

What Is Heaven Like?

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However happy or useful our life here, there are times when we have a desire to know if there is something beyond this life, or does the grave end it all. Our question is still the one that Job asked in the long ago. "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). We know, both by experience and by the Word of God, man will not live forever on earth. "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:22).

But we know also from the teaching of the Holy Scriptures that there is life beyond the grave. Our Lord said:

When the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations; and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: and he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal (Matthew 25:31-46).

We must always remember that man was created an immortal soul. In this life we dwell in mortal bodies, but after our resurrection, we will dwell in immortal bodies. However, for great numbers of people today, heaven is not a real place; it is just a state of mind, a dream. They jokingly talk about "pie in the sky by and by." They do not know where they are going when they leave this world. Faithful children of God have the hope of heaven, based on the Bible. Paul said he was "in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2). From eternity past, God had a plan for man's eternal happiness through Christ in heaven (Ephesians 3:10). The apostle John said to Christians that God has "promised us" eternal life (1 John 2:25). But this "eternal life" is more than mere endless existence. Every human being will have endless existence whether he will be saved in heaven or lost in hell (Matthew 25:46; cf. Romans 6:23), following the resurrection and the Judgment. "Eternal Life" is a quality of life, which is union with God the Father in heaven, in an immortal body. Hence, all faithful Christians are "in hope of eternal life" (cf. Colossians 1:5), "in the

world to come” (Mark 10:30 cf. 2 Timothy 4:8). This is the dearest of all hopes to mankind. We do not want to believe that our earthly pilgrimage will end at the grave.

Believers In Heaven

The Bible tells us about a wonderful place called heaven, but where is it? What is that place like? Who will go there?

The Old Testament does not speak of life after death and heaven so explicitly as does the New Testament, but there are several expressions which show clearly that the great heroes of faith of the Old Testament did believe in the hereafter in heaven. David wrote in his beautiful Psalm, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Psalm 23:4-6).

Daniel said: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). If Atheists are right in their teaching, and there is no hereafter, then we will never see our loved ones and friends again nor be reunited with them as faithful children of God in heaven.

Abraham was a wanderer for many years after he left his home in Ur of the Chaldees. He never settled in Canaan as a permanent resident. “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob ...for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Hebrews 11:9-10).

Indeed, the hope of heaven fulfills the heart’s deepest desires for joy (cf. 1 Peter 1:3-4; 3:12-13). The inheritance Christ has prepared is reserved for those who are prepared for it. Jesus said to His disciples prior to His departure back to heaven: “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:2-3). So heaven is a real place, the eternal home of the redeemed.

Jesus is the way and the only way to our heavenly home. No one comes to the Father but through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). Only by loving God and obeying the gospel do we have the promise of living with Him forever (cf. Acts 4:12). Christ is “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Hebrews 5:9), cf. Revelation 22:14; Matthew 7:21-27). By God’s wonderful grace He has made a home in heaven available for every one who will prepare for it.

In one sense, heaven is a *condition* as well as a *place*. It is a prepared place for a prepared people. The Bible could not be clearer. How, then, can a person now living in sin and not interested in spiritual things, possibly expect to go to heaven in his condition when life on earth comes to a close? He would not enjoy heaven, for he does not enjoy the things of God now. It is *character* that determines one’s eternal destiny. Judas went “to his own place” (Acts 1:25).

Identity Continues

The Bible also teaches that we will retain our individual identity after the spirit leaves the body and throughout eternity (cf. Matthew 25:37-39, 44; Philippians 2:16; 1 Thessalonians 2:19). Heaven will be a place of conscious existence in the presence of others. The rich man and Lazarus were still conscious after death in Hades (Luke 16:19-31). It seems plausible to believe that those who are more zealously worked and gave of their time and services in this life for heaven will have a greater capacity to enjoy it. Jesus plainly said that, “he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matthew 16:27). In this sense then, some may have greater joys in heaven than others, or degrees of happiness.

Thus, in heaven I will still be “I”. Me will still be “me”. You will still be “you”. And I will *still know that I am the same person who lived on this earth* and worked for the Lord’s church, although now “I” will be in an immortal body. David declared, “...your heart shall live forever” (Psalm 22:26). The body is only “our earthly house” in which we now live in this life (2 Corinthians 5:1-2). Death does not make any change; it does not change a bad person into a good person. As we go, so shall we continue to be either a good or bad person. God created man “in his own image” (Genesis 1:27) and in doing so, “he hath set eternity in their heart” (Ecclesiastes 3:11, ASV). I can never cease to exist.

Heaven Is Like

John wrote, in his book, Revelation, of heaven and what it will be like. Note some statements:

And I, John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband...And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain for the former things are passed away...And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof...And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there...And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life...And there shall be no more curse:...and his servants shall serve him: and they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads, and there shall be no night there:...and they shall reign forever and ever (Revelation 21; 22:1-5).

John also wrote: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). As the English poet, Robert Browning (1812-1880) stated in the poem, *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, “Come, and grow old along with me: *the best is yet to be*.” For the Christian, this is certainly true. Paul said: “...to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better” (Philippians 1:23). So, think about going to heaven and living in joy and happiness forever. ...It is “very far better” (ASV).

How long has it been since a sermon on the subject stirred the souls of the saints and sinners in the assembly? In the apparent absence of such teaching on heaven, it is losing its attraction and the passing pleasures of this life are taking precedence.

Who is going to heaven? They that love the Lord and keep His commandments are going to heaven. After John gave his description of heaven, he wrote: "Blessed are they that do his commandments that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14). Again, "And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life (Revelation 21:27; see also vs. 8 and 22:15).

God's love is a means of causing people to repent and obey the Lord: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16; cf. Romans 2:4).

No "Mores" In Heaven

Some wonder why the Holy Spirit guided John to use symbolic words in Revelation 21; 22:1-5 in describing the eternal blessedness of the souls in heaven (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Think of how a West Texas farmer living on the plains and knowing nothing of life in a large city, goes to New York City and then returns and tells his small children what the city is like. How would he describe the tall skyscrapers and the subways of transportation to his children who have never been in such a city? He would have to use figures of speech and comparisons with what the children knew. So, it is with God's description of the eternal home of the soul. The words used by the Holy Spirit are a description of a heavenly thing in earthly terms. John speaks of the city with streets of gold and walls of jasper and gates of pearl. But these are not literal. They are the symbols of its glory. It would be ridiculous to try to give all of these terms a literal meaning. But other terms are used to describe heaven besides the city of God. It is pictured as a restored Garden of Eden. Once this beautiful earthly paradise was given to Adam and Eve., but because of sin, it was lost (Genesis 2:8-17; 3:1-29). Nevertheless, in heaven, in the future paradise of God, there will be no curse any more. The tree of life is in the restored Garden (Revelation 22:1-3; 2:7).

We could also ask, "who is heaven?" or "what is heaven?" Far too many people make the mistake in their thinking of heaven as a material place. They think of it as a place to go, when in reality in a sense, it is something we are to be. The city of the New Jerusalem is the emblem of a community of righteous souls. The walls of the city indicate security and separation. It is a beautiful place. The pure river "clear as crystal" is the emblem of the pure joy of the holy life with all the saved. The wicked people of this earth will not be in heaven. But we, living in the flesh in this world, cannot fully grasp the meaning of all of those terms describing the beauties and joys of heaven.

Also, heaven is wonderful because of the things that are not there. There is *no more* sin there. Bad people will not be in heaven. [The wicked will be in another place of everlasting punishment, (Matthew 25:41,46; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9)] *No more* crimes will be committed in heaven. *No more* locks on our doors. *No more* fear of being murdered (Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:15). There will be *no more* pain there. There will be *no more* grief there. There will be *no more* tears in heaven. There will be *no more* hospitals, funerals and cemeteries in heaven. No hearse will ever roll down those streets to go and bury our dear loved ones and friends, for death will be *no more*. We will live in immortal bodies forever and never grow old.

Can we imagine a beautiful land where no more of these things exist, as they do here upon this earth? Yes “the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4). That is Heaven! Heaven will certainly not be on this old earth. The earth will be “burned up,” annihilated, when the Lord returns at the end of time (2 Peter 3: 7-12). There will be a new abode, “wherein dwelleth righteous” (2 Peter 3:13).

So heaven is a beautiful place and a condition that is hard for us in this life to fully understand. How would we describe a beautiful tropical island to an Eskimo who has always lived in the northern part of Alaska but was now planning to move with his family to this place? He would probably tell his children that this country is lovely, as there will be no more cold and ice and snow and polar bears, but warm sunshine and beautiful flowers the year around. He would say, “We will play in the sand on the beaches and wade in the warm water of the seas.”

Hence, in this way the Holy Spirit through John tried to describe heaven. Just as we would have to begin by telling the Eskimo what is *not* there, this is the method used by God to tell us about the life of the redeemed in heaven. He told us of some of the things that are *not* there. Death, “the king of terrors” (Job 18:14) is over! Thank God! No more “good-byes” will ever be said! That is heaven!

After enduring the trials and afflictions of this early life and being taken from Hades to our new resurrected bodies, we will then all shout the happy song of salvation, for “death” will be then “swallowed up in victory.”

“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Corinthians 15: 55, NKJV)

No more will we suffer and die! “But thanks be to God which giveth us the *victory* through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15: 57, emphasis, PC)

Glad Reunion

On being welcomed into heaven, we will meet our Saviour; we shall also meet our dear loved ones and friends again and all the redeemed of all the ages (2 Samuel 12:23; Matthew 8:11; 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-18). Thus, one of the most delightful prospects of heaven is the blessed company that shall gather in the eternal home. And what a happy reunion will be ours on the celestial shores! But, will the family circle be unbroken by and by?

I was to take as many people to heaven as possible. Heaven will be better if we take others with us (1 Thessalonians 2:19). As I near the end of my earthly journey, now at the age of ninety-one years, having preached the gospel since 1929, I want to spend the time that I have left in every good way that I can and to as many as I can to encourage all to obey the Lord and become Christians and to so live that heaven will be our eternal home together. I want to see my dear Saviour who loved me and saved me by His grace; and I want to see my dear loved ones and my many dear friends whom I have known and loved in so many nations of the world to whom I have preached the gospel orally and in my tracts and by the Bibles I have distributed. “What a day, a glorious day that will be!” As Paul said: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). Heaven will not be a disappointment for anyone. We often sing:

We read of a place that's called heaven,
It's made for the pure and the free;
These truths in God's word He has given,
How beautiful heaven must be.
How beautiful heaven must be,
Sweet home of the happy and free;
Fair haven of rest for the weary,
How beautiful heaven must be.
Mrs. A. S. Showalter

Another unknown poet has written words appropriate to the passing of a loved one:

This world, however beautiful, was never meant to be
The place that we would call our home for all eternity.
And though we would not choose to leave, a loving God knows best,
And in His time He lifts us to a place of rest
For He has built a mansion where His children will abide,
Free from pain and sorrow forever at His side.
And though these ones we love so much have left our present sight,
And passed into a better world of majesty and light,
Someday we'll be together in our Father's house above
Where we'll thank Him for His mercy, and praise Him for His love.

Conclusion

If one would go to heaven, he must prepare himself for heaven while he lives on this earth by obedience to the teachings of the Lord (cf Matthew 7:21-27; 25:13; Hebrews 5:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10).

We cannot afford to miss heaven. There is nothing in this world that ought to keep us from making the necessary preparation for heaven. One "must be born again" (John 3:7) and live faithfully the Christian like to go to heaven (Revelation 2:10). I pray that heaven may be your eternal home.