

“What We Will Be”

“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

When you're a kid, one of the most vexing questions you face is, “What are you going to be when you grow up?” It's a question that adults always seem to ask, and it was one I never wanted to answer. There were a few years when I was sure I was going to play professional football, but as time went by and reality took over, the question remained: “What are you going to be?” It was a question I simply didn't want to think about. I was more concerned with what I was going to do in the present, and my thoughts were consumed with the trivial details of my little life.

The search for vocational identity is one of life's most challenging questions, and yet today, the Lord turns our attention to an even more important topic. Today, we consider the issue of our eternal identity, and the question, “What are you going to be?” takes on a far deeper meaning than a simple inquiry about the profession you will pursue. Today's question is ultimate. In fact, there is no more important question. What does the future hold? What comes next? What will happen to me when I die? When this life ends, *what am I going to be?*

Most of us avoid this question, but it's something we've all thought about. In fact, it's probably a question that keeps us up at night, and yet the answer to this question is something that even Christians struggle to express. We talk about the future with generic optimism, but when it comes to specific questions about *what we will be*, we tend to draw back with a shrug and wait for the next topic. Today, we need to recognize that this silence and uncertainty about our eternal future isn't helpful, and it's definitely not what God wants.

Throughout Scripture, God calls us to think and speak and sing precisely about *what we will be*. Peter said, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Peter 3:15). Paul wrote, “I do not want you to be ignorant brothers about those who have fallen asleep or to grieve like the rest of men who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). And Jesus said, “In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2-3). The fact is, Scripture drips with imagery of *what we will be*, and the language of heaven is one of the most prominent features of God's Word. And yet, our attention and energy are dominated by this life.

Paul said, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ (then) we are to be pitied more than all men” (1 Corinthians 15:19). This life is not the goal, but that's how we live! We go through life distracted by the immediate needs in front of us, consumed with the urgent details of the present, and we rarely give thought to the eternal context in which God has placed us. Yet the ultimate question remains, “*What are you going to be?*”

One of the reasons we don't like to think about this future-focused and eternal question is because the answer has profound implications for the way we live in the present. In an essay titled “The Weight of Glory,” C.S. Lewis wrote, “All day long we are, in some degree, helping each other to (heaven or to hell)...It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities...that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal.”

These chilling words remind us that everything we do in this life has ultimate implications. The portrait of our lives is painted on the canvas of eternity, and each day we are called to bear this “weight of glory.” And when you honestly think about your life in these terms, it turns our tidy, trivial little world upside down. It means that everyone you know is on a journey to eternity, either to heaven or to hell. The costumed children who came to your house last night to trick or treat are on that journey. The people you work with each day are on that journey. The neighbor you greet on your way to the mailbox is on that journey. The person sitting next to you right now is on that journey.

As Lewis said, you and I have never met a mere mortal, and that can be a terrifying thought because, the truth is, we have all lived too much in this world. We have all disregarded or neglected our neighbor, minding our own business, and turning our eyes from the lives and needs of others. Not only that, but we have also ignored our own need to repent. We have resigned ourselves to live in broken relationships, and we have failed to reconcile with our brother. These sins have eternal implications, and they need to be recognized. One of the reasons that I dodged the question about what I wanted to be when I was a kid was because my heart was too much in the present, and a genuine answer would’ve required me to take action. Looking to the future requires us to deal with the present, and that is not easy. In fact, living only for today is one of the greatest spiritual dangers we face because it allows us to remain in our sin, put off reconciliation, and ignore eternity.

But today, John reminds us that this is *not* our identity! “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! *And that is what we are!* Dear friends, *now* we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is” (I John 3:1-2).

These words pull us out of the present, and they place our lives into an eternal context. Today, in these words, God tells us who we are right now, and today, in these words, God tells us who we will be! And when we recognize the eternal journey we are on and the future that we have been given in Christ Jesus, the present struggles of this life are put into their proper place. When we see our journey in the light of eternity, we can speak the language of heaven, and we can lift our eyes upward. We can repent for our past failings and confess our present sins, and we can receive our identity as children of God, forgiven and freed to be like Him right now!

During 2026, we have been asking important questions about the ministry we share, and many of you participated in this planning process. The Story Continues included listening sessions, interviews, and countless conversations, and throughout November, we will be unveiling a renewed vision for our Emmanuel. This vision is based not only on the sure and certain promise about what we will be, but also on the proclamation of who we already are. You see, we are children of God right now! And that ultimate identity gives meaning and purpose to everything we do. God gives forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ. And, as we grow together in His Word, we encourage one another in faith, and then we go into the world, recognizing that every person we meet is someone for whom Christ died and one whose life has eternal significance. That’s what makes our life together at Emmanuel so important. We’re not simply planning for the next five or ten years. We’re living and loving and serving together – right now – in the light of eternity.

Today, as we recognize the faithful departed, we don’t have to wonder where they are. Today, we speak words of life, and as we commemorate their passing into glory, because words of life also proclaim who we are in Christ. And my friends, this Gospel message not only purifies us – it prepares us to live our present lives as God’s children, knowing exactly what we will be. Go with the peace of this promise God has made to you today, and all God’s people say, “Amen.”

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