

Title: The End of the Road  
Date: July 24, 2022  
Subject: The road to true happiness ends in heaven.  
Scripture: 1 Peter 1:3 - 12

A cross country road trip could begin in Happy Camp, California. Along the way we could visit Why, Arizona before heading to Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. From there we face a choice - North to Colorado with places like Last Chance, Nowhere and Purgatory. Doesn't sound like the best route. Let's go east to ... Uncertain, Texas; north to Okay, Oklahoma; Neutral and Good Intent, Kansas before arriving in Confidence, Iowa. Continue east to Tennessee through Defeated, Difficult and Dismal. Watch out that don't come to Bitter End. The route through Kentucky isn't any better what with Hazard and Hell for Certain. Who'd name a town that? Or Hell, Michigan? By this time Panic, Pennsylvania might be an appropriate stopover. Go north to Happy Corner in northern New Hampshire, nearby to Canaan. If don't want to go that far north could venture over to Bliss Corner but have to steer clear of Satan's Kingdom and Old Furnace.

Could have taken the trip through three places named Happy, several with Happy in the name, others named Joy, Paradise and Bliss. Only found one that uses heaven – Swede Heaven. You can make of that what you will (with Swedish accent). Many have a variation of heaven as in haven.

On our road trip on The Happiness Highway we've made stops at Misconceptions, Encouragement, Love, Serving, Spiritual Growth, Going, Generosity, Hindrances, Contentment, Suffering, Greeting. We've heard the call to not faint, fret or fear but be faithful.

The journey for humanity began in one paradise called the Garden of Eden. The road was soon filled with detours of humanity's making. We're coming to the end of the road. End doesn't mean dead end, that when we die, we'll come to a dead stop and there's nothing further. Rather, we're to understand "end" as meaning culmination. Those who remain on the wrong road are headed toward a future of judgment and eternal punishment. Those who take the Jesus' way end in another paradise called Heaven.

Let's define heaven as the place of eternal happiness, joy, gladness, pleasure, bliss. It won't be just some joy, a partial amount, an imperfect experience. It will be filled with joy - full, complete, satisfying. There'll be no need for a command to rejoice as it will happen automatically.

We can think of it in terms of the stereotypical kid at Christmas when he gets everything he wants and goes completely bonkers. That's not quite the right picture of how we'll respond, at least not outwardly, but it conveys the idea of pure joy.

Read 1 Peter 1:3 - 12.

The passage begins with emphasizing how our great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has allowed us to come to the place where we can call him Father. Because of his great mercy, he's allowed us to become his kids. He's given us new birth into a living hope. It's made possible by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That's the first prong of what he's provided. It occurs in the present, but points to the future by virtue of the word hope.

The second prong is God has given us new birth into an inheritance. Inheritance always references something that will take place in the future. The inheritance the Lord gives is unique. Rust can't make it deteriorate. Thieves can't steal it. It has an eternal shelf life so it will never spoil, unlike some of the stuff we find at the back of our refrigerators that has gone way past the expiration date. It won't lose its vibrancy or vitality in the way colors fade from clothes.

Our inheritance is kept in heaven for us. It's more secure than Fort Knox, "the Most Heavily Guarded Place on the Planet," because it's home to about half of the U.S. gold reserves. The complex is surrounded by a steel fence. The building is made of concrete-lined granite reinforced by steel. The U.S. Treasury says Fort Knox is "equipped with the latest and most modern protective devices." Rumors include the grounds being surrounded by land mines in addition to electric fences; machine guns ready to fire when a laser is triggered. There are outside guards posted on the building's four corners and in the sentry boxes by the entrance. They maintain their skills through practicing in shooting range in the basement of the facility. All to protect a bunch of gold. God has better security – angels who can send fire and brimstone, .....

The sermon has a Michael J. Fox feel to it. Back to the future. Back to the present. The passage quickly goes back and forth between the present and the future. For now, back to the present, the present aspect of God working in and for us, the present aspect of salvation. We're shielded by God's power. This is a constant theme in the book of Psalms where the psalmists speak of God being our fortress, our strength, our shield, our rock, our defense. He is present with us to make us steadfast in our relationship to him as we face the trials and troubles of the world.

God's sustaining grace will come to an end. There'll be a time when it will no longer be needed as it no longer will serve a purpose. His sustaining grace is with us until the coming of the salvation that's ready to be revealed in the last time.

The future aspect of salvation, when salvation is completed, is when his grace will allow us to be present with God. The purpose is to provide eternal happiness. This is pointed out in vv. 5 and 6 - greatly rejoice in the salvation that's ready to be revealed.

Back to the present. The presence of suffering and trials is brought up. The purpose of trials is they're a means of testing our trust in Jesus Christ. They help to refine us and it.

More about gold as a comparison is made. The price of gold was 1719.26 per ounce when I checked on Thursday at 5:04pm. Not everything that glitters is gold. I found that out the hard way. I was scouting around the dirt piles the excavator created from digging the foundation for the house my parents were building. There, in front of me, was a rock, glittering with flecks of golden color. Dollar signs all over the place. We were rich. I hurriedly showed it to my dad. He didn't grab it and rush to the bank. Nor did he chuck it back on the

dirt pile. He might as well have done so. He said it was fool's gold and wasn't worth anything. I think I probably gave it a heave or kept it for a little bit because it was shiny.

If there was question as to whether the chunk of rock I picked up was gold, it could have been taken to experts to determine if it was real. Then the partying could begin. Dig up the farm. Find more.

Just as gold can be tested to show it's real and refined to get a better quality so our faith is tested to show it's real and produce a better quality Christian.

A second purpose of the trials is for our faith to bring praise to God. Notice the timing of when the praise is offered. It's in the future. It can happen in the present as well but the tone of the passage is future.

Gold doesn't last. As I'm reading through the biblical accounts of the kings of Israel and Judah, I'm noticing that their gold was easy come, easy go. All the wealth accumulated by Solomon was squandered. Sometimes the kings used the country's wealth and the money from the temple to pay other kings to side with them against a mutual enemy. Or it was a payoff to keep invaders from invading. Other times invading nations took it as the spoils of war. And from there who knows where it went.

Gold doesn't last. Faith in Christ does. Gold can only purchase things that are temporal. No one can offer their fortune or the entire net worth of the planet to buy redemption from sins. That purchase was made with something that's imperishable - the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18, 19). In addition, a person's faith in Christ is able to "purchase" praise, glory and honor to God. Gold doesn't increase when it's refined. When faith is refined and the impurities are removed, faith increases.

I've recently shared this approach, but I think it's worthwhile for us to hear again and ponder how we might talk with people about eternal realities.

The non-follower of Jesus Christ frames the conversation in terms of them being right and the follower of Christ is wrong in the insistence that Jesus is the one and only way to heaven. They assert Christians have wasted their lives by following the standards and principles of the Bible. Sometimes the suggested Christian response is to admit the possibility of being in error but couch it in terms of preferring to live the way we do as it protects from problems like broken relationships, pain, venereal disease. Then we ask, "but what if I'm right and you're wrong?"

A better method would be to take the apostle Paul's approach who said if there is no resurrection from the dead and if we only have hope for this life, we are to be pitied more than all men (1 Corinthians 15:16 – 19). Agree with the person. Admit if we're wrong – we're complete imbeciles, dumber than D U M, everything we've said and believed is complete crazy talk. Who stinkin' cares? Why not just go out and have one drinking binge after another, go from one sexual liaison to another, dominate people, steal, kill, however we can to get our jollies. It makes perfect sense to live that way if the other is right and we're wrong.

Then ask, "but what if I'm right and you're wrong? Are you willing to gamble that there isn't something more beyond this life, that there won't be an accounting for what we believe and in whom we place our trust? You're free to believe and act the way you want, but I don't want to take that chance."

It's back to the present in vv. 8 and 9. Our trust in Christ can and should do something for us now. It isn't a blind faith. There's plenty of evidence for the veracity of Christ being the Son of God who gave his life so we could have our sins forgiven. This affects our present existence. We can live above the sufferings, trials, and troubles of life because of what Christ provides.

The updated NIV words it "the end result of your faith." Other translations similarly speak of the end of our faith or the outcome of our faith. That's back to the future but it's phrased as being in the process, of happening now. "You are receiving."

What are we receiving? It's the salvation of our souls. Salvation is used in a broader sense than it was in v. 5 where it spoke of the fulfillment of the coming salvation. Here it addresses the present deliverance from peril and destruction, their safety, their security. Nothing can alter the Christian's position before God. They are already in a right relationship with God and don't have to wait for a future determination. The Lord is making good on his promises. The soul is saved ... and the body will be.

Buddhists and other groups wait for Nirvana or Utopia when everything will be made right. All they have to do is bear with the troubles and inflict more pain on themselves so they can deserve to have that future. The follower of Jesus Christ doesn't have to wait for things that will only happen in the end. It's true that heaven will restore everything to its original purpose and it'll be place of perfection, but the Christian can experience some of that in their present lives. Christianity is sometimes criticized as a "pie in the sky" religion. The truth is that most other belief systems are "pie in the sky."

Those who personally place their trust and reliance in Jesus Christ have been saved at the point of Christ's crucifixion. That's where it's rooted. That act completed everything needed for salvation. We're in the process of being saved as we experience the unfolding of God's work in our lives while we're alive on earth. We look forward to the time when we will be saved as salvation in all its fullness will be revealed.

In the Scripture reading earlier David described God's sustaining grace and his response. He said, "I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; Even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is my at my right hand, I will not be shaken" (Psalm 16:7, 8). Because the Lord was his God, he felt his lot in life was secure. He describes it as pleasant places and declares that apart from Lord he had no good thing.

His attention was turned towards the future. Because of what God was doing in his life in the present he believed he would have a delightful inheritance (Psalm 16:6). The Psalm ends with these words: "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; My body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:9 - 11).

David said the Lord revealed to him the path of life. In his most famous Psalm David describes the journey including paths of righteousness and walking through the valley of the shadow of death during which

God's goodness and love would follow him all the days of his life with the assurance he would dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23).

He knew the journey could be long and arduous, filled with detours and pitfalls as well as celebrations and parties. He didn't fix his gaze upon this world. He knew where he would end up. He looked forward to the eternal pleasures when he would be with God. He looked forward to the time of inexhaustible joy.

Though David wasn't called a prophet, I think he could be included in the group of people who spoke about grace that was to come and was revealed when Jesus came (1 Peter 1:10). The prophets and other Old Testament people didn't understand about Jesus Christ coming - what would cause him to come, what he would teach, how he would live, how he would die, how it all would unfold. They knew something was going to take place. They believed God was going to act, but they didn't exactly know how, what, where or when.

In this same way, we don't understand all God has in store for his people in the place called heaven. We get the why but not so much the details of the how, what, where and when.

We understand God is there and we'll see him in a new way, to see him as he is (Matthew 5:8, Job 19:25, 26). We understand heaven will be paradise. It will be our home. It will be the place that fulfills our hopes and dreams. It will be a time of receiving rewards. We'll be reunited with our loved ones who've placed their trust in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4).

Someone has noted what will be absent from heaven: "the agony of the sin that surrounds us: selfishness, a world boasting in wrong, child abuse, playground bullies, injustice, hate, foul language, dirty jokes, abortion, sexual immorality, immodesty, greed, gossip, drunkenness, rape, credit card hackers, overdemanding employers, inconsiderate neighbors, backbiting, cliques, persecution, phony Christians and worldliness. without hospitals, or prisons, or graveyards. There will be no violence, no betrayal, no manipulation, no scorecards; nor will there be any Alzheimer's, or cancer, or addiction, not even any knee replacements in heaven."

The last book in C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* series is *The Last Battle*. The title of the last chapter is "Farewell to Shadowlands." On the last page, he writes: "There was a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are—as you used to call it in the Shadowlands—dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning." And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before." (C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, p. 228.)

This is the end of our road, where the Highway to Happiness ends – a never ending joy with God.