

Heaven

Intro

This last February, Sheila and I took a trip to California. We had the opportunity to attend the Legacy Grandparenting Conference in Fullerton. We also took a week of vacation and explored the Sequoia and Yosemite National Parks, and Big Sur.

We did a lot of preparing and planning for that trip. Well, actually, our “travel agent” Abby Steele did a lot of planning for us. We made reservations and planned what we wanted to do and where we wanted to stay and what we wanted to do. We checked out the weather so we would know what to pack (there was 7 foot of snow in Sequoia when we went! We learned how to put snow chains on)

It was always comforting to check in at the various hotels and to see that our name was on their list...or their computer!

Well, today, I want to talk to you about a destination: where it is, what it’s like there, what kind of things are there to do there, and most importantly, how to make sure you are going there.

Heaven—someone has called Heaven the most misunderstood doctrine in Scripture. For sure, we think about heaven a lot less than we should! Heaven, in some form, is mentioned in Scripture over 500 times.

So today, I hope to answer four questions about heaven:

Where is Heaven?

What is Heaven Like?

What will we do in Heaven?

Who will be in Heaven?

(Pray)

I. Where is Heaven?

Someone has said the simple answer is “Wherever God is.” Jesus even defined it as “My Father’s House”

Open your Bibles to John 14:1-3

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God^[a]; believe also in me. ² My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Jesus gathered his 12 disciples the night before he would die on the cross and comforted them with these words. He had shared with them that he was about to die, that he would be resurrected , and then would go back to heaven.

What do we learn about Heaven from these verses?

A. Physical Place –

First, that Heaven is a physical place. It’s as real a place as Fullerton, California or Rock Island, Illinois. It is not a state of being, a state of mind, or some kind of metaphorical idea.

Psalm 11:4 “The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven.”

Heaven is a literal place – I cannot tell you exactly where it is. It would seem from the Bible that it is UP.

Acts 1:10,11 And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

Illus: One day a preacher was preaching on the subject of heaven and asked the congregation, “How many of you want to go to heaven?” Everybody raised their hands except one ole man on the back row of the church. So the preacher stopped his sermon and said, “Bro. So and So, don’t you want to go to heaven?” The man said, “Yea, I want to go to heaven, I just don’t want to go today.”

Paul tells about being caught up into the “third heaven” in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4:

² I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³ And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—⁴ and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

The New King James says “third heaven” for paradise.

What are the three heavens?

Isaiah 55:9 – the Atmospheric Heaven – For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.

¹⁰ “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven
and do not return there but water the earth”

The first heaven is the sky that we see when we look up

Genesis 1:14-17 – The stellar Heavens - ¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons,^[a] and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth,

The second heaven is outer space.

David Jeremiah says this about the third heaven: “Paul is saying there is something beyond the atmospheric heaven. There's something beyond the stellar heavens. There is a third heaven, and it is in that heaven that God resides. “

My Father’s House – where we will someday go to be with God

B. Permanent Place

Heaven is a forever place. We will spend forever and every in that place where God resides.

2 Corinthians 5:1

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

Ephesians 2:5-7 describes eternal heavenly places: “ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”

John 3:16 describes for us an eternal result of believing in the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't have to worry about our stay in heaven coming to an end. It is a permanent residence.

C. Prepared Place

Jesus said he was going to prepare this place and that he would come back and take us to this place – if it doesn't exist -- he is the worst of liars.

There are two ways to look at the idea of a prepared place.

First – Jesus prepared a place for us by going to the cross. He was about to prepare our way to heaven.

What is not yet ready — not yet prepared — is the way to get your room in God's presence. Sin has not been atoned for. And Jesus is the Lamb of God about to be slain -- Jesus will prepare our place by preparing our way to that heavenly place, his father's house.

Second – a prepared place could be a place He prepares in heaven for us. Prepared place --Tailor made for us –have you ever experienced a tailor made article of clothing? I've had suits altered before, and they fit better. But I've never had a suit tailor made for me. I understand that they fit you just right, made especially for you.

Heaven is made with us in mind. It is a prepared place.
Jesus' death and resurrection paved the way for us, prepared a place for us.

II. What is Heaven like?

Even though the Bible talks about heaven a lot, it doesn't give us a lot of information about exactly what heaven is going to be like. There are comparisons with life here, descriptive images, but nothing compares to what heaven will really be like.

Let me say this: every tv show or movie about heaven has pretty much got it all wrong. Because we really cannot comprehend how utterly amazing heaven is!

Here are some things the Bible says about heaven:

Psalm 33:13 – God's dwelling place—"The Lord looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man;"

Acts 1:11 – where Christ is - Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

Philippians 1:21-23 – Where believers go after death – "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. ²² If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. ²³ I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better."

Hebrews 11:10 - a city designed and built by God – "For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God."

Hebrews 11:16 – a better place than here – "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city."

Luke 23:43 – Paradise- And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”⁴³ And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

A. Paradise

Heaven is described as paradise. Jesus himself referred to heaven as paradise when talking to the repentant thief on the cross.

The dictionary defines “Paradise as “ an ideal or idyllic place.

Heaven is even more than that.

Our most descriptive narrative of what heaven is like is found in Revelation 21-22. Included in this description are streets paved with gold, gates made of pearl and precious jewels making up the walls.

The things we hold most valuable are building materials in heaven!

B. Pinnacle of our life

Consider your happiest, most fulfilled, most amazing experiences here on earth. Heaven is that multiplied.

Galvin Ortlund says this about happiness in heaven:

“Not only will heaven heal your earthly sorrow, but it will also recall, answer, and fulfill all your earthly happiness. Your happy moments on earth are not lost to you. They will return to you, in some deeper form — part of that final, settled Happiness of which they were, even at their best, mere anticipations.”

It’s like in The Chronicles of Narnia when one of the characters makes it to heaven and says, “This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this.”

It is life at its ultimate best: no suffering, no sickness, no temptations, no unanswered questions, no doubts.

C. Pure

Heaven will be a pure place. There will be many things that are not in heaven. In Revelation 21, John mentions some things that won't be in heaven:

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” (vs. 4)

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (vs. 22-27)

What are the things that won't be in heaven:

No tear left unwiped

No death

No mourning

No pain

No Temple – no need for it

No sun or moon – God is the light

No shut gates – no need to lock the gates, no crime

No night –

Nothing impure or unclean

No immorality – no sin

No shame

No deceit or false things

Heaven – a pure place

D. Perspectives are new

We will have the big picture when we get to heaven. Things that seemed to be important here on earth will be unimportant in heaven. And the reverse will also be true.

In our questions in preparation for our Questions series, someone asked if we will be aware of what is happening on the earth and in hell while we are in heaven.

For some, contemplating seeing loved ones suffering either on earth or hell would tarnish the joys of heaven.

So will we live in “Heavenly bliss”, unaware of the happenings here on earth or in hell?

Author Randy Alcorn says this about our happiness in heaven :” Happiness in heaven is not based on ignorance, but perspective.”

Luke 15:7 seems to indicate there will be awareness in heaven of earth’s goings on:

“Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.”

In heaven we will see all things from God’s perspective. We will see the big picture of his plan for redemption for all people.

The ultimate answer to the question is we do not know for certain.

III. What will we do in Heaven?

Pastor James Phillips, my pastor when I was attending college, told a story about his son Jimmy, who surprised him one day when he announced that he didn't want to go to heaven. Well, this of course caused this pastor concern, that one of his own children didn't want to go to heaven some day. When he questioned Jimmy further, the boy blurted out, "It sounds boring...just sitting on a cloud all day playing a harp!"

Well...what ARE we going to do for all eternity? For some of us, a nice long nap sounds pretty good. But you can't do that all of eternity.

So what will we do with our eons of time throughout eternity?

Well, no one will be sitting around on a cloud playing a harp – we will be too busy!

A. Pour out our worship

Revelation 4:9-11

We will pour out our worship. We will spend eternity looking into the face of Jesus and celebrating the fact that we have been redeemed by the blood of the lamb.

We will love God more and more each day of eternity. God is infinite and our time to learn more and more about him is infinite. We will never come to the end of knowing him and discovering more about him.

The distractions that kept us from fully worshipping him will be non-existent.

Jonathan Edwards said that "the joys of heaven will accumulate as one joy is added to another and the pleasure of all remain. Their knowledge will increase to eternity; and if their knowledge, their holiness; for as they increase in the knowledge of God, they will see more of his excellency, and the more they see of his excellency the more they will love him and the more they love God, the more delight and happiness they will have in him."

That is never-ending joy

B. Pain will be healed

All the hard things we went through here on earth will be put in perspective. It won't just be healed, but our pain will be transformed into glory and joy, because we will see it from God's perspective.

Rev. 21:4 He will wipe away every tear – our pain won't just end, but will be put right

C. Purpose lived out

Revelation 22:3-5 tells us this: No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. ⁴They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

We will serve God in heaven.

Pastor Collin Smith says we will get to “serve God as we always wished we could”. What are we going to do for all eternity? We are going to help God run the universe!

We will use our gifts to rule the new heaven and new earth. There are some people who will have to make new career choices: like nurses, doctors – since there is no sickness there. Many of us may have to serve God in new ways. Pastor Chad will still have a job, because worship leaders will be in high demand there.

Whatever way we serve God in heaven, it will be fulfilling, amazing work that will never get boring.

Some one asked what age we will be in heaven. Some have said we will all be the same age that Jesus was when he died: approximately 33. Some wondered if we will be the age we are when we die.

The truth is, age on earth and growing old is the result of sin. Age won't be the same in heaven as it is here on earth. The Bible just doesn't say what age we will be.

Will there be Marriage in heaven? Jesus answered that question for us in Matt 22:30

“For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”

Notice Jesus didn't say “we will be angels” but be like angels. This is a common misconception even among Christians. We will not become angels when we go to heaven. God created angels in the beginning of time, totally separate beings from people.

But back to marriage. Someone said this about the lack of marriage in heaven:

“My life with my spouse, no matter how precious, will be a shadow of what I, and the rest of God's children, will have in perfect communion with our Lord and each other. Marriage with a believer can be one of the greatest relationships of earth—but the least relationship in heaven will be greater than it.”

Someone asked the question will we know each other in heaven?

This question is asked a lot. Here is an answer given by William Pettingill: (This quote is from one of Ray Pritchard's sermons.) He said, “We may be sure that we shall not know less in heaven than we know here.” The scripture he gives to prove his point is 1 Corinthians 13:12, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” Pettingill goes on to say “How does God know us? Answer: He knows us completely, intimately, thoroughly, inside and out, with nothing hidden but everything seen as it really is. When we get to heaven we'll know each other as God knows us because all the imperfections of this life will be removed. In this life sin causes us to cover ourselves-not just physically but emotionally and spiritually. But when sin is finally lifted from us, then we can be ourselves with no shame, no pain, no embarrassment, and no covering up. Dr. Pettingill concludes that in heaven we will know every person in heaven and all of them will be friends and loved ones to us.

I Thessalonians 4:17 describes us going to heaven when Christ returns, following those who've died in Christ before.

¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Sounds like a wonderful family reunion to me!

IV. Who will be in Heaven?

Our last question is “Who will be in heaven?” Who will be present?

A. Present in Heaven

1. God – For sure, God is in heaven, because it is his dwelling place, his house.
2. Jesus- And Jesus will be in heaven. He's been there ever since he ascended into heaven, following his death, burial, and glorious resurrection.

Hebrews 9:²⁴ For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

He is in heaven as our mediator.

3. Angels- Also in heaven are angels, serving God.

B. Prepared people – But there are also people in heaven. Who are these people?

1. Old Testament Saints – These are the men and women, who looked to the redemption to come on calvary, and by faith trusted in God's rescue plan to come. Hebrews 11 lists some of these Old Testament saints in heaven:

By faith Abel

By Faith Enoch

By faith Noah

By faith Abraham

By faith Noah

By Faith Moses

By Faith Rahab

¹³These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”

These old testament saints will be there

2. Every true believer who has died – Every person, from the cross until today, who genuinely trusted in Christ for Salvation, for the forgiveness of their sin.

Ray Pritchard tells this story:

Several years ago Dr. D. James Kennedy, pastor of the famous Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, FL, joined other evangelical leaders in a meeting with President Ronald Reagan at the White House. During the meeting Dr. Kennedy asked the president this question, “Suppose you were to die and found yourself standing at the door of heaven. If God were to say, ‘Why should I let you into heaven?’ what answer would you give?”

The President paused, thought for a moment, then replied, “Well, I guess I’d have to answer with John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

Doesn’t matter if you are president, or pauper. There is only one way to get to heaven.

3. Every child that dies before they can understand the Gospel

4. Those who respond to the invitation – Revelation 21:27 says But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Everyone is invited to be a part of God’s family. Every one receives the invitation – the price is paid.

There is a book. A registry for heaven. When you admit you have sinned and are powerless to do anything about it, and believe in your heart that Jesus died for you so your sins could be forgiven, and accept him as your savior, your name goes in the book.

David Jeremiah tells a story about a friend of his, Ruthanna Metzgar . She is a professional singer and she tells a story that illustrates the importance of having your name written in the book. Several years ago, Ruthanna was asked to sing at a wedding in Seattle where she lives. And in her story, she says it was a very, very plush, posh wedding. One of the wealthiest families in the city, their daughter was getting married. And she was asked to be the soloist. And she was excited about the invitation for two reasons. First of all, it was quite an event, but secondly, the reception for this wedding was going to be held on the top two floors of the Columbia Tower, the tallest building in the Northwest, and very, very exclusive, and she couldn't help but think about how much fun it would be for her and her husband Roy to go to the reception.

So the wedding came and, when it was over, they drove down to the Towers and they went to the reception desk and there was a tuxedo-dressed maître d' there who was introducing everyone and offering luscious hors d'oeuvres and exotic beverages. As they came to this place, the bride and the groom approached a beautiful glass and brass staircase that led up to the top floor. Someone ceremoniously cut a satin ribbon draped across the bottom of the stairs. They announced the wedding feast was about to begin, and the bride and groom ascended the stairs, followed by all of their guests. At the top of the stairs, the maître d' with a bound book greeted the guests outside the doors.

"May I have your name please"? he said. "I am Ruthanna Metzgar and this is my husband, Roy". He searched the M's. "I'm not finding it," he said. "Would you spell it again"? Ruthanna spelled her name out very slowly. After searching the book, the maître d' looked up and said, "I'm sorry, but your name isn't here". "Well, there must be some mistake," Ruthanna said, "I'm the singer. I sang for the wedding". And the gentleman answered, "It doesn't matter who you are or what you did, or what you did. Without your name in the book, you cannot attend the banquet". He motioned to a waiter and called him over and he said, "Show these people to the service elevator please".

And they were ushered out of that area of the Towers, past beautifully decorated tables that were laden with shrimp and whole smoked salmon, magnificent carved ice sculptures, and adjacent to the banquet area there was an orchestra preparing to perform, all of them dressed in white tuxedos. The waiter led Ruthanna and Roy to the service elevator, ushered them in, and

pushed "G" for the parking garage. After locating their car and driving out of the area, several miles in silence, Roy reached over his hand and put it on Ruthanna's knee and said, "Sweetheart, what happened"? "Well," she said, "when the invitations arrived, I was just jammed up busy. I never bothered to RSVP. And beside, I was the singer. Surely, I could go to the reception without returning the RSVP"?

Ruthanna started to cry, not only because she had missed the most lavish banquet she'd ever been invited to but also because she suddenly had a small taste of what it will be like someday for people as they stand before Christ and they find their names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Conclusion:

Remember back in John 14, and Jesus told his disciples to not be troubled, because he was going to heaven and he would take them there some day?

Well, Thomas pipes up...you know, Thomas, the one with the unfortunate nick name: "Doubting Thomas"?

He says to Jesus, "Lord, we don't even know where you're going. How can we get there?"

Many people are confused about how to get to heaven. They wonder if they've been good enough. They wonder if God will overlook their sin and say, "Oh, it's okay...come on in." They hear different religions teachings on how to get to heaven.

Jesus said this to Thomas: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Jesus very clearly marks the path. It is through a relationship with him. He says, "You don't have to fret, or try to figure it out, or try to be something you cannot be....I am the way, I am the truth, I am the Life."

Will you RSVP today?

*****CLAIRE SWENSON – JOIN AT 8 AM*****

