

## Living in the Shadowlands

This year's Christmas function was addressed by Steven Nicholson, a solicitor with McPhee Kelshaw and the editor of this Newsletter and a member of the Fellowship's committee for some years. The full text of this address is available on the Fellowship's website.

After reflecting on some of the highlights of this year Steven took the attendees back to the celebrations that marked the beginning of the "new millennium". He found these celebrations remarkable because he had never seen 5.8 million dollars go up in smoke so quickly, remarkable because it was not a new millennium unless you started counting at 1BC and remarkable for the Australian that they remembered. It was not Donald Bradman or Dawn Fraser who was remembered but a five foot three former alcoholic who wandered around the streets of Sydney in the early hours of the morning for twenty five years graffitiing the sidewalks with one word *Eternity*. It was that word in the distinctive copperplate handwriting of Arthur Stace that was celebrated as it was lit up on the Sydney Harbour Bridge at the climax of the celebrations of the new millenium.

He then noted how much we had missed that daily reminder of where we will be spending our afterlife and how little we thought about *Eternity* and how heaven is the goal of the Christian life. In 1997 Time magazine noted:

Once upon a time, the hereafter was well mapped and familiar, the subject of detailed sermons and cautionary tales about doing and being good. Today, however, the silence on it is so pervasive that heaven may as well not exist.

Steven then went on to say:

"Remarkably while our pulpits may be silent about heaven the bible is not. While a visitor has not returned as Shaw suggests to describe a day in heaven God's Son came and gave us some picture of what it is like and the apostle John received a revelation of heaven.

We know from the bible that:

- Doctors are redundant in heaven - there are no tears, no pain, no illness.
- Dr Fells wouldn't enjoy heaven because all the advocacy work is monopolised by the Father's son.
- heaven is pictured as a wedding feast, a mansion with many rooms, the consummation of creation, an eternal city, the new Jerusalem.
- We will see clearly what we see dimly here.
- We know that in heaven the worship will be endless. It is a place of great joy.
- We know it is God's kingdom come in all its glory where we will be God's people, in God's place under God's rule."

So why is it that we don't think about heaven.

Steven identified the following reasons:

1. We are too concerned about being too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. He quoted C.S.Lewis' comment that:

*We are very shy nowadays of even mentioning heaven. We are afraid of the jeer about "pie in the sky", and of being told that we are trying to "escape" from the duty of making a happy world here and now into dreams of a happy world elsewhere. But either there is "pie in the sky" or there is not. If there is not, then Christianity is false, for this doctrine is woven into its whole fabric."*

To believe in heaven is to run toward life not to run away from it.

2. We are too easily satisfied. Again he quoted C.S. Lewis:

*"Our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea"*

Quoting Malcolm Muggeridge he noted that:  
*The only ultimate disaster that can befall us, I have*

*come to realise, is to feel ourselves to be at home here on earth. As long as we are aliens, we cannot forget our true homeland*

3. We are at war.

It is no coincidence that our minds don't naturally turn to heaven it is part of Satan's strategy. He quoted this time from Lewis' brilliant Screwtape Letters where the senior devil Screwtape urges his young nephew Wormwood:

*"The routine of adversity, the gradual decay of youthful loves and youthful hopes, the quiet despair (hardly felt as pain) of ever overcoming the chronic temptations with which we have again and again defeated them, the drabness which we create in their lives and the inarticulate resentment with which we teach them to respond to it - all this provides admirable opportunities for wearing a soul out by attrition."*

*"If on the other hand, the middle years prove prosperous, our position is even stronger. Prosperity knots a man to the World. He feels that he is "finding his place in it", while really it is finding its place in him. His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work, build up in him a sense of being really at home in earth, which is just what we want.*

4. We have forgotten the centrality of the Cross. That is we focus so much on what God has saved us from - judgment and sin that we forget what he has saved us for- eternal fellowship with Himself and our brothers and sisters in Christ—in a word heaven.

He then challenged members that to live in the shadowlands is to live in the light of heaven for it is from there the shadows are cast. This helps us in that:

1. It provides a context for our lives. It reminds us that even when the demands of work, family and church appear very large on the horizon the horizon of this life is very small. It is but the title page of our existence and the only things that will survive will be those of eternal significance.
2. We should live as citizens of heaven now. The most important feature of heaven is that God is at its centre - that is the essential feature of heaven. If we are to live as citizens of heaven we must have God at the centre of our lives. We must ask ourselves and each other - is the centre holding.
3. It reminds us that every person we meet is a potential citizen of heaven or of hell there are no mere mortals there are no ordinary people. We are all destined for eternity the question is whether we are going to spend it in God's presence or not.