
CBC WEEKLY RESOURCES



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COMMUNITY BIBLE CHURCH
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I. SERMON RECAP

Pastor Gary closed the “Established” series by speaking tenderly but directly to those who may still be “outside of Christ.” He used a vivid picture: every person without Christ is like someone crossing a deep chasm on a narrow, slippery, moss-covered footbridge. The only thing keeping them from falling into an eternal abyss apart from God is a fragile, fraying thread tied to the gracious hand of God. That hand is currently holding back the demonic, giving time and breath and opportunity to turn to Christ... but that time is not unlimited.

From there, he unpacked the biblical teaching that heaven is real: a place prepared by Christ, a paradise of perfect peace and understanding, and ultimately the presence of God Himself. He contrasted this with hell: a real place of separation from God, hopelessness, and darkness. But the heart of the message was this: heaven is not merely about relocation to a better environment. Heaven, in its deepest sense, is about a Person. Jesus Christ. The question is not only, “Will you go to heaven if you die tonight?” but “Do you know, love, and trust the Person who is heaven’s center?”

Pastor Gary reminded us that when Paul was caught up to the “third heaven,” he was overwhelmed by the glory of Christ and became deeply aware of his own weakness. Out of that weakness, God said, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” The way into true life, both now and forever, is not pretending to be strong, but admitting our weakness, sin, and need, and clinging to Christ. For those in Christ, our hope is not just a place we will go, but a Person we will see face to face. For those not yet in Christ, you don’t first need a place; you need a Person: a Redeemer, Shepherd, Elder Brother, and Lord who has suffered, died, and risen for you. May you come to see that your weakness does not disqualify you; it qualifies you to receive His sufficient grace and to walk with Him—now and into eternity.

II. STUDY GUIDE

Key Points

Life without Christ is perilous, even if it feels stable.

Heaven and hell are real places, not merely ideas.

Heaven is also a paradise of restoration.

Heaven is ultimately about a Person, not just a destination.

True encounters with God deepen humility, not spiritual pride.

God sometimes allows ongoing weakness (“thorn in the flesh”) to guard us and keep revelation pure.

Your weakness is not a barrier to God’s work; it’s the doorway.

Identity in Christ is rooted in being fully known and fully accepted.

Evangelism must point beyond “a better place” to the beauty of the Person of Christ.

A worship-first posture grows out of knowing the Person of heaven.

Stillness before God reveals both His holiness and our need.

Key Scripture (NIV)

Psalm 73:2 But as for me my feet had almost slipped I had nearly lost my foothold

John 14:2-3 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

Luke 23:43 Jesus answered him Truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise

Revelation 21:4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away

1 Corinthians 13:12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror then we shall see face to face Now I know in part then I shall know fully even as I am fully known

2 Corinthians 12:1-4 I must go on boasting Although there is nothing to be gained I will go on to visions and revelations from the Lord I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know God knows And I know that this man whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know but God knows was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things things that no one is permitted to tell

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 Or because of these surpassingly great revelations Therefore in order to keep me from becoming conceited I was given a thorn in my flesh a messenger of Satan to torment me Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me But he said to me My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses so that Christs power may rest on me That is why for Christs sake I delight in weaknesses in insults in hardships in persecutions in difficulties For when I am weak then I am strong

Revelation 1:10 On the Lords Day I was in the Spirit and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet

Other Relevant Verses (NIV)

These were either alluded to in the sermon or strongly tied to its themes.

Romans 5:8 - "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this While we were still sinners Christ died for us."

Ephesians 2:4-7 - God raised us up with Christ "and seated us with him in the heavenly realms."

Philippians 1:21-23 - "to live is Christ and to die is gain... I desire to depart and be with Christ."

Philippians 3:20-21 - "our citizenship is in heaven."

John 17:3 - "Now this is eternal life that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent."

Matthew 11:28-30 - "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."

Hebrews 9:27-28 - "people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment."

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 - "and so we will be with the Lord forever."

Psalms 16:11 - "you will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand."

Colossians 3:1-4 - "set your hearts on things above where Christ is."

III. DEVOTIONAL MATERIAL

Day 1 - "Slippery Stones and a Holding Hand"

Question: Where in your life do you feel most "slippery" right now—most aware that you cannot hold yourself up?

Reading: Psalm 73:2; Hebrews 9:27-28

Devotional:

Asaph, the writer of Psalm 73, was a worship leader in Israel. From the outside, he was "the spiritual one." Yet he confessed, "my feet had almost slipped I had nearly lost my foothold." In his case, the slippery stones were envy and confusion over why the wicked seemed to prosper. His stability wasn't lost through some dramatic, visible sin but through internal heart drift.

Pastor Gary used this image to describe every person outside of Christ: walking over a vast chasm on slick, mossy stones with a frayed thread to God's hand as the only safety. Hebrews 9 reminds us that life is not an endless bridge: "people are destined to die once and after that to face judgment." The clock is ticking, even when we are young or feel invincible.

Culturally, we tend to minimize death, push it to the margins, and distract ourselves. But Scripture pulls it into the light, not to scare us senseless, but to wake us lovingly. The good news is that the same God whose holiness demands judgment is the God who has "appeared a second time... to bring salvation." The hand holding that frayed thread is scarred by nails. Christ Himself stands between you and the abyss.

How to Apply:

Take a few minutes of honest stillness. Acknowledge specific areas where you know your "feet" are slippery. These can be patterns of sin, unbelief, or indifference.

Instead of trying to "be stronger," tell God plainly that your feet slip easily.

Ask Him to shift your trust from your own footing to His hand, to Christ's finished work and ongoing mercy.

Challenge/Encouragement:

Do not waste the awareness of your weakness. Let it drive you to the One whose grip does not slip. Today, when you feel temptation or fear, quietly say, "Lord, my feet slip, but Your hand holds." Let that be a turning back to the Person, not just a wish for a safer place.

Day 2 - "A Place Prepared, A Person Awaiting"

Question: When you think about eternity, do you mostly picture a place or a Person?

Reading: John 14:2-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

Devotional:

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus spoke tenderly to troubled disciples. They were about to lose His physical presence. To comfort them, He did not offer vague spiritual clichés but detailed promises: "My Father's house has many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you." In first-century Jewish culture, this language evoked a bridegroom adding rooms onto his father's house for his bride. It is relational, not merely architectural.

Jesus does not say, "I'll build something nice and see you when you get there." He says, "I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." The emphasis lands squarely on proximity to Him. Paul echoes the same priority: "And so we will be with the Lord forever."

Our culture often imagines heaven vaguely: clouds, harps, a general sense of "peace." Pastor Gary pressed us to go deeper: heaven is a real place and a glorious paradise, but its essence is the Person who inhabits it and prepares it, Jesus. If we only want the place and not the Person, we have misunderstood the gospel.

How to Apply:

Examine your own heart: when you think about "going to heaven," what excites you? Relief from pain? Seeing loved ones? Those are good but ask God to increase your longing to be with Christ Himself.

In your prayers today, shift from "God, get me to a better place" toward "Lord Jesus, deepen my love for You and my desire to be with You."

Consider memorizing John 14:3 and repeating it when anxiety about the future rises.

Day 3 - "Paradise and Tears Wiped Away"

Question: What wound, regret, or sorrow do you secretly wonder if you will carry forever?

Reading: Luke 23:39-43; Revelation 21:4

Devotional:

In Luke 23, we meet a dying criminal, a man at the very end of the footbridge. He has nothing to offer, no time to turn his life around, no spiritual résumé. One thief mocks Jesus. The other, knowing he deserves his sentence, simply says, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." He doesn't ask for a place called heaven; he appeals to a Person with a kingdom.

Jesus answers with astonishing immediacy and tenderness: “Truly I tell you today you will be with me in paradise.” The word “paradise” echoes the Garden of Eden, a walled garden of delight and fellowship with God. This man, moments from death and hours from agony, is promised not just survival but intimate, relational restoration with the Lord he had just begun to trust.

Revelation 21:4 gives a window into what that paradise is like: “He will wipe every tear from their eyes.” Notice the personal touch; God does not merely remove the cause of tears; He gently wipes the tears themselves. The old order, with death, mourning, crying, and pain, passes away. The thief’s wasted years, our deepest griefs, the injustices we have endured or contributed to, none of them will have the last word.

How to Apply:

Bring to God one specific sorrow or regret that feels permanent. Imagine Jesus not only forgiving you but personally wiping the tear from your eye.

Let this picture inform how you approach others’ pain: as you comfort, you reflect the God who wipes tears, not just the God who “fixes problems.”

When you feel overwhelmed by news, injustice, or personal loss, read Revelation 21:4 slowly and thank God that He has already determined the end of the story.

Challenge/Encouragement:

If Christ can promise paradise to a dying thief in his last hours, He can meet you in your weakness today. Let your deepest wound become the place where you lean hardest into the promise of the One who wipes every tear and welcomes failures who cling to Him.

Day 4 - “Inexpressible Glory and the Thorn”

Question: How do you typically respond when God does not remove a weakness or pain that you have begged Him to take away?

Reading: 2 Corinthians 12:1-4, 7-10

Devotional:

Paul recounts an astounding experience: being “caught up to the third heaven,” hearing “inexpressible things.” He is so cautious about drawing attention to himself that he speaks in the third person. He cannot even explain whether he was in the body or out of the body. The details of the place are overshadowed by the overwhelming encounter with the Person and glory of God.

Yet the same passage reveals that to keep him from becoming conceited “because of these surpassingly great revelations,” he was given “a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me.” The language suggests ongoing, piercing pain. Three times he pleaded passionately for relief. God’s answer was not, “You’re strong, Paul.” It was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

In the ancient world, public honor and strength were prized; weakness was shameful. Here God flips the script. The very man with “surpassingly great revelations” is kept grounded through limitation. Heaven’s glory did not make him invincible; it made him more dependent. He begins to “delight in weaknesses” because they become the setting where Christ’s power “rests” on him, like a tent or covering.

How to Apply:

Identify your own “thorn.” That recurring limitation, sin, struggle, sickness, or circumstance you wish were gone.

Instead of only asking “Why, Lord?” ask “How might Your power be displayed here, in my weakness?”

Consider sharing your weakness with a trusted believer, not to glorify the thorn, but to invite prayer and to testify that you need Christ’s grace.

Day 5 - “Knowing and Being Known”

Question: Do you believe God fully knows you and still fully wants you?

Reading: 1 Corinthians 13:12; John 17:3

Devotional:

Paul says, “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face.” In the first century, mirrors were polished metal, giving dim and distorted reflections. That is how we now perceive God, ourselves, and eternity. “Now I know in part then I shall know fully even as I am fully known.” There is already One who sees you with perfect clarity: every motive, every hidden sin, every wound and longing.

Jesus defines eternal life in relational terms: “Now this is eternal life that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” Eternal life is not mere longevity; it is a quality of life rooted in knowing and being known by the Triune God. Pastor Gary challenged us not to arrive in heaven and find that the Lord who looks into our eyes is only an acquaintance to us. The aim is not simply to reach the place, but to grow in intimacy with the Person now.

Culturally, many define themselves by achievements, failures, or others’ opinions. Heaven’s definition is different: you are the one fully known and fully loved by God in Christ. That identity begins the moment you trust Him and will be perfected when you see Him face to face.

How to Apply:

Spend a few minutes in quiet, inviting God to search you (see Psalm 139). Acknowledge that He already fully knows you.

Instead of hiding parts of your life from God, name them in His presence and then thank Him that Christ died knowing all of it.

Begin relating to God in more personal ways: talk to Him about your joys and fears, not only your “spiritual requests.” This builds the friendship with the Person you will one day see.

IV. SMALL GROUP RESOURCES

Opening

Welcome everyone; briefly acknowledge this is the final message in the “Established” series and that it focused on heaven, hell, and especially the Person of Christ.

Invite someone to ask God to guide your time: thanking Him for His Word, for the reality of eternity, and for His grace in our weakness.

Sermon Recap Theme

Core focus:

Being “established” in Christ means more than having a future place in heaven; it means knowing and depending on the Person who is heaven’s center, especially in our weakness.

Highlights to Review (bullet points):

The illustration of life without Christ as walking a slippery, mossy footbridge over an abyss, held only by a fraying thread in God’s hand.

Heaven is explained as:

- a place (a prepared dwelling),
- a paradise (comfort, clarity, no more tears),
- and ultimately a Person (being with Jesus).

Hell is a real place of separation from God and hopelessness.

Paul’s vision of the “third heaven” and his “thorn in the flesh”—how revelation produced humility, not pride.

God’s word: “My grace is sufficient for you for my power is made perfect in weakness.”

The challenge is to examine whether our faith is more about getting to a place or growing in a relationship with a Person.

Icebreaker Question

Allow 5-15 minutes for this, depending on group size.

Icebreaker:

“When you were younger, how did you picture ‘heaven’ or ‘the afterlife’? Has that picture changed over time, and if so, how?”

Encourage light, honest sharing: childhood images, movies, stories, etc. Then gently transition to how Scripture and this sermon have corrected or deepened those images.

Scripture Exploration

Passage 1: John 14:2-3 (NIV)

Read aloud together.

Discussion Prompts:

What comfort do you think Jesus intended His disciples to receive from these words?

Where do you see both place and Person highlighted in this promise?

How does the image of Jesus “coming back to take you to be with me” shape your view of death as a believer?

How might these verses change the way we talk about heaven with people who do not yet know Christ?

Passage 2: 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (NIV)

Read aloud together.

Discussion Prompts:

Why do you think God allowed Paul to keep his thorn even after he pleaded three times for it to be removed?

What does “My grace is sufficient for you” mean in your own words?

How is God’s power “made perfect in weakness”? Can you think of a real-life example?

What would it look like in your life to “delight in weaknesses” for Christ’s sake?

Passage 3: Luke 23:39-43 (NIV)

Read aloud together.

Discussion Prompts:

What differences do you notice between the two criminals’ responses to Jesus?

The repentant thief doesn’t ask directly for “heaven.” What does he ask for, and what does that show about where his hope lies?

How does Jesus’ answer (“you will be with me in paradise”) support the sermon’s emphasis on a Person over a place?

What hope does this story offer to people who feel they are “too late” or “too far gone”?

Putting It Together - Larger Prompts

Across these passages, how do you see the themes of place, paradise, and Person working together rather than against each other?

How do Paul’s ongoing weakness (thorn) and the thief’s last-minute faith each show that our security is in Christ’s grace, not in our performance?

How might God be calling our group to live differently, both in how we view our own weaknesses and how we talk with others about heaven and Christ?

Application

Personal Steps:

Shift from Place-Focused to Person-Focused Hope:

Sometime this week, take 10-15 minutes alone to talk honestly with Jesus about what you are actually longing for: comfort, relief, reunion, or Him. Ask Him to increase your desire for His presence.

Embrace your weakness as a doorway to grace:

Identify one area of weakness where you have been frustrated or ashamed. Intentionally bring it before Christ and ask Him to show His strength there. Consider sharing this with one group member for mutual encouragement.

Practice stillness before God:

Set aside a brief time (even 5 minutes) to sit quietly before God. No requests at first, just awareness. Let adoration rise, then confession, then thanksgiving, then supplication (ACTS pattern) in response to the Person you are before.

Community Steps (as a group):

Encourage honest weakness:

Commit to being the kind of group where boasting in weakness is normal, where people can admit struggles without fear of rejection, and where Christ’s sufficiency is celebrated.

Christ-centered evangelism:

Talk about how you might adjust the way you share the gospel. How can you describe Jesus Himself—His character, His suffering, His love, so that people see more than just a future “place”?

Pray for those on the “footbridge”:

As a group, list first names (or initials) of people you know who may be outside of Christ. Encourage each other to pray regularly for them to see their need for a Person, not just a place.

Closing

Invite group members to briefly share any specific prayer needs, especially areas of weakness or fear about the future that surfaced during discussion.

Encourage someone to pray, asking God to:

Deepen your love for Christ as the heart of heaven.

Teach you to boast in weaknesses so His power may rest on you.

Draw those who are “walking on slippery stones” into saving relationship with Jesus.

Leader Notes

Foster Safety:

Model vulnerability by sharing your own “thorn” or area of weakness first. This sets a tone where others feel permitted to be honest.

Keep Christ Central:

When discussions drift into speculative details about heaven or end-times timelines, gently steer back to the Person of Christ: “How does this passage help us know and love Jesus more?”

Balance Tears and Hope:

Some may carry deep grief, fear of death, or loved ones who have died. Allow space for emotions. Remind them of Revelation 21:4 and the tender promise that God Himself wipes away tears.

Include Those Still Exploring Faith:

If someone in the group may not yet know Christ, do not pressure or corner them. Instead, frame truths as invitations: “If you are not sure where you stand with Jesus, this is what He offers...” Encourage questions.

Honor Time, but Be Flexible:

Gauge the group. If one section provokes deep conversation, it may be better to linger there and shorten later parts. The goal is heart engagement, not finishing every question.

Encourage Follow-Up:

Suggest that group members follow up during the week with someone who shared vulnerably. A text, call, or coffee can help people experience the ongoing care of the body of Christ.

May God use your small group gathering to help each person move from merely hoping for a place to deeply knowing the Person who is our heaven, Jesus Christ.