

Riverview Baptist Church
Sunday School Lesson Guide
November 9, 2014
“Living for Eternity”

Memory Verse:

We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment. 1 Corinthians 4:12-13

Imagine there were two men, both in the same occupation and both hired to leave their homes in the U.S. for a small Middle Eastern country to work for one full year for a substantial amount of money. They are each given a tiny, one room apartment to live in for the duration of their stay. One man, bored by his surroundings, takes some of his hefty paychecks and decks out his apartment with new appliances, a huge TV and surround sound system, and new furniture. After he has spent a good deal of money, he found that his apartment was much more cozy and comfortable.

The second man, however, did not touch his money, but deposited it in his account every month. The object of taking this job was to make as much profit as possible for his life back at home and he focused on that objective. Finally, with their contracts fulfilled after a full year, both men got ready to head back to the U.S. The first man was sorrowful because all of the stuff he had bought over the year could not fly home with him. The second man was fine because he knew that his family and his hard-earned money would be waiting for him after the flight. Which of these men was wise and which was foolish?

The first man arrived home, safe and sound, but he had lost all the great furniture and gadgets he had spent his money on during his temporary stay abroad. The second man made it home having avoided wasting his wealth in the foreign land like the first man.

So what's the difference between these two men? Vision and motivation. One could only focus on his own comfort and pleasure, so he squandered a lot of the wealth he had earned. The other man, however, focused on the long game, the future, his plan to be prosperous. One said “Gimme, gimme, gimme, right now! I need comfort! I deserve pleasure! I have to have it now!” The other simply put aside his desires for short-term gain and instant gratification in exchange for delayed but much more satisfying future gratification. How did he manage? He focused on the plan and he lived it out.

This is a very obvious modern parable representing two Christians who have two very different outcomes in Heaven. One lived focused on eternity and the other lived only for the moment. How can we tell if we're really living for eternity and storing up our treasures in Heaven? Here's a few scriptures that paint a pretty clear picture of kingdom minded folk who are living for eternity.

Those who live for eternity, also...

1. **Look** towards eternity (Hebrews 11:13)

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. Hebrews 11:13

All the followers of God in the Old Testament had to trust God's promises for the future and live by the faith that He had given them. God promises to Abraham (for a nation of descendants from which would come a blessing for all men) didn't come to pass in Abraham's lifetime... nor his son, Isaac's lifetime... nor in Jacob/Israel's time. Moses lead that nation, but never set foot in the promised land, and none of the Patriarchs, Priests or Prophets got to see Jesus Christ and His ultimate fulfillment of reconciliation between God and Man. So how did they do it? How did they put off instant gratification for something infinitely better? They trusted God, put their faith in Him and looked into the far distance, believing His promise and doing their part to advance towards it. Seeing it so far in the distance, they knew they weren't meant to see it fulfilled on Earth, but they knew that God would let them see it fulfilled in eternity, when they went to be with Him. In the lens of eternity, the worries and plans of this world seem petty and strange. When we live for eternity, we are able to use that lens to change our desires, values and priorities toward those things that will pay off in eternity.

2. **Work** towards eternity (1 Cor 4:12-13) (2 Cor 5:20)

We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—right up to this moment. 1 Cor 4:12-13

We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. 2 Cor 5:20

A. Perception affects your **work**. (1 Cor 4:12-13)

When we get a good look through the lens of eternity, our perceptions change about reality. Our perceptions are realigned, as are our values. When our perception changes, our beliefs change and when our beliefs change, our actions change. Thus, the work we do changes based on our point of view. When we see the troubles of this life (being cursed, persecuted, slandered and treated like trash) compared to the glory of Heaven, it makes it that much easier to return good for evil as Jesus commanded us to do. The suffering of this life is like a vapor in the wind but the goodness of God in eternity will never end, by definition of eternity. How can that not give us the joy to ignore persecution and spread the Gospel. Incidentally, this Heaven-focused, Jesus-centered, mindset is what brought so much to the early church that was so horribly persecuted in the Roman Empire. Historically, the church is shown to have grown in number and influence during the times when it was most persecuted.

B. Work affects your **perception**. (2 Cor 5:20)

The more rewarding hard work we do for God, the more good deeds we perform that He has laid out for us to do, the more our perception change is confirmed. We begin to see what we're doing is really God's eternal work. It's not just hard work, it's not just rewarding work, it's Holy work, it's God's work and its payoff is literally never-ending. We are truly Ambassadors of Christ channels of His Holy Spirit and conduits of His power here on Earth. We are not being conceited when we say that God is working through us. The most important work ever done in our lifetimes is God's will for our lives, and we see that more and more as we draw closer and closer to Him through prayer, study and obedience.

3. **Anticipate** eternity (Phil 3:20)

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ
Philippians 3:20

Finally, those who live for eternity will anticipate eternity. Like the fathers of the faith before us, we have looked and seen that we are a peculiar people in this world. We are strange to them and they are strange to us. We used to be just like them, but now we have been changed, saved by God from the death and sin we were floating in. Focusing on eternity allows us the joy of anticipating the return of Jesus Christ, when he comes back to right everything that's wrong, one way or another. Though they didn't know it specifically, this was the fuel of the faith that every Old Testament saint of God had received. Because of God's promises their (and our) seats are reserved and our citizenship is confirmed: we now belong in Heaven due to Christ's sacrifice and the Father's adoption of us.

Some people may get anxious about the "end times" speculation that some good Christian people can get carried away with sometimes. However, when we step away from that fear and let God show us the big picture, His eternal picture, then we will be like John the Revelator saying, "even so, Lord Jesus, come!" We will long to see Him come as soon as He can, because His return will equal reward for us. The age of sin and death will have passed and the new, eternal age of God's goodness, grace and mercy will be upon us. This anticipation for eternity will prompt us to look more and more towards eternity and seeking God's will for our lives during this temporary stay. The anticipation will also motivate us to do the hard work God has for us to do, liberating our perceptions from the bondage of the Self and the Flesh. Doing the work and receiving confirmation of our faith will only cause us to anticipate Jesus' return even more. As long as we stay close to God, this becomes a feedback loop that gets stronger and stronger. This is one of the many ways God is sanctifying us in this temporary world and using it to conform us to the image of Jesus, making us more like Him in every way. What a motivation!

Take Home:

- Does your outlook on life reflect a focus on eternal things or earthly things?
- Does the work you do benefit you for the short term or will it echo in eternity for the glory of God?
- Do you anticipate Jesus' return to dwell among men forever, or does that hold no excitement or motivation for you? Or perhaps does the thought of Jesus' return make you a little nervous?
- These are serious questions to ask yourself. Pray and ask God to help you to honestly evaluate yourself and your perceptions. Ask Him to give you what you need to change you priorities and perceptions of value to mirror His.