

The word gain is usually not in our funeral vocabulary. Most of the time we speak of our loss – and that is what we concentrate on. People tell us how sorry they are for our loss. In fact when a person dies we say that they lost their life. We have a flood of emotions – sadness – grief – some times anger and regret. We have those emotions because we have lost something. We have lost fellowship with Art Lijewski, and it hurts. We have lost the opportunity to be able to sit down with him, play a game of smear, and enjoy his sense of humor – and that hurts. I asked Edna what she would most miss in Art's passing, and she said, just to be with him, look at him, and hold hands with him. His children said, to see his face smile, to play cards with him, to sit and watch the lake or Ausable River with him. But I would like to change the loss thinking in all of you today. Actually, for a Christian, the day of our death is better than the day of our birth. Now listen to this. Heaven enjoys a maternity-ward reaction to funerals. Angels watch body burials the same way grandparents monitor delivery room doors. "She'll be coming through any minute." They can't wait to see the new arrival. While we may be driving hearses and wearing black, they're hanging pink and blue streamers and passing out candy cigars. We don't grieve when babies enter the world. The angels of heaven don't weep when we leave it. For they know, that our departure from this world spells great gain, not loss. To Die is Great Gain. Let's examine why death is great gain for us.

A few hundred years ago our forefathers lived in rude huts. If you had told them that one day we would have a beautiful city like Washington, skyscrapers in New York one hundred stories high, 1000 foot ore boats in the Great Lakes, they would have said, "Surely these things can never be." And as we look at the best that our world has today and compare it to the descriptions of heaven, we could exclaim, "How could such a place ever exist?"

But there is such a place. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you." Paul called it a house not made with hands. The disciples longed to go there, having heard what Jesus had said about it. John on the Greek island of Patmos, had the glorious privilege of looking into heaven. God showed him the things prepared there for His children, and John tried to describe these things in the book of Revelation.

This place called heaven is a place of beauty, a place of life, and a place of incredible blessings. First of all, it's a place of beauty. One of the things that Art loved to do was to be out on the Ausable River with his Son Rich, fish, and just take in the beauty of God's creation. Fresh air, fresh water, trees, a marvelous setting. Or to be out in his back yard working hand in hand with Edna, planting flowers, or tending to his garden. Art was someone who really appreciated the creation of our God. A little girl looked up at the stars one night and wisely said, "If it is this beautiful on this side, how much more beautiful it must be on the other side. Imagine a multitude of Christians standing before the throne of God and praising him. What a beautiful sight! Rev. 7:9-10 says, "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count... they were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." What a beautiful view Art has. Art used to be one great dresser. He loved to listen to Lawrence Welk, and dance. Well right now, there is something better going on than the Lawrence Welk show. Art is surrounded by others wearing white

robes, and singing praises to the Lord. Art too is dressed in a dashing white robe, ready to sing and dance before His Lord.

Let's now take a closer look at heaven. Let's follow the angel on a guided tour. We read vs. 1-2. Not only is heaven a place of incomparable beauty, but it is also a place of endless life. And where does this everlasting life have its origin? IT has its origin as our text mentions from the throne of God and of the lamb. God gave man the original source of life at the time of creation while the Lamb gave us redeemed life after man fell into sin. In heaven though we observe that the water of life flows from both the throne of God and of the Lamb. Like a river which never runs dry so with water flowing from the throne in heaven. It is an unlimited supply of life. It won't run dry after we've been in heaven for 10 thousand years.

Further, our life in heaven will be crystal clear. In our hearts there will be love, forgiveness, and honesty. There will be no pushing and shoving matches to see who can speak or praise God first. There will be perfect harmony. Blacks, Mexicans, Whites and all other races will not be subjected to prejudice or name calling.

How will we stay alive in heaven? Will there be cherry and apply harvests in heaven? Our text talks about being nourished by fruit.

We have to remember that the book of revelation is a vision of John . In heaven the fruit that we will enjoy is the Word of God. What God speaks to us will always be interesting and spiritually nourishing. There will be no famines in heaven. In Rev. 7 we hear: "Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat." God's Word will then be our nourishment in heaven. God is not the type of speaker who makes you yawn after the first 2 minutes of his sermon. God's Word will be interesting and nourishing forever. It will be in season 12 months of the year. Eating the fruit is hearing the Word of God, rejoicing in it and believing it.

To be happy always! To live forever! Can this really be true? All during the course of man's life he has been looking for ways to extend his life or keep that 17 year old youthful look. Ponce De Leon scurried the countryside of Florida for that Fountain of Youth, but came to the sad conclusion that it didn't exist.

In our present day as we look around we see many new medical drugs. But all the medicines in the world cannot halt the funeral procession of death. The Bible says, "The wages of sin is death."

However, Jesus Christ offers us a life beyond this life. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. He that believes in me though he were dead, yet shall he live and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." Faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior from sin is the key which has opened the gates of heaven for our loved ones and for us. Rev 7 says of the Christians in heaven: "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

These are they who have come out of the great tribulation. Art Lijewski knew that life was a battle. In fact, He experienced real battles firsthand. He was a soldier who received 5 bronze stars. He was in the 2nd wave that went over on D Day. He was the first over the Siegfried Line. He was involved in the battle of the Bulge. He was a half track driver with the 2nd Armored Division, a group called Hell on Wheels. When he and his fellow soldiers freed the people of France from German oppression, the people of

France gave him and his compatriots, yellow ribbons. In three years time, he was only home for 10 days with his wife Edna. That was a trial. In addition as a Fire Fighter he was injured three times. On one occasion, he fell through a floor to a flooded basement, where only holding on with his spread out arms onto some pipes was he saved from certain drowning. The Big Wenona Hotel Fire. Art was there. And then the past several years dealing with cancer. He definitely went through a period of tribulation.

But look at the present health situation for Art. It says there will be leaves for healing. No more influenza, cancer, brain surgery, strokes. Art is healthy again, both physically and spiritually. Handsome again, dark curly hair, a wonderful smile, a sharp dresser. Thanks to Jesus. Jesus did something for Art, that Art could relate too. You see for years Art had picked up junk scrap metal with the Men's Club from Trinity, and then turned it in for cash to Trinity church for use in children's ministry. Jesus took Art, a worthless piece of scrap sinner, and made him into something useful again. Jesus paid for Art's sins, and gave him a righteous standing before God. It says in Isaiah 53:5 "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, the chastisement of our peace was upon him and with his stripes we are healed." Art is healthy again spiritually and physically.

Heaven is place of countless blessings. It is such a place because of the things that will not be there. There is much of it here. Pious job once said, A man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward." Even Jesus was a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." But there will be no sorrow or sadness in heaven. There will be no pain in heaven, no long nights of suffering. A passage written in Revelation says, "For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe every tear from their eyes." No more need for handkerchiefs, or kleenix boxes. No more tears spilling from our eyes.

The blessings of heaven continue. "We shall see his face! That is our Savior's face. There are some people in the world we aren't allowed to see when we want to. If you'd stroll up to the white house in Washington today and demand to see the President, you're probably get the shuffle treatment. You'd end of talking to one of his advisors or else it would take you days for an opportunity to meet him. Our president is an important man. But think how much more important Jesus is. There is no red tape when you want to see him in heaven. Jesus throws the doors of heaven wide open and says, "Come on in, see me face to face." Bring your prayers to me. Hear my words firsthand. Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest."

Heaven will then be a place of happy reunions. It won't be like a mere earthly reunion. Oftentimes at family reunions, we miss someone who can't make it for one reason or another. However, in heaven we will see our loved ones. Parents will meet their children. Sons will meet their fathers and mothers.

To understand in a small way the glories of heaven, I always tell people, you're your best memories of this earth, and multiply them by a few million and you will begin to understand the joy of heaven. Remember the snow forts as kids, the fishing, the picnics at State Park, the family times, the competitive card games, the dancing, and the eating of a big piece of pie for dessert. Happy memories of your husband, father, grandfather, and great grandfather. The joys of heaven will be much greater than these joys. Look forward to the reunion day, when these joys will continue together.

We cannot continue our guided tour of heaven without taking into consideration the final sentence of our text. "And they will reign forever and ever." Satan has been busy in an effort to destroy the things of God. He managed to destroy the Garden of Eden. He tried to destroy Jesus by 3 temptations. But Satan, can never, I repeat never mar heaven. He and his cronies tried once and they got booted out. They can never return.

Forever also means that time cannot destroy heaven. Great cities such as the eternal city of Rome eventually fall away and all that is left is ruins. Niagara Falls is each year eroding farther away. But the New Jerusalem will never pass away. II 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. Charles Linbergh once said, "Take advantage of all that you are offered. Fame passes so quickly. Yes all things change and decay and fade away, but God and heaven never change. So we now say, goodbye to Art. We are sitting on a high embankment overlooking the Ausable River on a clear sunshiny day. We are thinking of the beauty and joys that are his and will one day be ours thanks to our Savior Jesus Christ. No loss here, but only great gain. Thanks be to God who gave Art the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.