



Summer Family (Part 6)

Painting a Picture of Heaven

Dave Stone

Ted Cunningham – We are continuing in our Summer Family Reunion series with a new friend and to tell you about Dave Stone. Dave pastored for 30 years at Southeast Christian Church, thirteen of those years as senior pastor and truly Southeast Christian Church is the church in the country we all look to for pastoral succession. They just do it so well.

Bob Russell handed the baton over to Dave years ago, then Dave handed it over to Kyle Idleman. We all look to Southeast and to Dave for such wisdom in this area. I've been leaning into him on the future and the health of our church as well. He's on the Board at Focus on the Family and leads their pastor ministry there. Again, he has become like a pastor to me.

I'm going to pull the curtain back just a little bit to let you know about this because this is kind of behind-the-scenes stuff you don't normally share. But he asked Katie before he got here this weekend, to send a picture of everybody he would be interacting with. So, Katie started stalking people on Facebook and put their names with a picture. Yesterday, yesterday, on the golf cart, he was scrolling through pictures of people asking questions about them.

That's what you call a pastor. He truly loves people. That's because I felt horrible beating him so badly at golf yesterday. It was awkward.

Would you give a nice warm welcome to our new Friend, Dave Stone.

Dave stone – Thank you, Tom. Ted... Ted. Thank you, Ted. He is one of my closest friends.

It is great to be here at Woodland hills. I've heard so much about this church. I've heard tons about you all.

And now, I to get to experience it. I've been very excited about this and I do love Ted Cunningham. I love the fact he's been here for 25 years. I love the servant's heart that he possesses and Amy possesses as well and just the way that they are an embodiment of inspiring the family to become fully devoted followers of Christ. I know that's how they are leading. That's how this staff is. I've got to meet a lot of the staff.

I'm just honored to be here. Let me ask you a strange question just right out of the get go here. How many of y'all have ever had broken ribs? If you have broken ribs, the only time it hurts is when you laugh, cough, sneeze or breathe. It's just a painful injury. A few years ago, I had two broken ribs, I had a biking accident. Think huffy not Harley. But my arms should have PR probably given that away. Sure enough, I got two broken ribs and it was brutal. I called my doctor after two days and I said, "Hey, you've got to give me something. I cannot sleep."

He said, "Well, let me ask you a question. Are you trying to sleep laying down?" I said, "That's how I was taught. He said, "You can't sleep while laying down. He said, for the first five to six days, you have to sleep sitting upright in a chair." I said, "That's impossible, no body can sleep sitting upright in a chair. But the next Sunday, I was in the middle of my sermon and I looked out at my congregation... Yeah, it's possible.

There are a lot of people in Louisville, Kentucky who are really good at it.

So, I'll try to keep you awake. But what I want to talk to you about today is Heaven. It was one of the most memorable nights in my life. Through a strange twist of events, I had been invited to play golf at Pebble beach. And this is the pentacle of golf. I know you guys have incredible courses here, but Pebble Beach is kind of every golfers dream. If that wasn't enough, my buddy and I received a personal invitation for the two of us to attend a private dinner with golfing legend Gary Player. Gary Player is the only golfer to have won both a PGA championship and a senior PGA championship. He's won 18 majors. Three months ago, he hit the honorary first shot at the Masters.

So, to say that I was pumped up, would be a massive understatement.

To sit at the table with greatness... for as long as I live, I will never forget that night. And yet, as exciting as it was to receive that invitation, I have good news for you. You have received a grander invitation to an even greater banquet.

The Bible calls it, in Revelation 19, the Wedding feast of the Lamb. And it will be held in Heaven. And your host is the one who spoke the universe into existence, the one in whose image you were created, the Great I AM. And you don't have to leave after the meal because if you have committed your life to Jesus Christ, then Heaven will be your eternal address.

John 14 is a passage that you are well familiar with. Verses 2 and 3. My father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. So, with that in mind, today we talk about Heaven. I've entitled this message *painting a picture of Heaven*.

Maybe you heard about the teenager who got his first job working for florist, making different deliveries. It went pretty well... until after he had been there a couple of days, he got a little bit careless and he accidentally switched two of the orders between a church that was moving to a bigger building and a man who had passed away. The irate pastor called up the head florist and said, "We've got a problem." We have our big grand opening worship service in our large sanctuary and it starts in about 20 minutes, and in the front of our sanctuary there is a set of flowers with a big sash on it that says, "Rest in peace. The florist says, "You think you've got problems, "Somewhere in this town, next to a casket, there is a set of flowers that says, "Good Luck in your New location.

That's how some of us approach the afterlife. I hope I get lucky or "I've got my fingers crossed. But where you spend eternity will not be decided by luck. Choice, not chance will determine your eternal destination. And today I am convinced of this. What you believe about eternity determines how you live today. And the Bible is very clear that there are only two options. There is Heaven and there is hell. And that's it. it's as if Jesus, in all of scripture is waving the caution flag of warning so the people will never have experience hell.

Think of it like this: it's as if the cross of Jesus Christ is placed right before the entrance to Hell and Jesus says the only way that you are going in there is over my dead body." When we reject that sacrifice, we seal our fate in hell for all eternity.

But Heaven was designed for you, for those who accept Jesus Christ. If we really knew what awaits Christians in heaven, it would transform the way we live and it would increase our desire to go there. And yet, there are some Christians who are living as if there is no Heaven and there are non-believers who are living like there is not hell.

And if you don't hunger for heaven, you will be tempted to go after Heaven on earth. And I want you to be more excited about Heaven than you are frightened about hell. So, today, I'm going to give you three familiar three-word phrases that paint a picture of Heaven and I think you'll be able to remember them.

The first phrase that I want you to think of is home sweet home. We say things like, "There's no place like home." You'll probably go on a short vacation this summer, in fact, maybe you're on one right now. Welcome. I was just talking to Scott and Lori over here who it's their first time at church and they are on vacation and went to high school with her. Wow, is that crazy? So, I know some of you are on vacation, but when you get home, you'll say there's no place like home. We had a great time in Branson. You'll have a great time wherever it is that you are going to so this summer, but there's nothing like walking into your own house. When you walk through that front, when you see your bed, it looks, it feels, it smells like home. That comforts us. And yet, this home is only temporary

In First Peter 2: 11, the Bible refers to Christians as being strangers and aliens in this world because this world isn't our home. But if you are a believer, I guarantee that Heaven is a home for every Christian. It was made with you in mind.

Second Corinthians 5: 1 says, now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven not built by human hands.

Later on, down in Verse 8 it says, we are confident I say and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. There are two phrases that jump out at me. An eternal house in Heaven and at home with the Lord. Why would it say at home with the Lord? Because

for Christians our home is where Christ is. Listen to Jesus' words again, *I go to prepare a place for you that you may be where I am.*

As strange as it might seem, even though you have never been to Heaven before, it will fill like home to you because God instilled that desire within you, that longing. And God knows what you will need to feel like home to you.

A couple of years ago, you may have read about the nursing home in the Netherlands that was experiencing the same struggle that occurs in most nursing homes, due to the fact that the older we get, the more our memory starts to fade and since all hallways and doors look the same, the common problem is that the residents have a hard time finding their way back to their room. I watched this happen with my dad when his dementia began. It was so frustrating to him to leave the cafeteria and to try to, at times, find his way back to his room. But this nursing home in the Netherlands hired a photographer, and they had him go to the previous home address of each resident and he took a picture of their front door and then they had the pictures blown up and enlarged and they put them over the doors and along the hallways and it made it easier for each resident to find their way home.

That's what I want to do today. I just want to help you find your way home, eternally, to paint an accurate picture of what Heaven is like.

Philippians 3: 20 says, For our citizenship is in Heaven and we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ *Home sweet home.*

Here's the second three-word phrase: *Better by far.* From a prison cell the Apostle Paul lays out the benefits of living and living and dying.

In Philippians 1 21-24 – for me to live is Christ and to die is gain, but if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ, so I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between the two. I desire to depart and be with

Christ, which is better by far, but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

So, He so made certain, that in his inspired word, you would know beyond any shadow of a doubt that earth can't begin to compare to Heaven. It is better by far. Trying to describe Heaven would be like trying to explain what an iPhone can do to someone living in the first Century. We couldn't totally explain it, nor could they totally understand it, no matter how hard we tried. Our God is a God of creativity his creation screams that in every facet of our lives. There is absolutely nothing boring about Heaven. How can it be boring if the one who created this earth, the one who made every animal, every mountain, every lake, every ocean, the one who makes rainbows. How could heaven be boring.

So, let's try to see what it is that makes Heaven better by far. First of all, it's new and improved. Revelation 21: 1 Then I saw a new Heaven and a new earth for the first Heaven and the First earth had passed away. So, in the last book of the New Testament, John one of the disciples, is taken on a journey by an angel and John is given a brief peek into Heaven to try and help paint that picture for us. And he says, it's a new Heaven and Earth. So, this earth as we know it will be destroyed and coming down to replace it is the one that God has been preparing for us.

Also in Heaven, there will be a symbolic wedding. Revelation 21:2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. So, the church, that's us, are the Bride of Christ. We will be united with Jesus. Remember earlier that I mention that you were invited to a much more important dinner or banquet than the one that I was invited to at Pebble Beach. Well, here it is. The wedding feast of the Lamb. That's what you are invited to.

Revelation 19:9 Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Now I know what's going through every man's mind right now as you are listening. "Oh, great, I get to go to Heaven and I get to go to a wedding and I have to go to the reception."

But trust me... when you are seated at the table, and Jesus "Christ is at the head of that table, you are not going to be bored.

What else is there? The bible says you will have a glorified body.

Roman's 8: 23 – We too wait with an eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies that he has promised us.

Earlier, I mentioned, from Philippians 3: 20 it says he will transform our Lowly bodies to glorified bodies. It's tough to know exactly what that means, but the older you get, the more exciting that thought becomes.

I'm telling you what. The other night I went to sleep, everything was cool, I woke up the next morning, I said to my wife, "I've pulled a muscle in my calf. She said, "Did I hurt when you went to bed? I said, "No. I started to call my doctor, but I thought what am I going to tell my doctor? I dreamed I was running a marathon and I think I pulled something in the event. I don't know what to say. I can't wait for a new body. My idea of exercising down here on earth is filling the bathtub with hot water, pulling the drain and fighting the current. But in Heaven, I'm going to have a new glorified body. And I think we will be in our physical prime. In the garden of Eaden, when Adam and Eve were created, we don't know how old they were. But sin had not entered the world and yet the bible tells us that they were naked and they were now ashamed.

So, I don't know if they were 24 or 34, but I can promise you, they were not sixty four. This instant transformation sounds rather appealing. Heaven will be better by far because of the glory of God. That's all of Heaven.

Revelation 21:11 it shown with the Glory of and it's brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel like a jasper, clear as Chrystal. It goes on to say that the foundation of the walls were decorated with every type of precious stone. We can try to picture it, but it must be breathtaking. The Bible says there's no sun or moon because God's glory lights all of heaven. The streets are made of pure gold. Get this, what is of the highest value here on earth will literally be pavement in heaven.

What else is there? Rewards. Revelation 22: 12 – Look, I am coming soon, my reward is with me. and I will give to each person according to what they have done.

So, not only are you in Heaven for all eternity, but you will be rewarded. Our Heavenly father will reward us for our commitment to Christ and we will receive his grace and be forever reminded of his forgiveness. That is Hugh.

I was blessed to have an earthly father that modeled both grace and forgiveness.

When I was 15 years old, I experienced every teenage boy's dream. My mom and dad said they were going out of town and they were going to leave with another couple. My brother and I were thinking this is going to be awesome. We have two and a half days all to ourselves at home.

My dad was the Dean of Cincinnati Christian University at the time. He said, Hey, I'm going to have you boys stay down at the dorm and that

way, I can have people who can keep an eye on you and see what you're doing." I said, "Don't you trust us?" He said, No.

Mom and dad made one tactical error. When they left the college campus, both mom and dad had driven a car to the campus and then they left to go out of town with this other couple. That left an extra vehicle. I was only 15 at the time, my brother was 18. At the time, you had to be 16 years old to even get a driver's permit. But when mom and dad left, my brother came to me with the keys to the blue beauty. He said, "Dave, you've been a relatively decent brother, I'd like for you to take the blue beauty out for a spin sometime today. I said, "I'm not worthy, but since you asked, I will gladly do it."

So, I did take the blue beauty out for a spin and drove around the campus for two solid days. I'd see a person come out of the building and I'd say, "Angie, where are you going? To the library? Hop in, I'll give you a ride. I ran a shuttle service for lonely secretaries for 2 days.

Everybody that got in the car with me, I said the same thing. I said, "Hey, whatever you do, do not tell my parents. Oh, Dave, nobody is going to tell your parents, stop worrying.

Mom and dad got back from their trip. On the first day, everything was cool. On the second day, everything was great. On the third day, up from the grave he rose.

Dad came home from work and he slammed the door. He wasn't a slammer. He said, "Boys, I want to see you in my study. We went to the study. He slammed that door. He starts pacing back and forth. He's got fire coming out of his ears. He looks at us and says, "Is there anything you boys want to tell me? They had been gone for 2 and a half days. We had done a lot of different things, and we didn't know exactly what they had on us. I live by a very simple philosophy,

never confess to a felony if he only has you for a misdemeanor, he said do you boys have anything to tell me? I said, "We have nothing to declare. My dad, being a preacher, immediately begins to spout off an impromptu parable. He says, "A certain man went on a journey out of town with his wife... I know where this is going. A certain man when out of town on a journey with his wife. Before leaving he entrusted two sets of car keys to his older son who, in turn, entrusted one set of car keys to his younger brother who even though he didn't have a driver's license, proceeded to drive around the campus at Cincinnati Christian university for two solid days what should happen to these two boys? Dead silence. He said it again, "What should happen to these two boys? Finally, my Sunday school training kicked in and I said, "As surely as the Lord lives, the elder brother must die.

As I recall, my dad did not think it was all that funny and when I turned 16, my dad said, "Hey, happy birthday Dave, but you are going to have to wait a while to get your driver's license. Oh wow, that hurt. But two days later, he came into my room and said, Let's go. I said, "What? He said let's go. I'm thinking prison? I didn't know where.

He said, "Let's go get your license. I said "are you serious? He said yeah, you drove for two days, I made you wait two days. I said, "Thank you. We show grace because we need grace and when we show grace, we resemble our heavenly father. And someday when you enter Heaven, and he says, "Well done, good and faithful servant, that, my friend, is grace. We will be rewarded because of Jesus and Calvary. This world has nothing to offer us that is eternal. Sometimes when I speak in a setting with believers and unbelievers, I'll say, "Think of it like this." If you are on your way to hell, then this life is the best it's ever going to be for you. But if you are on your way to Heaven, then this life is the worst it's ever going to be for you. Heaven is better by far.

Sometimes we can learn more about a place by seeing what isn't there. That's why revelation 22: 3 says, No longer will there be any curse. That's why revelation 21:27 says Nothing impure will ever enter it. This next sentence alone should be enough to make you desire heaven. Revelation 21: 4 there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away. That's better by far.

Recently, I sat down and I wrote out what I call my no more list. It's all of the things that are not going to be in Heaven and I went all the way from A to Z.

I sat there and I started thinking about everything that won't be in Heaven. I can't wait to get there because in Heaven, there will be no more anxiety, addictions, amber alerts or arthritis no more bankruptcy Bad breath, bullying, Botox, or bruises no more court rooms, child abuse, chiggers, Kemo, cancer, courting your calories, cable news and no more colonoscopies. No more double boogies no more disease, divorce, depression, drunk drivers death or dementia. No more ego, earthquakes or elections. No more fear, or face masks. No more foreclosures, or funerals. No more gossip or greed, grief or graveyards. No more hypocrisy or homelessness, no more hip replacements or heart attacks. No more injustice or infertility, isolation or incarceration. No more jealousy or junk mail. Nor more knee replacement surgeries kill joys kidney stones no more loneliness legalism or long lines for ladies bathrooms.

No more murders, mammograms, or miscarriages. No more negativity, neonatal units, nursing homes or nuclear war. No more oppression orphanages, or obituaries. No more prisons, pain, poverty, no more performance reviews no more political parties. No more quitting. No more quarantines, no more roundabouts, no more root canals, no more reorganizations, no more regret, racism or road rage. No more raisin cookies disguised as chocolate chip cookies,

No more sermons, no more shame or starvation, no more satanic attacks or suicide.

No more sexual assaults or school shootings. No more traffic jams or trafficking.

No more taxes or ticks or tornadoes or tumors or terrorists. No more tiny caskets, no more unexplained tragedies, unmet needs, unwanted children, unloved spouses or unbelieving sceptics. No more vaccines, ventilators, or violence. No more wars or waiting rooms, wheelchairs, or walkers. No more Zanex, no more x-rays, no more yelling from your spouse or yelling from your kids or yelling from you boss and no more zoom calls.

And Jesus says,

“Behold, I have come and I am making everything new. None of those things will be there. But look who will be there. Revelation 21: 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying look, God is going places now among the people and he will dwell with him. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Our God is both a powerful God and yet a personal God. He is powerful enough to sit on the throne and rule and entire universe yet when you arrive in heaven, he is personal enough that he will wipe away every one of your tears.

Look with me at one more passage and then I will tell you the final three-word phrase to describe Heaven.

Revelation 22: 3 the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him. They will see his face. When you think of heaven, I want you to think of Home Sweet Home. Better by far, face to face. What makes Heaven, isn't so much what's there and what isn't there, but it's who is there. And the answer is Jesus. And he's the host of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb. And seeing him face to face is

the culmination of all of life, all of human existence, no one has ever seen the face of God, but if you put your trust in him and committed your life to him, you will see him at the dinner, face to face, Heaven is exhilarating, it's refreshing, it's fulfilling, everything that is good here will be perfect there. Everything that is bad here will be absent there. The apostle Paul says in first Corinthians 2:9 – no eye has seen, no ear has heard it no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. I can only imagine. Do you see the bookend that is taking place here. It's a return to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden. It's a close intimate relationship, only back then, they never got to see his face. But now we will. The Bible starts out with a groom and a bride in the garden of Eden. The bible ends with a groom and a bride in a new Jerusalem with a new Eden coming down out of heaven to earth.

Back in Exodus 33: God says In your sinful and fallen condition, you can't see my face and live, but in Heaven, you will see his face and you will live forever.

The apostle Paul referred to this moment in 1 Corinthians When he said, now, we see dimly, but then we shall see face to face. 13: 12

Jesus said, in the Sermon on the mount, blessed are the pure at heart. Why? Because they will see God and we will be made pure instantly in heaven because as we read, there is nothing impure there. and when you see his face, it will be home. Like a blind person receiving sight, we will see God in the face of Jesus Christ, the one who died so that you could be forgiven and free. Would you want to see him face to face? What do you call Heaven minus Jesus and the answer is hell. His presence makes all the difference.

Earlier, I told you about my invitation to that intimate dinner at Pebble Beach with Golf legend Gary player. On my drive from the San Hoza

Airport, I had some phone calls to return so I was good boy. I pulled over into the parking lot so I could take some notes while I was talking. I even swung past a Wendie's and waited in a long line to get a Frosty. I enjoyed that. That was good. But when I was about 12 miles away from Pebble Beach, I got slowed down in a traffic jam and while I was sitting there, I got a phone call from my buddy who I was going to dinner with. He said, "hey Dave, where are you? I got hung up in some traffic, but no worries I should slide in just before it starts at 6:30. He said, "It started five minutes ago. The invitation said 5:530 not 630. My heart sank. To make matters worse, the traffic got worse. I ended up arriving at Pebble beach at 6:50 and I was too embarrassed to go in for the last 10 minutes of the meal.

I meant it when I said earlier. It was one of the most memorable nights of my life. Memories of regret. How do you miss out on such a great dinner after receiving such a mangamous invitation? Well, for the very same reason that the majority of our world will not be present at the wedding feast of the lamb. I disregarded the important details of the invitation. I had no sense of urgency. I underestimated the affected that the surroundings of the culture could have on my pursuit, and I let good things crowd out the best thing. and if we are not careful, we can do the same thing. We can settle for a cheap imitation in this life and miss the meal with the master in the next.

At times, in our everyday lives we've become so fixated on our frostiest, that we've forgotten to focus on the feast. I guess what I'm asking is would you like to go to a place that God has prepared as a reward for you, a place that feels like home that is better by far, where you can worship Jesus face to face to thank him for staying on the cross when he could have come down from the cross. And staying on that cross and becoming that perfect sacrifice, he made salvation and forgiveness possible for all of us if we would just swallow our pride and accept him. I have to tell you; I can't wait to get to heaven.

On my way out the last hour, I had several people just stop me and just tell me they can't wait to see in heaven I can't wait to see my neighbor Mike who died way too early. I can't wait to see our friend in ministry named Amanda. I can't wait to see my new friend Browning who just passed away and I got to baptize him a few weeks before his passing. I can't wait to get to meet my daughter and son-in-law's baby that didn't make it. I can't wait to see one of my mentors named George and my long-time friend Bob. I can't wait to see my Mom I can't wait to see my dad. I can't wait to see you. Heaven is a prepared place for prepared people. Are you prepared?

Our father in Heaven, I thank you for this church. I thank you for the difference that Woodland Hills is making in this community. Lord, I thank you that they are impacting so many people and they are inspiring so many people. Lord, I thank you for the way they point people to you. Our prayer today is for those who don't know Christ that they would be willing to swallow their pride and take a step closer to Jesus and say I want to find out how it is that I can have a relationship with Jesus. Lord, would you help them to know that it's not through their goodness but through your graciousness. Not through anything that we do, it's through what you've done. In accepting that true gift that you gave us. We thank you that you died an atoning death for us and we thank you that you conquered the grave and someday we can too. Dear Lord, for those who are missing loved ones right now, would you just be close to them and with your Holy spirit, comfort them, and may we look forward and live each and every day with heaven in mind and realize this world is not our home.

It's in Jesus' name we pray... and all God's people said... Amen

