one and only” is *monogenes*. *Monos* means “only,” and *genes* means “race or offspring.” *Monogenes*, then, highlights the relationship between Jesus and God. God is the father of all humanity, but Jesus alone is the monogenetic Son of God. He alone has God’s genes or genetic makeup.

Every quality we attribute to God, we can attribute to Jesus. They are cut from the same cloth. Two peas in a pod. Jesus himself made this claim. On the night before his crucifixion, he gathered his disciples in the upper room and said to them, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.” (John 14:6-7)

Jesus was saying he is not only the *way* to the Father but also is the *same nature* as the Father. He is *monogenes*. When you see one, you see the other. When you know Christ, you know God. The simplicity and the clarity of that teaching are more encouraging than we can imagine.

- 2) Unfortunately, the disciples missed the moment. For them, Jesus’ words were clear as mud. Philip spoke on behalf of the group to express their confusion: “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” (John 14:8) Poor confused Philip. Poor confused humanity.

Even Jesus seemed a little surprised at the level of ignorance. Maybe a little hurt. “Don’t you know me, Philip,” he asked, “even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9) Jesus was reminding Philip that he had been there when the sick were healed. They came blind, deaf, mute, lame, or leprous, and they left praising God. He had been there when Jesus cast out demons with a word. His authority was absolute. Philip had been there when Jesus raised the dead. He saw the weeping change to laughter and joy.

So Jesus wanted to know, “After everything you’ve seen, Philip, how can you still not see?” We also need to think seriously about the question. How often have we seen Jesus touch our lives? How often have we received exceedingly abundantly more than we could ever ask or imagine? Yet how often do we fail to submit to him and acknowledge his lordship over our lives?

Much like Anibal, we shrug and say, “Okay, I will follow Christ. But don’t expect me to change the way I live.” We think we can draw up the rules. The issue at stake is one of *authority*. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” (Matthew 28:18) He carries *all authority*.

- 3) Christ received a message from a Roman officer, asking him to heal his servant. Jesus

started on a journey toward the soldier's house, but he never arrived there. Why? Because the man sent friends to intercept Jesus, telling him not to make an unnecessary trip.

Listen to the man's message, because it is astounding: "Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, 'Go,' and they go, or 'Come,' and they come. And if I say to my slaves, 'Do this,' they do it." (Luke 7:7-8)

This officer understood authority. When the one in charge commands, the ones beneath obey. The soldier effectively said, "Jesus, you call the shots and inhabit the throne. You wear five stars on your shoulder. What you say will be done." He saluted Christ as supreme commander.

And Jesus didn't correct him! He didn't dilute the man's opinion or adjust his comments. "You flatter me," he could have said. But he didn't dismiss the adulation as overstatement. Rather, he accepted it as appropriate. "I tell you, I haven't seen faith like this in all Israel!" (Luke 7:9)

Christ claims ultimate clout. Unshared supremacy. "He sustains everything by the mighty power of his command." (Hebrews 1:3) The reality is clear: Jesus indeed is God's only Son and has the authority to heal us.

And healing is desperately needed. God has decreed that "anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord." (Hebrews 12:14) Hard-hearted souls will not populate heaven. Jesus said only the pure in heart will see God. (Matthew 5:8) We need a Savior who can rescue and redeem us from sin.

- 4) So, how can this be done? What is the nature of the spiritual operation that needs to be performed in order to save us? It hinges on a single word in the Greek: *hyper*. It means "in place of" or "on behalf of." New Testament writers repeatedly turned to this preposition to describe the work of Christ. Listen to the following and pay attention to the word *for*. Each time you hear *for*, know that it means "in place of."

- "Christ died for our sins." (1 Corinthians 15:3)
- "Jesus gave himself for our sins." (Galatians 1:4)
- "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us." (Galatians 3:13)
- "Jesus himself prophesied: 'The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.'" (John 10:11)
- "Before his death, Jesus took bread and explained: 'This is my body given for you.' And presenting the cup, he explained: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.'" (Luke 22:19-20)

Do you see the pattern? Christ gave himself *for* you. Specifically, he exchanged hearts *with* you. This would be like the cardiologist who examined your test results saying, “Yes, your condition looks really bad. But I have a treatment! I am going to exchange hearts. Mine is sturdy, yours is frail. Mine is pure, yours is diseased. Take mine and enjoy its vigor. I’ll take yours.”

Mind you, this is no transplant but a swap. As the prophet Isaiah wrote, “The LORD has put on him the punishment for all the evil we have done.” (Isaiah 53:6) Jesus removed our thieving, lying, adulterous, and murderous hearts. He removed our sin along with it, placed it in himself, and invited God to punish him for it. As the Scripture says, “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

C. Application

So, what is our part to play in this spiritual operation? Max Lucado explains it like this:

“It is simply to look up to God’s one and only Son and accept his offer of a new heart. When I lived in Rio de Janeiro, I often had to drive from the North Zone of the city to the South Zone. I loved the South Zone forays, but they sure bewildered me. I kept getting lost. But I had one salvation: Jesus. Literally, *Jesus*.

The Christ the Redeemer statue stands guard over the city, one hundred and twenty-five feet tall with an arm span of nearly a hundred feet. Perched a mile and a half above sea level, the elevated Jesus is always visible. Especially to those who are looking up for it. And since I was often lost, I was often looking. If I found him, I found my bearings.”

The promise of John 3:16 offers us the same. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son.” When we accept his offer, God pronounces us healthy. More than pardoned for our crimes, we are declared innocent. We enter heaven not with healed hearts but with his heart. This is the promise of what God has offered to you and to me.

3:16

The Numbers of Hope

Max Lucado

Sermon Series Outline 3

The Last Word on Life

John 3:16

“Whoever believes in him shall have eternal life.”

A. Introduction

What comes to mind when you think about heaven? Puffy clouds, cherubs, and harps? What comes to mind when you think about hell? Fire, brimstone, and horned demons? Our imaginations fail us. They cannot fathom the majesty of heaven, just as they cannot fathom the bitterness of hell.

Max Lucado’s father was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s disease. Max and his wife were preparing for their move to Brazil and his father said, “In regard to my disease and your going to Rio. That is really an easy answer for me, and that is *Go* . . . I have no fear of death or eternity.”

Max shares, “Dad lost much: his health, retirement, years with his children and grandchildren, and years with his wife. The loss was severe, but it wasn’t complete. He still had God’s call on his heart. And he still had the hope that God offers to all who choose to believe in him. My father had “no fear of death or eternity” because he knew that Jesus had gone ahead and prepared a place for him.

God the Father offers each and every one of us a unique invitation to lift us out of our sin, our pain, and our suffering when we simply call on him for help. He offers us a way out of our mess. Our part is simply to believe in God’s promise, allow him to lift us up, and follow where he leads. When we do, we will find that he will take us safely home.

B. Teaching

The words of John 3:16 reveal that God makes this offer of eternal life available to everyone. “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, *that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*” God, at this very moment, is issuing invitations by the millions. He may speak through nature or nurture, majesty or mishap, with a shout or a gentle whisper. But through it all—and to all—he continually invites: “Come, enjoy me forever.”

- 1) Yet many people have no desire to do so. God speaks, and they cover their ears. He commands, and they scoff at what he says. They don’t want him telling them how to live. They regard his Son as a joke and the cross as folly. They spend their lives telling God to leave them alone. And so, at the moment of their final breath, the Lord honors their request.

“Get away from me, you who do evil. I never knew you.” (Matthew 7:23) This verse escorts us to the most somber of Christian realities: *hell*. If you’re not excited to talk about this subject, know that you are not alone. Hell is a hideous topic. Any person who discusses it glibly has failed to ponder it deeply. Scripture writers dipped pens in gloomy ink to describe its nature. They spoke of the “blackest darkness,” (Jude 13) “everlasting destruction,” (2 Thessalonians 1:9) and “weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (Matthew 8:12)

A glimpse into the pit won’t brighten your day, but it will enlighten your understanding of Jesus. He didn’t avoid the discussion. Quite the contrary. He spoke of hell often. In fact, thirteen percent of his teachings refer to eternal judgment and hell. Two-thirds of his parables relate to resurrection and judgment. Jesus wasn’t cruel or capricious, but he was blunt. His candor might stun us today. “Fear Him,” He warns, “who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

One of Jesus’ more striking descriptions of what eternity will be like for those who reject Him is found in a parable he told in Luke’s Gospel. In the story, Jesus juxtaposes two men. One is rich, the other poor. One is known, the other forgotten. One is surrounded by friends and family, the other surrounded by dogs. These descriptions apply to this world—to our physical realm.

But things take a different turn when the men walk through the door of death. In eternity, the poor man, named Lazarus, becomes rich. He is carried into heaven on angels’ wings and converses with Abraham, the patriarch of the Jewish people. It is a royal homecoming.

Not so for the rich man. He finds himself in a different place. Listen closely to Jesus’ description of it: “In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’” (Luke 16:23-24)

Make no mistake: hell is a real place. Words such as *body*, *finger*, and *tongue* presuppose a physical state in which a throat longs for water and a person begs for relief. Hell, just like heaven, is not a state nor a metaphysical dimension of floating spirits. Hell is an *actual* place populated by physical beings. God has quarantined a precinct in his vast universe as the depository of the hard-hearted who refused to accept his offer of grace.

Where exactly is this place? Jesus gives one chilling clue: “outside.” Hell is outside the boundaries of heaven. Abraham, in paradise, told the rich man, in torment, “Between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.” (Luke 16:26) Most frightening of all, hell lasts as long as heaven . . . which is forever. Hope and happiness perish there, but the body and soul continue outside.

God, who is eternally gracious, will never force his will upon anyone. He urges the mutineers to stay on board, but he never ties them down to the mast. So in the end, the answer to the puzzling question of how a loving God could send sinners to hell . . . is that he doesn’t. They *volunteer*.

- 2) Thankfully, wonderfully, amazingly, hell is not the only option. God offers an infinitely better choice through Christ. Remember the promise of John 3:16: “Whoever believes in him shall not perish . . . *but have eternal life.*” God offers the hope of a life that never ends . . . in a place that never ends called *heaven*.

The Bible says that Jesus has gone to “prepare a place” for us. (John 14:3) Like hell, heaven is tangible and touchable. It’s as real as the soil in your garden and as physical as the fruit in your orchard. In fact, your garden and fruit might look familiar in heaven. God has already given us glimpses of this future state. Think of gold-drenched sunsets. Diamond-studded night skies. Rainbows so arched in splendor we have to stop and sigh. These are mere appetizers of heaven.

Now, think of yourself. Why? Because you will be you at your best forever in your heavenly home. Sure, even now you have your good moments. Occasional glimpses of your heavenly self. When you forgive your boss’s temper, tolerate your spouse’s moodiness, or selflessly serve a person in need, you display traces of saintliness. It’s the other moments that sour life.

But not forever. Not *in* forever. God impounds imperfections at his gate. As John declares in the book of Revelation, “Nothing that is impure will enter the city.” (Revelation 21:27) Pause and let this promise drench you. Can you envision your sinless existence? You will be you at your best forever!

Here’s something else you need to understand: *you won’t be bored in heaven*. I know that’s a concern for many people. After all, eternity is a long time. But the reality is that you won’t be bored in heaven because you won’t be the same *you* in heaven. Boredom emerges from soils that heaven disallows. The soil of weariness is what makes our eyes tire. The soil of mental limitations causes information overload that dulls us. The soil of self-centeredness pushes us to grow disinterested when the spotlight shifts to others. The soil of tedium leads to meaningless activity that siphons our vigor. Those soils will be thrown out with sin and Satan, leaving you with a keen mind, endless focus, and God-honoring assignments.

Yes, you will have assignments in heaven! Just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, you will have meaningful work to accomplish in your eternal home. This work might be

similar to what you do now. It might be something new entirely. You could oversee the orbit of a distant planetary system, or design a mural in the new city, or monitor the expansion of a new species of plants or animals. Like to cook? You might feed an Africa or two.

One thing is for sure: you'll love it. Never weary, selfish, or defeated. Clear mind, tireless muscles, unhindered joy. Heaven is a perfect place of perfected people with our perfect Lord. Paul said it this way: "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33)

- 3) All of this begs a few final questions. How can we be sure of these promises? How can we know they will come true? What guarantees can we gather for the hope of heaven? The apostle Peter has an answer: "Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we've been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now!"

The resurrection is our guarantee. We can follow Christ with confidence because he has already been there. Jesus was born in Bethlehem. All of divinity was content to cocoon itself in an eight-pound body and to sleep on a cow's supper. He grew up in Nazareth, where he made deadlines and paid bills. He went to Galilee, where he recruited direct reports and separated fighters. He journeyed to Jerusalem, where he stared down critics and stood up against cynics.

But most of all, he has been to the *grave*. Not as a visitor, but as a corpse. Buried amidst the cadavers. Numbered among the dead. Heart silent and lungs vacant. Body wrapped and grave sealed. The cemetery. He was buried there. But death could not hold him. We can believe in the promise that Jesus can replace death with life *because he has already done it*. He has already been down that path and come out the other side. Fully alive. Fully glorified.

A. Application

Several years after Max Lucado's father's death, he received a letter from a woman who remembered him. She was only six years old when her Sunday school class made get-well cards for ailing church members. Her mom baked a pie, and the two made the delivery. His dad was bedfast. The end was near. Somehow, she had a moment alone with him and asked if he was afraid to go away.

"Away is heaven," he told her. "I will be with my Father. I am ready to see him eye to eye." At about that point, her mother returned. She recalled that her mother consoled his parents with a fake smile on her face. But the little girl smiled a *real* smile, and his father did the same.

This woman wrote to Max to say that her family was going to Kenya. They were going to take the message of the gospel to a tribe on the coast. She was scared for her children because she knew that there would be hardships along the way. "But as for me," she wrote, "I am not afraid,

because the worst thing that could happen is getting to see my Father eye to eye.”

This is the hope that we have in Christ. This is the promise of John 3:16. “For God so loved the world . . . that he gave his one and only Son . . . that whoever believes in him . . . shall not perish but have eternal life.”