

WHAT WILL HEAVEN BE LIKE? (1)

In these troubling times, most of us are a little frustrated, uncertain, anxious and disappointed at how things are developing. One thing that seems clear, at least to me, is that the worldly powers that be give little consideration to God in the decisions they make.

As Christians, I believe we are to be subject to governing authorities, even when we do not agree with their decisions (with the one exception of course – Acts 5:29). We are even told in scripture to pray for our leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-2). And in these times, as this situation drags on, our concerns and angst grow even greater. This is why I have tried to present a number of lessons designed to encourage us as we deal with these times. We have talked about why we have made the decisions we have made, how to live godly in these trying times, living with hope and setting our mind on things above – both the need to do that AND what our lives will be like WHEN we set our mind on things above. We have even addressed the subject of God and suffering.

This morning I want to focus on something I have mentioned a few times since we started these online lessons - **heaven**. I want to talk in more detail about heaven – the place we desire to go when this life is complete. This will be a two-part lesson. Today we want to talk about how heaven is described and in our next lesson (next week) I want to talk about the residents of heaven.

I. Thoughts about heaven

- a. **It is our motivation** – we often sing songs about it. Because in addition to praising God, our songs are designed to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16). Singing about heaven can strengthen our hope and encourage us to keep enduring.
We give consideration to the subject often: Sometimes in passing or invitation, very often as a goal we are striving for; at times as a point in a greater theme (such was part of a lesson at the end of 2019 and our theme – “Lights in a Dark World”), and occasionally a more detailed study (I presented a complete lesson about heaven about 3 years ago) – which is what we will be doing in these lessons. In a broken world filled with sorrows, we need frequent reminders of what it is about.
- b. **How often in scripture do we read of the goal of heaven?** 2 Timothy 4:7-8 – we read of the victor’s crown that awaits us when this life is complete; 1 Peter 1:4 speaks of an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled reserved in heaven for you; 2 Corinthians 5:1-2 speaks of our habitation in heaven – a source of hope if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed; 2 Peter 3:13 speaks of how we are looking for new heavens and a new earth (I believe a reference to our eternal home in heaven); Matthew 6:19-21 – it is where we are to be laying up our treasures and thus where our heart will be; Philippians 3:20-21 speaks of our citizenship being in heaven (implying we are sojourners and pilgrims on this earth) which we eagerly are waiting for; etc. The list of passages is extensive reminding us of our desired destination – Heaven. So let us consider WHAT motivates us about this place.
- c. **Heaven is a real place** –
It is not some fictional place made up by preachers to increase membership and give false hope (though some have embellished it beyond what scriptures actually teach)
You CANNOT believe the Bible and see heaven as anything but a real place. It may not be a place in the physical universe (it is a spiritual realm), but it is as real as this world is.
 - i. FIRST, I would appeal to the way it is described by our Lord – John 14:1-3 – I am going to prepare a place for you
John 18:36, Jesus said, “MY kingdom is not of this world...”
 - ii. Hebrews 11:10-16 – Abraham waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. (vs. 10); Also vs. 16 – a better, that is a heavenly country – contrasted with the physical lands from which the forefathers departed. They were not pursuing a fairytale

- iii. 2 Corinthians 5:1, we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens...
- d. Four figures of heaven¹ that point to its reality
 - i. A dwelling place – John 14:1-3 (Mansion in NKJV, KJV; dwelling places – NASB; rooms - ESV). But the idea is a dwelling place, possibly a room or a place. Notice that Jesus said, “In My Father’s house are many...” Jesus was going somewhere and returning. He pointed toward its reality.
Think of the intimacy of that, as we are with our Heavenly Father in His dwelling place.
 - ii. An inheritance - 1 Peter 1:3-9 – an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven.
An inheritance is a rich word, especially spiritually. When we think inheritance, we think of an estate – something of value left to you.
BUT, also consider that this inheritance means that we belong to God – Romans 8:16-17. We are part of His family and He is going to provide for us.
Also consider – RESERVED – God has a place for YOU (If you belong to Him). We understand reservations – you go to a restaurant and hotel with reservations – a prepared place is waiting.
 - iii. Paradise –I’ve always appreciated this word. As I understand, it is reference to a garden – a beautiful, well-kept garden (we have gardens – the arboretum, Huntington library, etc. – beautiful places to go and enjoy nature). I love nature and going to places of natural beauty – they profess to me how great God really is.
Cf. Genesis 2:8-24 – the garden of Eden where Adam and Eve were placed, where the “tree of life” was found. It is taken away when man sinned – Genesis 3:22-24.
We do not read again of this “tree of life” until Revelation 2:7, 22:1-5 – where do we find it? In heaven, in the presence of God.
The word “Paradise” is found 3 times in the NT – Luke 23:43 – Jesus to the thief while on the cross; 2 Corinthians 12:4 – Paul caught up to Paradise; and Revelation 2:7 – where God is.
 - iv. A city – we have already noted Hebrews 11:10. But consider also Revelation 21:10ff – John wrestles to describe the great and holy, heavenly city.
While figurative language, it clearly shows that it is a very real place that originated in heaven.

So we can see how heaven is a real place!

- e. ***It is our reward*** – 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 11:26 – Moses “looked to the reward”. Let us understand that how we live this as Christians comes with a reward. The sacrifices, the suffering, the disappointments, the endurance – in the end they will all pay off.
Colossians 3:24, Matthew 5:12 – great is your reward in heaven...

II. What will heaven be like

- a. Exactly what heaven will be like we don’t know. That is the nature of the spiritual realm.
Jesus taught in parables to help the people grasp the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God. He used material terms to give them a good of an understanding as possible (similar to allegory in poetry). But descriptions often fall short. Someone can describe in great detail a place and make you want to go there, even crave it and make it a goal, but until you actually do, it is not the same.

¹ Jeff Archer – 9/1/19, What Will Heaven Be Like? <https://www.jordanpark.org/media/sermons/2019/09/01/what-will-heaven-be-like>

All we have in scripture is glimpses into heaven. But everything it says is good, perfect and flawless. Consider:

b. **Heaven is a BETTER place** –

One of the descriptive words frequented in Hebrews is the word “better”. The writer seeks to show how life in Christ is better in every way, than the Old Law – a better priesthood, better sacrifices, a better law and promises, a better hope and a better place of rest as we have noted in Hebrews 11:16 – a better, that is a heavenly country.

Hebrews 10:34, “you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven...”

Hebrews 11:40, “God having provided something better for us...”

Heaven is better than anything this world has to offer. As you dig deeper into what heaven is like, you will see it is better than this world in every way.

A good way to consider this is to contrast heaven with the disappointments and struggles of this world, which is what we want to do.

c. **Heaven is Eternal** –

Clearly this world is temporary. And we, even more so. We know the frailty and uncertainty of life. James describes our life as a vapor (James 4:14). Solomon went into even greater detail on this in the book of Ecclesiastes calling all things in this life vanity.

And when we consider how people are constantly looking for ways to extend their lives just a little longer, some wanting to live forever, we can see the desire for such. I believe this is something that God put within us – Solomon noted, that God has made everything beautiful in its time and also “He has put eternity in their hearts” (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

But no matter how well do, at best we may give ourselves a few extra years – and I emphasize MAY do so, because we know there are no guarantees. We all succumb to death and our eternal destiny. Heaven is described as our eternal resting place. Matthew 25:46, speaks of entering into everlasting life. 2 Corinthians 5:1, *For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

Again 1 Peter 1:4 speaks of an inheritance that does not fade away.

Throughout the gospel of John we read of everlasting life – (John 3:16, 36, etc.)

1 John 2:24-25 – He has promised us – eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 4:17, when the Lord returns and we are caught up to meet the Lord in the air, “*and thus we shall always be with the Lord.*”

d. **A place of rest and peace** – this world is filled with unrest and troubles. It becomes tiresome, both physically and mentally. Ungodliness wears on us and frustrates us. We just want to rest our bodies and minds for a little while. But we can’t, because life keeps going and we have chores, maintenance, work, etc. That is why so many work hard toward retirement. But, as we are now seeing – even that is uncertain. And even after a day of hard work, we want to go home and rest for a while, only to wake up in the morning and start the process of work and life all over again. HEAVEN is a place where we are promised an eternal rest. Hebrews 4:9 says, “There remains a rest for the people of God.”

2 Thessalonians 1:7 speaks of how God will give His troubled people (troubled by this world) rest when He is revealed and takes vengeance on the ungodly.

Revelation 14:13, *Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.”*

e. **A place of indescribable beauty** – while there is beauty to be found in this world, it is also a filthy place in many places and ways. I find it tragic how people will destroy natural landmarks and places of beauty, of just because they can or for some sort of selfish gain.

We build our gardens and places of solitude, but they have to be maintained to enjoy them.

I don’t know what heaven will look like, but I believe it will be a place of indescribable beauty that we

can only get a glimpse of in this life. I think of the above references to Paradise.

Consider also the New Jerusalem that John described in Revelation 2:10-22:5. A city that is spacious with streets of gold and shining brightly and a river of pure water flowing from the throne of God lined with trees yielding fruit for every month. I KNOW its figurative, but it is designed to help us understand what heaven will be like. Think of the most beautiful place you have been, or desire to God because of the pictures you have seen. THEN think of the word, BETTER. That is heaven.

- f. ***A place where there will be no more*** - in direct contrast to this world. This world is so filled with heartaches, disappointments, troubles and wickedness.

Heaven is not like that. Revelation 21:4, "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes..."

No death, sorrow, crying. No more pain. 21:27 - Nothing that defiles or causes an abomination or a lie. Revelation 22:3, No more curse – which I believe describes many of the troubles in this world.

It will be a place where those given over to ungodliness will not be – 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. Add to this, Galatians 5:19-21 – the works of the flesh. And numerous other lists of ungodly behaviors that God will not allow in heaven.

So you either take care of them now, or face the eternal consequences.

Surely, it will be wonderful to find a place where NOTHING that disappoints us will be found – we will never grow old or get sick. No security systems or taxes. No hurtful behaviors, etc. No viruses or pandemics! Just an eternal bliss.

- g. ***A place where righteousness dwells*** – 2 Peter 3:13 speaks of how we look for new heavens and a new earth "in which righteousness dwells". All things that are good and right will be there.

It will be a place where we worship God and serve Him forever. WE want to develop this more fully in our next lesson when we discuss WHO will and will not be in heaven.

In times like these, we need to remind ourselves of why we must keep serving God and trying to do our best. It is times like these that declaring, "our citizenship is in heaven" is worthwhile. May this lesson help us toward that end in some way.

But understand, that no all will make it to heaven. It is a place for the saved, so I must ask you, ARE you saved? Have you obeyed the gospel? Have you put on the Lord in baptism? (Acts 2:38, Mark 16:16, Galatians 3:27, etc.) We will discuss this more next week, but for now I do want to encourage you to become a Christian if you have not already done so. Even in these times, if there is a way we can help you make your life right with God – I am here and ready. The lesson is yours. Let us pray!