

A Foretaste Of Eternity In Heaven

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In August 2007, we were blessed to move to Houston so I could work with Dee Bowman and Bubba Garner at the Southside church in Pasadena. In June of the following year, we experienced our first Southside Lectures. It was their 28th year of the Lectures. What an amazing week that was, listening to Jason Moore, Bob Owen, Terry Slack, and Don Truex deliver a total of 16 sermons in 4 days. The next year was just as amazing listening to Leon Goff, Chuck Durham, Tim Jennings, and Buddy Payne (the Florida Buddy Payne).

Not only did we hear wonderful sermons, but as a preacher at Southside, we had the opportunity to eat each day with the other preachers and their families and spend some quality time together. And at each service there was plenty of visiting and enjoying each other's company. Of course, the singing was amazing, with R.J. Stevens leading as he has done every year since the Lectures began, save for one. There is just something special about gathering with 600-800 other Christians to worship, sing, and study God's word for an entire week.

The last 2 years that we have gone to the Southside Lectures were just as good as the previous two, but different. It was different because we weren't working with that church anymore – we were visitors. As a result, it served as a sort of reunion as we were able to reunite with all our friends that we had made during our time there. It was wonderful to see them again and spend time together after being away for a year. We were challenged in our spiritual thinking by the lectures given by Phil Robertson, Mark Roberts, Ralph Walker, Brent Lewis, Roger Shouse, Tony Mauck, Colly Caldwell, and Warren Berkley.

Last weekend, the Westside church of Christ in Irving held their 17th annual Youth Lectures. Some of you were there or have been to past Youth Lectures. This year, they broke attendance records with over 800 at each service. Dan Lankford, Don Truex, Russ Bowman, Dee Bowman, Todd Banning, and Mark Roberts spoke on the subject of the wrath of God.

Just this past Friday night, the Kleinwood church of Christ in Houston held their annual singing which typically brings crowds of approximately 1000.

The Florida College Lectures have been held every year for over 60 years. Each year, thousands gather to hear numerous lectures presented over the course of 4 days by faithful preachers and to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. I've been fortunate to attend several of these, and it's very spiritually uplifting in so many ways. The lectures, the singing, the being with old friends.

When I was much younger, I attended the FC Camp on campus from 3rd – 12th grade. Since then, I have served as a counselor at the FC Alabama Camp, once at Sr. Camp in 2007 and this year at Jr. Camp. Many of you have attended the FC Texas Camp or served as a counselor there or both. At the Alabama Camp, they refer to it as the best week of the year. There's a good reason that's the case. It's a week of having a blast with 200 of the greatest people on earth playing sports, enjoying the outdoors, studying the Bible together, singing together, and praying together.

What do all of these events and others like them have in common? They give us a foretaste of eternity in heaven. It's the closest we can get to heaven here on earth. Now granted, there won't be sports in heaven. There won't be games and crafts in heaven. There won't be lectures in heaven. But we will be

gathered with a large number of Christians. We'll be able to reunite with those we haven't seen in so long. We'll praise and serve God together.

The worst part about the Southside Lectures, the Westside Youth Lectures, the FC Lectures, and the Kleinwood singing is having to leave when it's over. It's knowing that you won't see some of those people for another year, or possibly ever again. It's having to go back to the real world where sin and corruption reign and is all around us. Where temptations abound. Where the majority of people aren't concerned with spiritual matters. Where the words that are spoken on the TV and in movies, or sung in the popular songs are crude and filled with carnal thoughts and sensuality.

The best part of heaven is never having to leave. It will never be over! We'll never have to say goodbye to those we love. *"There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."* (Rev. 21:4) There will be no letdown as we go back to the "real world". Heaven will be the real world. It will be the new heavens and the new earth. We won't have to worry about hearing and seeing sin and corruption which vexes our souls. *"But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life."* (Rev. 21:27) It will be a joyous time – for an eternity.

We have a foretaste of eternity in heaven every time we are a part of these great events. But it's just a small taste. Heaven will be much more grand – so much so that we can't fathom it. But we also have that same foretaste each time we come together as a local church. In a small way, we're experiencing what we will experience in heaven: spending time with the best people praising and serving God and simply being together for an eternity. What an awesome thought. Doesn't it make you want to go there right now?