

## GOD'S PROMISES ABOUT HEAVEN

John 14:1-6

Good morning! We're on the fourth week of our series we're calling "God's Awesome Promises to You". In the Bible, there are more than 8000 promises of God. But we're talking about only 7 promises of God in this series. Imagine if we have a series of 8000 promises? That will take us years. Many of us will already be in heaven even before we're done halfway. And that is our topic today: Heaven.

You know, God's promises are kind of like a divine insurance policy because when God has promised to take care of your life, your stress level goes down. You don't feel so anxious. So today, I want to encourage you with a message called "God's Promises About Heaven".

In 2015, the Pew Research Center said that about 70 percent of adults in North America believe in Heaven. Now, whether they believe they're going there is another thing. And how they can enter heaven is another thing as well. In our message this morning, I'll tackle these two things. These are important issues and I hope you'll still stick around with me.

A few years ago, a book came out called Heaven Is for Real. Some of you may have heard about the book or read it or even saw the movie. It's the story of this four-year-old boy named Colton Burpo. He had a near-death experience. His appendix burst and his body was actually leaking poison for five days. They misdiagnosed it, and so he almost died.

His parents rushed him to the emergency room and he claimed afterwards that while on the operating table he had visions of Heaven. Sometime after that experience when he was fully healed, he started telling his parents some strange things. He said, "When I was on the operating table, Mommy, I saw you." She said, "Oh, really, sweetheart?" He said, "Yeah, I saw you."

You were on your phone in the hospital room and you were crying and you were talking to Grandma." And she wondered, "How would he know that?"

And then he said, "And Daddy, I saw you, too. You were on your knees in a church," actually his dad was in a hospital chapel, "And you were yelling at God. Why were you so angry?" His parents looked at each other and they were just like, "I don't know. That's kind of strange, but maybe just his imagination?"

The next week he said, "Mommy, how come you never told me you had a baby die in your tummy?" They never told Colton about a miscarriage she had two years before. He said, "Yeah, why did you never tell me I had a little sister? I met her in Heaven. She can't wait to meet you and Daddy someday." It kind of like blew their minds. That's a pretty incredible statement.

Now, I've read accounts similar to this before and actually there's a whole genre dedicated to something like these accounts and it's called NDEs, near-death experiences. In fact, Newsweek ran a cover article called "Heaven is Real: A Doctor's Experience of the Afterlife." It's the firsthand account of a neurosurgeon from Harvard who claims to have visited the place.

On the one hand, a four-year-old boy, and on the other hand, an Ivy League neurosurgeon. I think what these near-death experiences have in common is that there is this universal hunger for Heaven, the sense that life on this earth is not all there is. In fact, the Bible says that God has set eternity in the hearts of men and women. It simply means this, there's this innate sense to all of us that this life is not all there is. That our eyes can't see everything behind the curtain.

Think of it this way. Right now, you and I are on planet Earth, would you agree? That's the reality. Now, although you and I are on planet Earth right now, there will come a day, there will be this moment, when you and I draw our last breath and our body goes into the ground.

At that moment, the Bible says, the true you, the real you, your spirit or your soul, will pass into eternity for ever and ever and ever after that. It's almost like, this present world is a preview. It's like a coming attraction of the life to come.

Now, the average lifespan is 79.8 years. If you're doing CrossFit, that could go well into your 80's.. I'm hoping to live to 90, depending on what I do with lechon. We'll see what happens there. The reality is how do you separate fact from fiction? What does the Bible actually promise about Heaven? When I say, "Heaven," what do you imagine?

Most people think it's like a computer screensaver kind of thing. Some people who grew up in church have in mind something like one long never-ending church service. People are all going to be singing songs and wearing choir robes. We don't know much about heaven, right? I think our conceptions or misconceptions of Heaven are drawn more from popular culture than the truth of Scripture. Well, today, we're going to go straight to the source, to God's Word, and see what Jesus promises about Heaven. The Bible is the perfect place to start. You know what the Bible stands for, B-I-B-L-E? Basic instructions before leaving earth. Okay, so let's take a look.

Turn to John chapter 14. We're going to see that Jesus gave some basic instructions before He left Earth and returned to His Father in Heaven. Please listen carefully and we're going to see five promises that you can take to the bank. Jesus is talking to His disciples here. He says, *“Don't let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, would I have told you that I'm 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. You know the way to the place where I am going.”* Thomas said to him, *‘Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’* Jesus answered, *‘I am the way and the Truth and the life.*

*No one comes to the Father except through me.*''' This is a powerful promise from Jesus.

There's five parts to this, and I know what some of you are thinking, especially the young adults here. If you're a millennial, you're kind of like, "What do I care about Heaven? I got my whole life ahead of me. I'm not going anywhere I'm right here, right now." And that is true for now, but I have bad news. It doesn't matter your age because statistically speaking, you're not going to make it. Life is terminal. It's just a matter of time. The mortality rate is still 100 percent, around the world. In fact, since covid entered the world, more than 3 million people have died because of it. Young and old alike. At first, they thought it was only the old people who died. But now, younger people die more than the old. Covid is no respecter of person. So, get your shots while there's still supply.

The reality of death is illustrated in the story I read yesterday. There was a woman who went to the doctor with her husband. The doctor called the wife in alone, and he said, "We have a major problem. Bad news. Your husband's going to die. He has a heart condition. He has a very high stress load, and if something doesn't change, he's going to die."

And so she said, "Okay, well, what..." He replied, "Well, for about a year, if you can make some big changes." She said, "What are they?" And he said, "Every morning, you need to get up early and make him a big breakfast, like big, nutritious breakfast. And then for the rest of the day, don't let him do any chores. He's just got to relax, don't bother him. No complaints. There's no nagging. Please don't. That will just raise his stress levels. Make him a big, healthy lunch. If you have to massage his feet, that's good too. But most importantly, if he wants to sleep early, let him be. Don't bother him with such highly stressful tasks like taking out the trash or cleaning the toilet. You can do that yourself. And if you do that for a year, he may make a full recovery."

And so they get in the car and on the drive home the husband said to his wife, "So what did the doctor say?" And she said, "He said you're going to die."

So, okay. What's the lesson? We're all going to die. In Filipino, una-una lang. In English, first-first only. I don't know how to translate that. Maybe, "Wait for your turn?" You know what? It's reality. We can't deny it. And that's okay if you're a follower of Jesus Christ because you've put your faith in the promise of Jesus's resurrection. Guess what? Death is just the doorway to new life, eternal life, life forever in the presence of God.

The thing is we don't think about Heaven very much until we get bad news, until a doctor calls and says, "You need a biopsy," or a loved one gets older and Alzheimer's sets in or, God forbid, a child gets sick. Or you really get sick because of covid. When you're young, you're in your teens or twenties, you're like, "Man, I'm bulletproof."

You know what, from the Bible's perspective it actually doesn't matter how old you are or what your station in life is, right now every one of us from God's perspective is having a near-death experience. Eternity is closer than you think. That might be upsetting to hear. Maybe you're like, "That stresses me out," well, that's exactly why Jesus raised the subject here in John 14 with his disciples.

Did you see how he starts? They were upset. They were anxious. They were stressed out. And so Jesus says, "Don't let your hearts be," what? "Troubled." Why were they troubled? They were upset because Jesus had just told them that the end of His life on Earth had begun. It was a countdown to Heaven. He actually told them exactly what to expect.

He said, okay, here's the deal, guys, I want you to know what's going to happen. I am going to die. I am going to be crucified on a Roman cross at the age of 33 years old. In my prime, premature death, I'm going to die on a cross. And then they're going to take my body, and they're going to bury it in a tomb.

I'm going to be in that grave for three days because through the power of my Father in Heaven and through the power of the Holy Spirit, I am then going to come back and return to my Father in Heaven.

And here's the promise, "I'm coming back for you and you and you and you and you and you." And the disciples are like, "I don't know what He's talking about." They just didn't get it. He said, I'm making you a promise. Don't let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me.

And this is so fascinating, look at this verse. He says, *"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?"* And so he promises them a place where they will go after Jesus comes back to fetch them.

Ok now. The first promise Jesus makes is that

#### 1. Heaven is real.

It is real. Tangible. You can feel it, smell it, see it. A lot of people think like it's maybe a state of mind or a state of being. No, Jesus says it is a concrete, material reality. The word *"place" in verse 2 is topos in Greek.* It's where we get our word "topography." And topography refers to the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area. Heaven, therefore, is a literal location, a physical place. Now, when I say physical, it's not physical in the sense we know it. It is beyond physical. But it is not entirely spiritual. We don't know exactly how it is but we know that we will go there, not with our physical bodies, but with our glorified bodies. A body that is like the glorified body of Jesus when he resurrected.

But let me tell you why this is meaningful to those of us who have lost a loved one. Losing someone you love is hard. It's painful. You wish it never happened. It's sad but because of the promise of Jesus, we are happy because we know the truth of scripture, the promise that says, *"Yes, we are fully confident, and*

*we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord.” (2 Cor. 5:8 NLT)*

Let that comfort those of you who maybe have lost somebody this year or past year or maybe you have someone in your family with a terminal condition. This is a tremendous, tremendous comfort here. We grieve. But we grieve with hope because we believe what the Bible promises that one day we'll be with our loved ones in Heaven. Say, "Amen," if you believe it.

In John 11, a woman came up to Jesus who was brokenhearted. Her brother, Lazarus, had died. She was brokenhearted, and you know what Jesus did? He cried. God cried because of the temporary loss of His friend. But do you know what Jesus promised Mary?

Jesus said to her in John 11:25, "I am the resurrection and the life." Here's the promise, "The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die." And then He asks a question, "Do you believe this?"

Friend, do you believe that? That's a great question. We all have to settle that issue of salvation once and for all in our heart.

And maybe you're here today, and you've like been kicking the tires of Christianity, but I think today is the day of salvation for you, to settle that question once and for all and claim this promise that the death of Jesus was to forgive all of your faults, your failures, your flaws, all your sins. And then you receive the righteousness of Christ and you get to be in the presence of the Father.

That is the number one promise of God at the center of the Christian faith. Millions and millions of people around the world have staked their life on this bedrock promise. So again, promise number one, Heaven is real.

This runs counter to what a lot of people think in America, that Heaven is this wispy place in the clouds with cherubs, and it's kind of this state-of-mind.

According to Jesus, who came from Heaven, and then returned back to Heaven, Heaven is a house. There are rooms. It's as real as this house. Some of you are like, "Wait, heaven is real? Like my apartment, my condo?" No, even more real than that. Did I say it's more than physical?

So, Promise #1 is "Heaven is real. Promise number two, Jesus says, 2. Heaven has been prepared for you."

Jesus says, "My Father's house has many rooms. And if it were not so, would I have told you? I'm going to," what? "Prepare a place for you."

Jesus was comforting his disciples. They were all so distraught and sad that Jesus was going away. They just didn't know where he was going. What Jesus was saying was all Greek to them. Well, actually Aramaic. Anyway, Jesus was letting them know that he wasn't going to abandon them. In fact, he was coming back. He was going to leave to prepare a place for them in heaven. At that point, the disciples didn't know that Jesus was talking about heaven. Even if they did, in what sense Jesus was going to prepare a place for them?

I believe Jesus was talking about his impending death on the cross. He would leave them because he would die on the cross. He had to leave, he had to die on the cross, so that he could lead them to heaven. That was his preparation for them to get to heaven. If he didn't leave, they wouldn't go to heaven. And when he said he would come back, he was talking about his resurrection. Scriptures say that after his resurrection, Jesus showed himself to his disciples for 40 days and gave them hope about heaven. He assured them many times that they will go to heaven because they believe in Jesus.

If you're a believer in Jesus, Jesus has already prepared a place for you in heaven. You have a reserved seat. It's waiting for you. Just imagine an auditorium where there's millions and millions of seats and one of those has your name on it.



It's like one seat has the name of Rey etched on it, another Elvin, another Julius another Andrew, maybe two seats for Andrew. And who's your seatmate? Of course, your wife. You have no choice. The thing is, that seat is yours. Especially bought by Jesus for you. Bought with what? His blood. He poured out his blood for you.

Now, it gets better. You know why? Because to God you are already seating in that heavenly seat. Paul says in Ephesians 2:4-6, "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and," don't miss this, "**seated** us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus." If you're a Christian, Paul is saying that God looks at you as if you're already in heaven. It means, that's where you're ultimately going. You cannot undo what God has done. No one can undo what God has done. No matter how many times you fall, God is faithful in keeping you because Jesus died for you and has **secured** a place for you in heaven.

Which leads us to the third promise,

3. **Heaven is promised to God's children.**

Jesus says, "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." Beyond the sheer beauty of Heaven, I think the greatest thing we have to look forward to is just meeting Jesus face to face.

What's that going to be like? You ever think about that? "I can only imagine", as the song goes. What's it going to be like to look into the face, into the eyes of the one who knit you together in your mother's womb? You're going to look into the face of the one who knew your name before your parents even did. I understand your parents may not have planned you, God planned you. He did. And He has a purpose for your life.

You ever wonder when you get to Heaven, what will Jesus look like? It reminds me of two brothers who were always arguing over whether Jesus was white or if Jesus was black. One of the brothers said, "He's definitely white. I've seen the pictures. He's got surfer hair, white robe. He's a white guy." And the other brother said, "No, I think He's black. I think if nothing else, He's Middle Eastern, so He's dark skinned."

Both brothers died on the same day, but they were excited because they were like, "Finally." They run up to the gates of Heaven and Saint Peter's there and they're like, "We're going to settle this once and for all. So, tell us, is Jesus black or white?" At that very moment, Jesus Himself walked by and said, "*Buenos dias, amigos.*" I think we're all going to be surprised a little bit when we meet Jesus.

In the book, Heaven is for Real, that little boy, Colton, his parents said, "Did you meet Jesus?" And he was playing with his Legos, and he said, "Of course." And they said, "Okay, what did He look like?" And he was young and they thought, "Maybe he's just making this up from what he's seen." So they showed him pictures of Jesus, "Was He like this?" And he said, "No, no." "Like this?" "No." "Like this?" "No."

And so they asked, "What did Jesus look like?" And he said, "He's not like that. He had red markers." And they said, "What do you mean red markers?" "He had red markers, Mommy." He's four years old they thought like, "Magic markers, Crayola, what does he mean?" He goes, "No, He had red markers. Everyone knows Him by His red markers." And they said, "Where does He keep these red markers?" And the little boy said, "Here and here." While showing his hands. You know how I think you'll know your Savior? By His scars. That is the price. That is how much God loves you. I know some folks dismiss that book outright. But I don't know, there's just so much truth in there I can't ignore. Anyway, we'll know when we get to heaven.

So, we don't know how Jesus really looks like. But we are going to recognize Jesus in heaven. By his glorious red markers. Did you know when Jesus was raised from the dead, His glorified, resurrected body still bore the wounds of crucifixion, and I think they're permanent so that we'll never forget the incredible price He paid to bring you to the Father's house. So how do you get there? This brings us to Promise #4.

#### 4. Jesus is the Pathway to heaven.

After the stunning description in John 14:1-4, Thomas says to Him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" And in the next verse, "*Jesus answered, 'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'*" Do you believe that promise?

You have to stake your life on something. I didn't ask if you're religious. I didn't ask, "Did you grow up in a Christian family? Did you go to church or mass when you were growing up?" I'm asking, "Did you put your full faith in this life transforming promise?"

Jesus says, "I am the way and the truth and the life". Friend, you can't come to the Father except through Jesus. You can't enter heaven except through Jesus. You can't enter because you think you are a good person. Just one sin in your life disqualifies you from heaven. Because heaven is a holy and perfect place and those who go there are holy and perfect. You can become holy and perfect because of Jesus not by your own good works. When He died, He paid for your sins. When He was raised, He said, "I'm going to put my foot on death and crush it, and I'm going to give eternal life to anyone who is humble enough to ask for it."

Can I ask, have you asked for that? Have you claimed that promise? You got to be able to point to a moment in your life where you said, "Jesus, I believe. I believe You're the Father's Son, and You're the Savior. Come into my life. Live Your life through me. I want eternal life."

Maybe you're here today, for some of you I think you've been kicking the tires of Christianity for a while. You've got questions, maybe you have some doubts like Thomas. But I think Thomas shows us you don't have to have all the answers to have faith in Jesus.

You can claim the promise today, that's why it's called faith. I know God's been speaking to some of you directly. He's been knocking on your heart for some time. Today is the day to open the door.

In fact, you want to know another promise of Jesus in the last book of the Bible? In Revelation, Jesus says this to every man, woman, and child. He says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." (Rev. 3:20)

That's the promise. That's the Bible's basic instructions before leaving Earth. Have you claimed that promise? Because promise number five is personal.

#### **5. You are personally invited to Heaven.**

If you haven't, I want to ask, what's holding you back? This weekend your Father's inviting you to come home.

And I'm going to invite some of those of you who are like, "You know what? I can't point to that moment, Rolly, when I asked Christ to be my Savior and came home to the Father's love." I'm going to lead you in a prayer of salvation in a minute. I think this is a moment for you to step from death over into eternal life.

Friend, you were made for a person and a promise. Heaven is the promise, Jesus is the person, and it's a package deal. You ain't getting one without the other.

So, I want to ask some of you to put aside your pride right now and put your faith in Jesus today. Settle this. Today is the day of salvation.

Let us pray.