

# The Tennessee Tribune

Volume 23, No. 21, 3 Sections

THURSDAY, May 24-30, 2012

\$1.00

## When We All Get To Heaven: Why Eternal Life Still Matters A Commentary by Jason Curry



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Several years ago, one of my father's in the ministry told me: "Try to avoid preaching that is so heavenly bound, that it is no earthly good." His welcomed comment was in reaction to the sermons of many of his students which avoided mentioning important "earthly things" like helping the poor, encouraging African-Americans to vote and speaking truth to power in an effort to talk about "heaving things" like eternal life. Several African-American scholars have also made a similar point about our cultural emphasis on heaven which appears in famous hymns or Spirituals like "I'll Fly Away," "When We All Get to Heaven," and "Come We that Love the Lord." From time to time, you and I may hear eulogies about the significance of heaven, but the theme of eternal life seems to have lost its prominence or significance in this age of "economic empowerment" and property-gospel

preaching. I believe that the absence of fruitful, lengthy and meaningful discussions about the reality and importance of heaven has invited me to reflect upon a few reasons why eternal life should remain central to any Christian discussion.

Many ministers and lay people argue that eternal life is only an existence after death. However, for me, the reality of eternal life is important because it informs how I live my life from day to day. The idea of eternal life provides me with the opportunity to resolve issue of grief, because I can look forward seeing my relatives in heaven one day (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The privilege of eternal life seeks to discourage me from engaging in thoughts or actions which dishonor myself, my neighbors or God because I look forward to receiving the "gift of God which is eternal life through Christ Jesus (Romans 6:23)." The idea of eternal life re-

minds me that I must study my bible for I may meet a clerk, mechanic or lawyer who asks: "...what shall I do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25)?" The reality of eternal life tells me that I cannot live on meat alone (John 6:27), and it provides me with intrinsic value or a sense of "sombodiness" during these tough economic times because I "can lay up for myself treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt..." (Matthew 6:20)." Lastly, the reality of eternal life is sure to supersede the greatest conversations of the day because one day we will meet God "face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12). " As Christians, we are in this world but not of it (Romans 12:2, John 17:14), and inspirational, instructional and insightful conversations about heaven and eternal life will add meaning and joy to our lives as we look forward to the next.