

Week 46

Heaven and Our Resurrection

Key Verses

I Thessalonians 4:13-15 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

+ Introduction

John Lennon wrote a song in 1971 called “Imagine;” the opening line is perhaps one of the saddest lyrics in all of music, “Imagine there is no heaven.” Twenty-eight years later, Bart Millard of Mercy Me wrote another song about heaven, “I Can Only Imagine,” which is the opposite of John Lennon’s song. The one written in 1999 by Bart Millard focuses on imagining what it will feel like to be in heaven, the reality of seeing Jesus, face to face.

There has always been a mystery and intrigue about heaven. Artists have tried to depict heaven on canvas, in books, songs, movies, and more. Heaven is no figment of the imagination, nor is it a feeling, a state of mind, or the invention of man. Heaven is a literal place prepared by Christ for a prepared people. ¹

Artists have depicted heaven throughout the centuries. Poets have eloquently written about heaven. Singers have sung about heaven. All these creative elements suggest what heaven may look like or be like. But unless we come to an understanding of the reality of heaven based on the Bible, we will be left to the mere creative imaging of others.

Heaven and the nature of the afterlife have piqued man’s curiosity ever since the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Deuteronomy 26:15 describes Heaven as God’s “*holy dwelling place,*” and is followed by profound references to heaven throughout the Old Testament, on into the New Testament, elaborated upon by Jesus, and culminating in John’s great apocalyptic vision recorded in the Revelation.

DEUTERONOMY 26:15 *Look down from Your holy dwelling place, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel, and the ground which You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey just as You swore to our fathers.’*

PSALM 103:19 *"The Lord has prepared His throne in the heavens; and His Kingdom rules over all."*

MATTHEW 6:9B *"Our Father, which art in Heaven..."*

JOHN 14:2 *"In my Father's house are many rooms, if it were not so I would have told you."*

ACTS 7:55 *"And he (Stephen), being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadily into heaven and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God."*

REVELATION 4:4 *"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."*

REVELATION 21:1 *"And I saw the holy city New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband."*

REVELATION 21:10-12,14 *"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. ¹¹ Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. ¹² It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel . . . ¹⁴ and the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."*

REVELATION 21:22-25 *"I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the Kings of the Earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed."*

REVELATION 22:5 *"And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever."*

✦ The Reality of Heaven

Heaven is a real place, and throughout Scripture, we see glimpses of heaven. Some descriptions are easy to imagine; others are more difficult. But, regardless of the ease or difficulty of the description, the truth we find in Scripture is consistent from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Even through the inspired writings of the Apostle Paul, we see a defined heaven that will be our eternal home.

Paul in 2 Corinthians 12:2 refers to *"the third heaven,"* and we need an understanding of what this means. Paul is not saying that there are three heavens or even three levels of heaven. In many

ancient cultures, people used the term heaven to describe three different “realms”—the sky, outer space, and then a spiritual heaven. Paul was saying that God took him to the “spiritual” heaven—the realm beyond the physical universe where God dwells. ²

a. The Three “Heavens”

1. The atmospheric heaven
2. The celestial heaven
3. The dwelling place of God

When the Bible speaks of heaven, it is of supreme importance to know to which one of these it is referring. Let’s break them down.

- The **atmospheric heaven** includes the air that we breathe and the space that immediately surrounds the earth. The technical term for this is the “troposphere.” It extends about twenty miles above the earth. The space above this is called the “stratosphere.” ³ This is the area of earth’s weather and the clouds, and the domain of the birds.
- The **celestial heaven** is the location of the sun, moon, stars, and planets. The Hubble telescope has revealed that this “heaven” is far more vast than man ever imagined. David would refer to this celestial heaven in Psalm 8.
- The **heaven** that is the eternal home of the redeemed of all time is the dwelling place of God. In chapter 4 of the Revelation, the Apostle John is invited to this realm, and he describes its glories. It is where God sits enthroned, and from there, He renders judgment and dispenses blessings. Old Testament saints did not have to wait for Jesus’ ascension to gain access to Heaven because Moses and Elijah came from there to participate in Jesus’s Transfiguration. In this present age, Scripture asserts God’s Kingdom will know no end, and Daniel reveals it will be an “*everlasting dominion . . . which will not be destroyed.*” John asserts Christ will reign “*forever and ever.*” (Revelation 11:15)

While there is much we do not know about heaven, and we will not until we experience it for ourselves, these are some basic facts about heaven that can be known.

b. Heaven is a place, not a state of mind.

In Acts 1:9-11, Jesus ascended into heaven, not into a “state of mind.” Throughout Scripture, when heaven is mentioned, it is a place, a destination, not merely a conjectured thought in someone’s mind. On the night before Jesus was crucified, He was very specific with His disciples about His destination when He said, “*I go to prepare a place for you*” (John 14:2).

The following day when Jesus was crucified, the thief hanging next to Him said, “*remember me...*” Jesus responded, “*Today you will be with Me in Paradise.*” (Luke 23:42-43) See also 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:21-24. The word paradise comes from the Persian word *pairidaeza*, meaning “a walled park” or “enclosed garden.” ⁴ For those who believe, there is hope in these words that once we take our last breath, there is a place we will go to with Jesus.

+ The Fullness of Heaven

We cannot be exhaustive in the description of the fullness of heaven, but we will look at some highlights of our future home.

a. Its Duration

"Heaven will endure as long as God does, and God is eternal; heaven is where we will experience eternal life in its fullness. Further, heaven is the fulfillment of God's promised everlasting life to believers, *"the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time"* (Titus 1:2)." ⁵

b. Its Characteristics

- Far Better Than Earth (Philippians 1:23, 2 Corinthians 5:8)
- Place of No Sorrow (Revelation 21:4)
- Place of No Curse (Revelation 22:3)
- No Darkness (Revelation 21:23, 25)
- No Sickness (Revelation 21:4; 22:2)
- No Death (Revelation 21:4; 1 Corinthians 15:53-54)
- Place of Glorious Bodies (Philippians 3:21; 1 Corinthians 15:51-53)
- Place of Many Mansions (John 14:1-3) ⁶

c. What Will Our Lives Be Like in Heaven?

Let's look at a view questions and answers given by author Randy Alcorn in his book on heaven:

- **Will We Be Unique?** – Yes. "Just as our genetic code and fingerprints are unique now, we should expect the same of our new bodies. Individual identity is an essential aspect of personhood. God is the Creator of individual identities and personalities." ⁷
- **Will We Become Angels?** – No. "Angels are angels. Humans are humans. Angels are being with their own histories and memories, with distinct identities, reflected in the fact that they have personal names, such as Michael and Gabriel." ⁸
- **Will We Have Desires?** – Yes. "One of the greatest things about heaven is that we'll no longer have to battle our desires. They'll always be pure, attending to their proper objects. We'll enjoy food without gluttony and eating disorders. We'll express admiration and affection without lust, fornication, or betrayal. Those simply won't exist." ⁹
- **Will We Have Beautiful Bodies?** – "I expect our bodies will be good-looking, but not with a weight-lifting, artificial-implant, skin-tuck, tanning-booth sort of beauty...Our new bodies will have a natural beauty that won't need cosmetics or touch-ups. As for fat, because God created fat as part of our bodies, we'll surely have some, but in healthy proportion." ¹⁰

- **Will there be Work in Heaven?** – Yes. “Since work began before sin and the curse, and since God, who is without sin, is a worker, we should assume human beings will work on the New Earth. We should assume we’ll be able to resume the work started by Adam and Eve, exercising godly dominion over the earth, ruling it for God’s glory... When the faithful servant enters heaven, he is offered not retirement but this: *‘Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord’* (Matthew 25:23, NKJV).”¹¹

+ The Way to Heaven

Heaven is a real place for those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. God created human beings to live forever. Just as God is eternal, so are humans. God daily walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Due to the sin of Adam and Eve, this face-to-face interaction came to an end. Mankind became separated from the Creator that fashioned them and sustained them.

Because of God’s great love for mankind (John 3:16), He provided a way for His relationship with men and women to be restored through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, on the Roman cross.

ROMANS 5:6-8 *“For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”*

ROMANS 10:9-10 *“That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; ¹⁰ for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”*

Salvation allows sinful men and women to enter heaven to spend eternity with their Heavenly Father and Beloved Savior, Jesus.

a. Resurrection for the Believer

1. Scenario #1: Our earthly body (the “earth-suit” we wear while we are alive on earth) will die due to accident, tragedy, disease, or old age. The death of our body will release our spirit and soul into eternity. Warren Wiersbe says, “At death, the spirit leaves the body, and the body goes to sleep and no longer functions. The soul-spirit goes to be with the Lord, if the person has trusted Jesus Christ. *‘Absent from the body, and ... present with the Lord’* (2 Corinthians 5:8).”¹²
2. Scenario #2: If we are alive when our Savior returns to earth, we will meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17). “The Christian doctrine of resurrection assures us that death is not the end. The grave is not the end. The body goes to sleep, but the soul goes to be with the Lord (Philippians 1:20-24). When the Lord returns, He will bring the soul with Him, will raise the body in glory, and will unite body and soul into one being to share His glory forever.”¹³

b. Glimpses of Life after Death in the Bible:

- **Mount of Transfiguration** (Matthew 17:1-13) – Peter, James, and John went with Jesus up to a mountain and saw Jesus' body transformed and recognized Moses and Elijah in bodily form. These three disciples, of course, had never seen Moses and Elijah, but amazingly knew who they were.
- **The Rich Man and Lazarus** (Luke 16:19-31) – Jesus tells a story to the Pharisees concerning an unnamed Rich Man and a poor beggar named Lazarus. Both men died. Lazarus went to "Abraham's bosom," a place of comfort and rest, and the rich man went to Hades, a place of torment and thirst.
- **The Resurrected Jesus** (Matthew 28; Mark 16; Luke 24; John 20 & 21) – After Jesus spent three days in a borrowed tomb, He spent the next 40 days interacting with His disciples in His resurrected body. His body was recognizable, yet different, from the body He occupied for the 33 ½ years He lived as the God/Man here on earth.
 - Jesus was recognized by His disciples.
 - Jesus knew His disciples and conversed with them.
 - Jesus appeared and disappeared.
 - Jesus walked through a closed door.
 - Jesus ate food.

I CORINTHIANS 15:12-14 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, your faith also is in vain.

c. How Can You Go to Heaven?

- **It is impossible to earn your entrance into heaven.**

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*
- **You must agree with God that you are a sinner.**

ROMANS 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*
- **You must believe that Jesus is the sinless Son of God, who shed His precious blood for you.**

I CORINTHIANS 15:3-4 *"...Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."*
- **Through prayer, invite Jesus to come in and control your life through the Holy Spirit, receiving Him as Lord and Savior.**

Though there are no "magic" words to pray, here is an example of the content:

Dear Lord Jesus,

"I know that I am a sinner, and I ask for Your forgiveness. I believe You died for my sins and rose from the dead. I turn from my sins and invite You to come into my heart and life. I want to trust and follow You as my Lord and Savior." In Your Name, Amen. ¹⁴

+ Conclusion

The question many people might ask is, "What difference does a future heaven make in my life today?" Dr. Robert Jeffress addresses that question well in the following statements:

- **Focusing on heaven reminds us of the brevity of our earthly life.**

PSALM 39:4-5 *"Show me, Lord, my life's end
and the number of my days;
let me know how fleeting my life is.
⁵ You have made my days a mere handbreadth;
the span of my years is as nothing before you.
Everyone is but a breath,
even those who seem secure.*

- **Focusing on heaven prepares us for the certainty of judgment.**

2 CORINTHIANS 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.*

- **Focusing on heaven motivates us to live pure lives.**

1 JOHN 3:3 *"Everyone who has their hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."*

- **Focusing on heaven places suffering in perspective.** ¹⁵

2 CORINTHIANS 4:17-18 *For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Heaven will be our eternal dwelling place. It has been prepared for all who believe. It will be a place of perfection and beauty beyond our imagination. It will be a place of worship and work. It will be a place of healing and comfort. Heaven will be our home. David understood this truth as he wrote about the Lord being his shepherd.

PSALM 23:6 *Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

- ¹ David Jeremiah; *Answers to Your Question about Heaven*; Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL; 2013; p. 3.
- ² <https://www.gotquestions.org/levels-heaven.html>
- ³ https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_151.cfm
- ⁴ Randy Acorn, *Heaven*, Tyndale House Publishers, Wheaton, IL; 2004, p. 55.
- ⁵ Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume*, 2011, p 1250.
- ⁶ *Ibid.* p.1250 – 1251.
- ⁷ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, p. 282.
- ⁸ *Ibid.* p. 83.
- ⁹ *Ibid.* p. 285
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 289.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.* p. 332.
- ¹² Warren Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary*, p. 720.
- ¹³ *Ibid.* p. 721.
- ¹⁴ *Steps to Peace with God*, booklet by Billy Graham Evangelism Association.
- ¹⁵ Dr. Robert Jeffress, *A Place Called Heaven*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI; 2017, p. 25-35.