

Driving beats, pain and perspective

By Gregory Wiens

A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's heaven for? from "Andrea del Sarto" by Robert Browning.

While out driving recently a song came on the radio titled "Heaven" which was sung by Los Lonely Boys, released in 2004. While this hit from 2004 features great guitar work and a driving beat, I was actually drawn in by the lyrics. The theme of the song is that life on earth isn't that great. As the singers bemoan the state of their world and personal lives, they repeatedly ask, "Lord, how far is heaven?" The song leads me to check my perspective on my present life, which includes a medical situation with my two-year-old grandson, Anderson. I know you have challenges, too.

*Cause I know there's a better place
Than this place I'm living, how far is heaven?
So I just got to show some faith
And just keep on giving, how far is heaven?*

This is also one of themes that run through the New Testament. Life here on earth is going to be tainted by sin. Life isn't going to work like we want, but all will be made right in heaven. Do we really believe this? What do we think about God when churches are split by carnal people; little children suffer and die from diseases; a murderer kills innocent people; a depraved dictator commits genocide on thousands of people; a drunk runs a red light and slams into a church bus; a helicopter goes down in a war on foreign soil attempting to free others from cruel terrorists killing young men and women; a selfish spouse leaves a family to pursue sex and fun; or poverty starves innocent women and children and keeps them underprivileged? Most of us are appalled when we see the ravages of sin in our world today. Even Christians wonder why bad things happen to good people.

We would be wise to reconsider Paul's words in the Book of Romans, chapter 8 ¹⁸*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* ¹⁹*The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope* ²⁰*that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.* ²²*We know the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.* ²³*Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."*

Paul clearly saw his suffering and that of others being the result of sin in our world. To him we will always have problems in our world and should expect nothing less until we get to heaven. Robert Roberts (in *Spirituality and Human Emotions*) wrote years ago that Christians too often fear death because we are enjoying life too much. We have forgotten that we were created for a place much different from our present world. I, too, see many Christians enjoying life so much that they feel assaulted when something goes wrong.

Again Paul affirms the Christian's walk in Philippians 1:21 *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."* Do we really believe that? Are we really willing to suffer in this age knowing that our ultimate destiny is in another? It really isn't sad that we die. What is sad is that so few of us really live when we had a chance.

Now hear me when I say, expecting evil is not the same as tolerating evil. As Christ followers, we are to be His light in this dark world. At a great cost, we have been given robes of righteousness. With the Holy Spirit's leading, we can resist evil and serve others to make an eternal difference here on earth. This is why we are still here. But when you see evil, realize that this world is broken and we are called to be God's ambassadors while still here...then we get to go home. And then there will be no more tears.

Next time you hear "Heaven" by Los Lonely Boys, remember that God never promised us a life without significant problems. We live in a sin-stained world. It is broken. But that's not the end of the story.

Hear the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, "¹ For 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. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. ⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. ⁹ So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. ¹⁰ For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

I'm so grateful that I'm not alone in this unfair world. I thank God for other followers of Christ. I thank God for you.

And in case you haven't heard the song:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NPIWkzUaDvQ&feature=related>