

What About Heaven?

Phil. 3:20-21

Good morning! We reached the end of our series on “Big Questions About God, the Bible and Life”.

Two weeks ago, before the youth camp last week, I answered the question “Is There Really a Place Called Hell?” The answer was “Yes, there is” and I proceeded to give the reasons from the Bible why we can believe with absolute certainty that there is hell and how to avoid going there. This morning I’m going to deal with another place which is the opposite of hell. The question I’m going to answer from the pages of Scripture is “What About Heaven?” Let’s read **Phil. 3:20-21**.

There are two statements that I believe to be almost universally true: Everyone wants to know about heaven and everyone wants to go there. Recent polls suggest that 71% of all Americans believe there is a place called heaven. I find that statistic encouraging because it tells me that even in this skeptical age there is something deep inside the human heart that cries out, “There’s got to be something more”.

In fact, in recent years, there has been great interest in heaven. Books were written and movies were made about heaven. In 2014, a movie came out called “Heaven is for Real” which is based on the book of the same title that was published in 2010. If you remember, I even wrote about it in my blog and talked about it in my Easter Service sermon. Is the story real or not? We don’t know but I know heaven is for real.

This morning I want to share with you some facts about heaven. Essential things about heaven that we can know based on what the Bible tells us.

For sure, there are so many things we don't and can't understand about heaven because no one of us here have been there, have we? But the Bible gives us enough information to stake our future in a place far better than earth.

As I go through this message, I'm also going to answer questions which most people ask about heaven and so we're going to have an idea what heaven is like.

The first question is

I. Where is heaven?

There are **three things or facts** I can tell you in answer to this question. The most important fact is that **heaven is a real place**. Listen to the words of Jesus on the night before he was crucified:

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 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." (John 14:1-3).

Twice in three verses Jesus calls heaven a place. He means that heaven ("my Father's house") is a real place, as real as New York, London or DC. The place called heaven is just as real as the place you call home. It's a real place filled with real people, which is why the Bible sometimes compares heaven to a mansion with many rooms (John 14:1-3) and sometimes to an enormous city teeming with people (Revelation 21-22).

The Bible also tells us that heaven is **the dwelling place of God**. His throne is there, the angels are there, and the Lord Jesus Christ is in heaven. Philippians 3:20 says very plainly that **"Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."** That's why Jesus told the thief on the Cross, **"Today you will be with me in paradise"** (Luke 23:43).

Third and I find this fact fascinating, the Bible hints that heaven is **not as far away** as we might think. Because heaven is a real place, we sometimes think it must be outside our present universe-which would mean that it is billions and billions of light years away. However, it's very clear that the early Christians understood that they would pass immediately from this life into the presence of Christ in heaven. Hebrews 12:22-24 tells us something amazing about what the gospel has done for us:

“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

The writer is here comparing Mt. Zion with Mt. Sinai. If you look at the preceding verses, they say that under the old covenant no one could come near God except under very strict conditions. That's why the mountain shook with thunder and lightning. But now in Christ we have been brought near to heavenly realities. Think of what he is saying:

We're not that far from heaven. We're not that far from the angels. We're not that far from our loved ones in heaven. We're not that far from God. We're not that far from Jesus himself.

So, Heaven is a real place, it's where Jesus is right now, and it's not far away from us. Where exactly? We don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. But we know it's not far away.

The second question is

II. What is heaven like?

The Bible doesn't give us a great deal of information. What we have are images and pictures of heaven and comparisons with life on earth.

What is heaven like? Here are some biblical facts about heaven. It is ...

- God's dwelling place (Psalm 33:13).
- Where Christ is today (Acts 1:11).
- Where Christians go when they die (Philippians 1:21-23).
- The Father's house (John 14:2).
- A city designed and built by God (Hebrews 11:10).
- A better country (Hebrews 11:16).
- Paradise (Luke 23:43).

Most of us have heard that heaven is a place where the streets are paved with gold, the gates are made of pearl, and the walls made of precious jewels. Those images come from Revelation 21-22, which offers us the most extended picture of heaven in the entire Bible. If you ask me if I believe those things are literally true, the answer is yes and no. Yes, they are literally true but no, heaven won't be anything like we imagine. It will be much greater.

Here's a delightful legend that makes the point very well:

I love the old story of the rich man who, on his death bed, negotiated with God to allow him to bring his earthly treasures with him when he came to heaven. God's reaction was that this was a most unusual request, but since this man had been exceptionally faithful, permission was granted to bring along just one suitcase. The time arrived, the man presented himself at the pearly gates, suitcase in hand— BOTH hands, actually, since he had stuffed it with as many bars of gold bullion as would fit. St. Peter said, "Sorry, you know the rules—you can't take it with you." But the man protested, "God said I could ... one suitcase." St. Peter checked, found out that this one would be an exception, prepared to let the man enter, then said, "OK, but I will have to examine the contents before you pass."

He took the suitcase, opened it, saw the gold bars and asked quizzically, “You brought PAVEMENT?”

When John writes about a street paved with gold, I do not doubt his words. He simply reports what he saw in his vision. Thus his words are literally true. They are also meant to tell us that the things we value so highly in this life will be used to pave the roads in heaven.

Heaven is a real place filled with real people. The Bible pictures it as a great city filled with all of God’s people.

What would such a city look like? It would be a city with ...

No pollution for the skies would always be crystal clear.

No crime or violence for no criminals would ever enter.

No greedy politicians, no drug pushers, no child molesters.

No potholes and no power outages either.

It would be filled with abundant parks, rivers, rolling meadows, and flowing streams. Lining the streets would be flowers in constant bloom, fruit trees of every kind, every species of plant life growing free from pestilence and disease.

The gates would be made of pearl, the walls of jasper, the streets of gold. Precious stones would lie on the ground like playthings - emeralds, rubies, diamonds galore. On every hand there would be children laughing, bright conversation, music floating from every direction.

In the city that God builds, there are no tears, there is no sorrow ... no regret ... no remorse. Bitterness gone forever, failure left far behind, suffering redeemed and rewarded. There are no eyeglasses, no braces, no wheelchairs, no false teeth, no bald heads, no hearing aids, and no crutches. There are no more hospitals, no more nursing homes, no paramedics, no CPR. Doctors have to find a new job, they aren’t needed anymore. Aspirin gone, accidents over, cancer disappeared, heart attacks banished, AIDS a distant memory. In heaven no one grows old and feeble.

There is one other thing you won't find in heaven. There are no cemeteries in the city God builds. There are no funerals ... for in that glad city no one ever dies. If you make it to that city, you live forever, never to die again. Either you believe in heaven or you don't. It's either a real place or it isn't. This is heaven-where all our best dreams finally come true.

III. Who is in heaven right now?

This question is not difficult to answer. God is in heaven because heaven is his dwelling place. The Lord Jesus has been in heaven ever since he ascended from the earth shortly after his resurrection (Acts 1:9-11). The Bible tells us that angels are in heaven. In fact, there are myriads of angels-uncountable numbers of heavenly beings-all of them serving the Lord in various ways.

And the saints of God who died on this earth are in heaven. I mean by this that heaven includes the Old Testament Saints who by faith trusted in God's Word and looked forward to God's promise of a Messiah who would die for their redemption from sin. It also includes every true believer from every continent and every denomination. Everyone who has genuinely trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior will be there. I also think that children who died before the "age of accountability go to heaven and I would also include those born with such mental limitations that they cannot understand the gospel. The Bible teaches that the moment we die we go directly into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul spoke of this in 2 Corinthians 5:7-8, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord." And in Philippians 1:21-25, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith."

That last passage convinced me that believers truly go to heaven at the moment of death. As many of you know, I was a Jehovah's Witness before. One of their beliefs is that human beings don't have a soul. Because they don't have a soul, when they die they just cease to exist. Nothing. Nada. What remains of them are just memories of people about them. On judgment day, those who died as Jehovah's Witnesses are resurrected bodily on a paradise earth. The rest of mankind don't get resurrected at all. Therefore, they don't believe in the existence of hell. And to Jehovah's Witnesses, heaven is a place reserved only for the 144,000 people mentioned in Revelation.

Anyway, going back to my story, I became a Christian and the existence of the soul is my stumbling block. I was taught by the Jehovah's Witnesses that there is no soul and that this idea just came from Greek philosophers. I struggled with it. I was confused. I remember one time, I was in a library, I was just poring over the Bible when I came to this passage in Philippians. Upon reading it, that's when it clicked. I told myself, "Why would Paul say he wanted to be with the Lord than to be with the Philippians? If he believed that he didn't have a soul, what would he gain by dying? His body would just be rotting on earth. He wouldn't be with the Lord. He wouldn't be anywhere. It doesn't make sense for him to say that he would rather be with the Lord than with the Philippians."

So, there is a soul and there is a heaven. But I do not want to be ambiguous on this point. Not every soul goes to heaven. Some people won't make it. The Bible speaks of the saved and the lost. The saved are those who trust Jesus Christ as their eternal Savior. The lost are those who do not trust Christ as Savior. This is the great dividing line of humanity-you are either saved or you are lost. And there is no middle category. You will either spend eternity in heaven or eternity in hell.

IV. Will we know each other in heaven?

This is one of the most frequently asked questions about heaven. I would like to share an answer given by a Bible teacher of another generation-a man named William Pettingill. [Note: see the book **1001 Bible Questions Answered, William Pettingill and R.A. Torrey**, Inspirational Press, 1997, p. 157. This is a reprint in one volume of two books first published many years ago. I highly recommend it as a handy reference tool for Bible students and Sunday School teachers.]

He said, “We may be sure that we shall not know less in heaven than we know here.” As proof he quotes 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.”** 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 (Psalm 139:1-4, Hebrews 4:12).

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.

In his very helpful book on heaven, W.A. Criswell makes the additional point that individual personality survives into eternity. I’ll be the same person then that I am now-only with all the imperfections and limitations of sin finally removed. This is a wonderful thought-that the essence of who we are will remain throughout eternity-yet vastly improved by God’s grace. He also says that in heaven we can eat all we want and not get fat. That’s really a heavenly feeling, isn’t it? As the Bible says, our bodies will be like that of Jesus after his resurrection. Immortal and glorified.

We can eat, we can pass through walls, we can fly. But I don't know what a glorified body exactly looks like. Maybe you can become invisible and then visible at will. You will eat not because you're hungry but because you just enjoy food. That's good news for those who enjoy food. Amen? You won't worry about your sugar level, calories, carbs, and what-not.

That helps me to think about a related question that people sometimes ask: How old will we be in heaven? I once read of a preacher who said that we will all be 33 years old because that's approximately how old Jesus was when he died. Of course, there is no scriptural support for that statement. The truth is, there won't be any age in heaven in the sense we speak of age on the earth. Growing old is a function of the decaying effects of sin. I do not believe that babies who die in infancy will be babies for eternity nor do I believe that people who waste away of cancer will appear emaciated in heaven. It will be something else entirely-which I can barely explain and certainly do not understand.

In heaven we will know each other intimately. That's why Peter, James and John recognized Moses and Elijah, even though they had been dead for hundreds of years, on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). I don't think they had nametags on. I think there was something about those two men that made Peter, James and John recognize them even though they had never seen them before. In heaven there will be no strangers.

V. What will we do in heaven?

Some people say, "Worshipping God forever in heaven sounds boring-is it wrong to feel this? Is heaven going to be fun?" Again, the Bible doesn't tell us everything we would like to know, but of this we can be sure: Heaven won't be boring and it will be more fun than the best party you ever attended.

So, what will we do for all eternity? First of all, we're going to worship God. That will be our main agenda.

In Revelation, the Bible says that the 24 elders worshipped God and the four creatures praised God day and night. That's the vision that John received from the Lord. That emphasizes the fact that in heaven worshipping God will be our primary occupation. Will that be boring? Of course not. Because there were instances in my own life, and perhaps, in yours as well, when I could just go on and on forever singing songs to God and praising him. Especially, if Tita Annie and Christine are leading us in worship in heaven. And Charlie and Jonathan as well with their guitars and John on his drums and the rest of the PW Team as background singers. Imagine that? I can only imagine what it will be like...

Wonderful as it may sound, I believe there will be other things to do. Perhaps, as one preacher said, we're going to help God run the universe. Do you remember the story Jesus told about the man of noble birth who gave his servants money to invest? One servant had doubled his money so the man said, "You will rule over ten cities." The next servant had seen a 50% increase so his master said, "Rule over five cities." And the man who hid his money had even that amount taken from him in punishment. (Luke 19:11-27). The story is a picture of what heaven will be like. We will use our gifts to administer the new heaven and the new earth.

I can guarantee you this: No one will be sitting around on a cloud eating grapes and polishing his halo. No, we'll all be too busy for that.

Here are five things that will occupy us in heaven. We will ...

Worship without distraction.

Serve without exhaustion.

Fellowship without fear.

Learn without fatigue.

Rest without boredom.

The best part of heaven will be seeing Jesus himself face to face. We will worship the Son of God and celebrate his great victory over sin while the endless ages of eternity roll on and on. The best music you've ever heard will pale compared to the music of heaven. The most awesome worship you've experienced on earth is but a dim reflection of the praise we will render around the throne of God.

VI. How can I be sure I am going to heaven?

This is the most important question of all. Here is a wonderful truth: God has made it easy for you to go to heaven. He did the hard part when he sent his Son to die on the Cross for you. He paid the price for your sins so that you could one day stand before God in heaven. Jesus says, **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"** (John 14:6). He also says, **"I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved"** (John 10:9 NASB). Jesus is not only the way to heaven, he is also the door to heaven. If you want to go to heaven, you've got to go through the door marked "Jesus Christ." There is no other entrance.

Several years ago the late Dr. D. James Kennedy, former 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." That is indeed a good answer because your only hope of heaven is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me make this very personal. If you were to die tonight, do you know for certain that you would go to heaven? I've already said that this is too important to say "I think so" or "I hope so." If you're wrong, you're going to be wrong for a long, long time.

What we need is solid ground on which to stand. And we have it in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our entire hope of heaven is wrapped up in what Jesus did when he died on the cross for the sins of the world and rose from the dead on Easter Sunday morning.

One of our most beloved hymns puts it this way:

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ the solid rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

That says it all. If you want to go to heaven, you must base your hope on the solid rock of Jesus' blood and righteousness. Are you standing on the Rock this morning? Are you wholly leaning on Jesus' name?

One final word and I am done. No one goes to heaven by accident. Heaven is God's prepared place for prepared people. We prepare for heaven and then God prepares heaven for us. I've already told you that most people believe in heaven and most people think they are going there. But are they on the right road? Are they building their lives on Jesus Christ-the solid rock? Too many, I fear, are standing on sinking sand and do not know it.

What is your hope for heaven? Mine is Jesus Christ. I've staked everything I have on him. If he can't take me to heaven, then I'm not going there.

What about you? When the dark night falls, the lights go out, and the waters of death swirl around you, what will happen to you then? If you know Jesus, you have nothing to fear. Put your trust in Jesus. Run to the Cross. Stand with your full weight on the Solid Rock of our salvation. May God help you to trust in Jesus Christ and him alone for your salvation. And may God grant that we will all meet one day in heaven.

Safe at home. In heaven at last. I'll be there. What about you?