

## • Heaven – Its Nature and Glory

### INTRODUCTION:

1. The word Heaven is found some 532 in the Bible.
  - A. Many of those are references to the heavens in opposition to the earth, as in “heaven and earth” or simply “the heavens,” referring to the skies above with its sun, moon, planets, and stars.
  - B. A great number of them, however, are references to the place where God dwells, the place we desire to enter upon leaving this life.
  - C. And there are many references to the “kingdom of heaven,” which does at times refer to the place of reward for faithful service to God in this life—or heaven itself.
2. I want to talk about this because Heaven is, quite simply, what the gospel of Christ is about.
  - A. Those who would reduce Christianity to moral teachings designed to make life better in this world miss the point.
  - B. Paul presents the truth that cutting the resurrection to eternal life in heaven out of the gospel would bring—“we are of all men the most to be pitied” (1 Cor. 15:19).
  - C. So, if heaven is not the motivation and goal of your Christian service, there is something seriously missing in your faith.
  - D. For, if you miss heaven, you have missed everything! There is nothing in this life that you have experienced that will make up for the loss of heaven and the consequences that follow!
3. Yet, despite its importance and all that God has revealed about it, and He has revealed much, heaven is one of the most misunderstood and abused truths of the Bible. That is why we need to talk about its nature and what makes it glorious.
  - A. People perceive it as all kinds of things, such as a place where...
    - i. You hang out, where you get to be who you want to be, maybe have a beer with Jesus (i.e., popular country songs mention things like this).
    - ii. Your greatest desires, if not sinful per-se, are fulfilled. You commonly hear...
      - a. I can see Joe/Jane now, swinging away on heaven’s beautiful golf courses.
      - b. I can just see him day after day, fishing those pristine heavenly lakes and streams, etc.
    - iii. So, whatever people perceive the departed doing in heaven, it most always emphasizes fulfillment of their physical desires as the means of providing eternal, heavenly joy.
  - B. This ignorance of what Heaven will be like, what we will do there, what makes it glorious is rampant because...
    - i. People do not read or study their Bible, caring little for what it says about this subject or any other for that matter.
    - ii. People claim they want *God’s* heaven, but instead want to shape or build it according to *their* thoughts and desires—to make heaven about them.
4. So, today we will begin with some basic teachings from God’s word concerning heaven and its nature, and why it will be so great to receive it as our reward after this life is over.

### BODY:

#### • **I. Heaven is God’s dwelling place:**

- A. The scriptures clearly and often state that heaven is God’s abode.
  - 1. The Israelites upon entering the Land were commanded to ask of God his blessings (Deut. 26:15 – “Look down from **Your holy habitation**, from **heaven**, and bless Your people Israel and the land which You have given us, just as You swore to our fathers, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’”).
    - a. That heaven is God’s *holy habitation* is repeated often, emphasizing God’s holiness, while implying, it seems, a contrast with the earth that is filled with sin.
    - b. This is significant, as we shall see, in helping us understand heaven’s nature and why it is so marvelous that we can spend eternity there.
  - 2. This means the **Father is there**, as Jesus pointed out in His example prayer (Matt. 6:9 – “In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.”).
  - 3. This means **Jesus the Son** is there (Mk. 16:19 – “So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God”).

- 4. This means the **Spirit** is there (John 1:32 – “And John bore witness, saying, ‘I saw the Spirit **descending from heaven** like a dove, and He remained upon Him.’”).
- 5. So, our first thoughts of heaven should be that the holy Godhead dwells there.
- B. Heaven is *God’s throne*.
  1. God rules all from Heaven.
    - a. Psa. 11:4-7 – “The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD’s throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. <sup>5</sup> The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates. <sup>6</sup> Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. <sup>7</sup> For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; The upright will behold His face.”
      - i. Note God’s righteous, interactive rule over the earth and its people, punishing the wicked, but encouraging the righteous.
      - ii. That He **loves righteousness** is a clue to the nature of heaven.
    - b. Matt. 5:34-35 – “But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, <sup>35</sup> or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet...”
  - 2. The risen Christ now sits and rules on this throne at the Father’s right hand (Eph. 1:19-23 – “...These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might <sup>20</sup> which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and **seated Him at His right hand** in the heavenly places, <sup>21</sup> far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. <sup>22</sup> And **He put all things in subjection under His feet**, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, <sup>23</sup> which is His body, the fullness of **Him who fills all in all**.”).
    - a. The glorified Son of God now rules on heaven’s throne.
    - b. But also note the description of God as the One “who fills all in all,” which comes to play in our understanding of heaven and its wonders.
  - 3. At the end of time when we will enter heaven, Christ’s rule over the kingdom shall be returned to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24-28 – “Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. <sup>27</sup> For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under *Him*,” *it is* evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. <sup>28</sup> Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, **that God may be all in all**.”).
    - a. Since at the end of all things even the **Son** subjects Himself to the Father, **so will we!**
    - b. This must happen so that “God may be all in all” (15:28).
      - i. This is the final state of all things—that God is “all in all”—that God’s great power and glory are finally seen in their fullness!
      - ii. This is the final goal of all that has transpired throughout the centuries, which I understand may seem egocentric to those who do not know or understand God.
      - iii. So, heaven is about God’s glory being forever seen in us and by us, as the glorified brethren of Jesus (Rom. 8:16-17 – “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be **glorified together**.”).
- C. I cannot help but wonder if we may still be asking **what will heaven be like?**
  - 1. To answer this, I must emphasize *again* that heaven is the home of Jehovah, the holy and eternal God, the Creator and Lord of the universe, the giver of life, the giver of His Own Son, the bestower of amazing grace, the Savior of sinners.
  2. So, in many ways Heaven’s wonder is spiritually discerned, only appreciated by those who truly know God and focus their life on Him.
    - a. It is strange indeed for those who have lived a carnal life focused on the **earthly things** to grasp the splendor, excitement, and great joy of **living with God in His eternal home!**

- b. In fact, they cannot do so (1 Cor. 2:14 – “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”).
  - c. But for those who live with a heavenly focus, it is life (Col. 3:1-4 – “Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, **keep seeking the things above**, where **Christ is, seated at the right hand of God**. <sup>2</sup> **Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth**. <sup>3</sup> For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When **Christ, who is our life**, is revealed, then **you** also will be **revealed** with Him **in glory**.”)!
3. So, as we begin to answer what will heaven be like, know this...IT IS GOD’S HOME and the place of HIS GLORIOUS THRONE where we receive glory from God!

## • II. Heaven displays God’s ultimate glory:

A. In the Book of Revelation John records for us one of the most amazing descriptions of heaven given in terms that the lowly human mind can grasp.

1. It says nothing of how heaven will be the greenest of fairways, have the most exciting sports, the best deer to hunt, the nicest houses, the fastest cars, or the best foods, etc., etc.!
2. Instead, it gives the greatest assurance to Christians who are persecuted, distraught, wearied by the fight, and desirous for comfort and companionship with their God and Savior.

- B. Here we see a most spectacular picture of God’s glory, power, and rule as He sits on his throne (Rev. 4:1-11 – “After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.” <sup>2</sup> Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. <sup>3</sup> And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. <sup>4</sup> Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. <sup>5</sup> Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God; <sup>6</sup> and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind. <sup>7</sup> The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. <sup>8</sup> And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty, who was and who is and who is to come.” <sup>9</sup> And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever, <sup>10</sup> the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, <sup>11</sup> “Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created.”).

- 1. The description of God on the throne is not given in human features, but in glorious stones that shine forth in clear and unmistakable brilliance (4:3).
  - a. The *jasper stone* is said to be translucent while exhibiting many colors, likely indicating the **multifaceted glory** and **beauty** of God.
  - b. A *sardius stone* is red, referring to God’s justice, or even His **grace** through Jesus’ blood.
  - c. The *rainbow* around the throne was like an emerald, again showing His glory/majesty, but also possibly His **mercy** as indicated by the rainbow shown to Noah.
- 2. God’s power is seen in that His throne was encircled by 24 other thrones (4:4).
  - a. Sitting on these thrones were twenty-four elders clothed in white garments and golden crowns.
  - b. They form, it seems, a council of spiritual beings for praise of God’s majesty and power.
- 3. From God’s throne emanates lightning and thunder, emphasizing His power and even His judgement, being reminiscent of Mt. Sinai as Israel left Egypt (4:5; Ex. 19).

- 4. In front on God’s throne were seven burning lamps that are the “seven spirits of God,” which appears to be a reference to the Holy Spirit and the completeness, or perfection, of its work and nature (see 1:4; 3:1).
- 5. Before the throne was a “sea of glass” (4:6).
  - a. This “sea of glass like crystal” is a large laver filled with pure water and its stillness and clarity being like glass. This is reminiscent of the O.T. temple.
  - b. This likely depicts the **cleansing** needed to approach God’s throne, emphasizing that God is HOLY, that God is PURE!
- 6. There are four living creatures about the throne that are “full of eyes in front and behind,” showing their eternal vigilance, or possibly symbolic of God’s omniscience (4:7-8). They have faces like a...
  - a. Lion – strength and fierceness of God’s throne against the wicked.
  - b. Calf – mercy, gentleness, even the sacrificial nature of God’s throne.
  - c. Man – intelligence, reason, and wisdom of God on His throne.
  - d. Eagle – ability of God’s throne to bring swift vengeance/justice on the wicked that oppress the righteous
- e. These four creatures with six-wings continually, day and night, exclaim God’s holiness, power, and eternal nature (4:8).
  - i. Their cry of “holy, holy, holy” is the only statement of God’s character repeated in this fashion, indicating God holiness is paramount and must be appreciated.
  - ii. That they praise Him as **the Almighty** stresses His complete power, while that **He was, is, and is to come** emphasizes His eternal nature.
  - iii. This praise NEVER ends but is tirelessly and enthusiastically given day and night!
- 7. As the Creatures worship, the twenty-four elders fall down in worship to God (4:9-11):
  - a. One might assume that the power of God’s throne is held up by the 24 thrones that surround it, but the very opposite is true. The elders on these thrones **fall before God** in continual praise, **casting their crowns before Him!**
  - b. They continually exalt God’s worthiness to receive glory, honor, and power, seeing He is the Creator and sustainer of all things.

#### C. Application:

- 1. Heaven’s nature and glory are in every way about God—His glory, majesty, beauty, holiness, and power, and about our amazing privilege to live with Him and praise Him in such *close communion* for eternity.
  - a. In heaven there will be no more thought of self, no thought of earthly things and desires.
  - b. All such things will have no meaning, no significance, as we will be filled and overwhelmed with His wondrous majesty, beauty, and holiness.
  - c. For, as Paul reminded us in 1 Corinthians, **God will be all in all** (15:28).
- 2. I think **A.W. Tozer** was right when he said, “I can safely say, on the authority of all that is **revealed** in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven.”
  - a. This is the problem with so much that is called “worship” by churches today.
    - i. For, it caters to the earthly, carnal desires of the masses with entertainment, spectacular audio-visual presentations, music, fun, etc.
    - ii. Such an approach to “worship” ill-prepares, or more truthfully completely deceives, the masses concerning heaven, its nature, and its beauty.
    - iii. And there are so many—so deceived—so ill-prepared—so sad!
  - b. So, does true worship excite you? Are you glad when our times of assembling roll around and you can come together with those of like faith and...
    - i. Praise God with your voice, making melody in our heart (Eph. 5:19)?
    - ii. Cheerfully give back to God a portion of the blessing he has abundantly bestowed on you (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:6-7)?

- iii. Pray together, commune together in remembrance of the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection through the Lord's Supper, and hear God's word proclaimed (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17ff.)?
- iv. Your answer will tell if you are ready for heaven!

CONCLUSION:

1. I hope I have helped to provide a better understanding and appreciation for Heaven, the holy and glorious abode of God.
2. And, I hope that in doing so that you leave with a greater appreciation for the work and worship of His church, performed and offered according to God's Spirit-revealed instructions, that we might...
  - A. Present, if only in our limited means, the proper picture of worship that all might get a clearer glimpse of heaven and its glory.
  - B. Be properly prepared for the real wonder, glory, magnificence, and beauty of heaven, which is **totally focused on God.**
3. So, is getting to heaven your life, your focus, your motivation, your goal?
  - A. If so, then God must be your life, your focus, your amazement, your motivation, your goal!
  - B. And that begins with choosing to follow Jesus today by F-C-R-B, and is continued through LF!
  - C. Will you come to Jesus today?