



A CLOSER LOOK

AT THINGS PERTAINING TO THE FAITH

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The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven

James Lloyd

In the Old Testament book of Genesis we see God choosing a man named Abram and promising to make of him a great nation. The book of Exodus records the formation of that nation and God's redemption of her from bondage. Leviticus chronicles God among His people. Numbers through Joshua is an account of God commissioning His people to take the land of Canaan that He had promised to Abram (Gen 12:1).

The land of Canaan was also known as the "promise land." It was the land of "milk and honey" (Numb 13:27). God's people were given a wonderful land where they would receive crops they did not have to plant, and they would dwell in buildings they did not have to build. It was a place already prepared for them. In the New Testament, the Hebrew writer tells us that God has also built a city for us (11:10,16), a place of "rest" (4:1), a "heavenly Jerusalem" which is the city of the living God (12:22).

*This world
is not
my home*

It is this city that every Christian longs for. It is where our home is for we are just "sojourners and pilgrims" in this world (1 Pt 2:11). "Our citizenship is in heaven," and we "eagerly wait for the

Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil 3:20). This is the sweet syrup of Christianity. I think sometimes we can dwell on the fact that we walk a "narrow" way (Matt 7:13), and we struggle through persecutions (Phil

1:29), and we deny ourselves to take up a cross (Matt 10:38), to the extent that we forget we are wandering through a wilderness of our own, on the way to a promised land the Bible calls "Heaven." Let us always stay focused on this place of reward (Col 2:18); this abode of eternal joy (Matt 25:21); this house of worship and praise (Rev 4:8-11), this point of reunion where we will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Matt 8:11); this place where we will be with our loving Father forever



and ever (Rev 22:5).

Jesus said in John 14:1-4, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so, I would have told you. 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 to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." The one

*I've Got
A
Mansion*

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The Difference Heaven Makes

Thomas Steed

While those who have no appreciation for the Gospel have been heard to say, “Some Christians are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good” a more accurate assessment may very well be that we have become so “earthly minded that we are no heavenly good.” It would appear that the reality of heaven and its life transforming implications have largely been overshadowed by our obsessions with the “cares, riches, and pleasures of life” and as a result we bear precious little fruit in the kingdom of heaven today (Luke 8:14). While we would never deny the reality of heaven with the fruit of our lips, the fruit of our lives too often reveals that heaven makes little difference to us in the midst of life in “the real world.” In a word, heaven has become increasingly “irrelevant” to us.

Contrast this present condition of the church with the manner of life exhibited by the saints of the first century. For them the reality of heaven wasn't on the fringe of their lives but at the very center, profoundly affecting every aspect of their existence. Indeed, one simply cannot make sense of the joy and love that so characterized them apart from their confident expectation of dwelling in the presence of God forever. How different would our lives be if heaven became a living reality instead of a vague idea that rarely enters our mind? Let us consider just a few.

for purpose and meaning in life cannot be fully realized by anything in the world but only by something beyond it. Our hearts deepest longings for love, joy and peace can only be satisfied by God and abiding in His presence forever. This is precisely what heavenly existence is (Rev 21:3). Thus, we live our lives recognizing that we were not only created by God but also for God (Col. 1:16). Like the faithful of long ago, we view ourselves as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” as we journey toward that “heavenly country” that God has prepared for us (Heb. 11:13,16). Apart from the promise of everlasting life with God our lives will always fall short of the lasting fulfillment for which we long.

In 1 Peter 1:8 Peter describes Christians as those who “rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.” Joy inexpressible? Why is it that so many of us do not believe that such joy could possibly describe our lives? Why is it that it doesn't describe so many of our lives? Could it be that, unlike those to whom Peter wrote, we have lost sight of the “end” of our faith, which is the “salvation of our souls?” (1 Pet. 1:9). Could it be that we have all but forgotten that Christ has “begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away reserved in heaven for you?” (1 Pet. 1:3-4). Because these saints lived in the full assurance of heaven not even the experience of being “grieved by various trials” could quench their joy (1 Pet. 1:6). The joy that heaven produces in our hearts is so firm that it can overcome any disappointment the world may bring our way (Matt. 5:12). Maybe such joy has never been realized in our hearts because the hope of heaven has never been a “living hope.”

*Constant
Joy*

*Genuine
Purpose
in
Life*

In the book of Ecclesiastes Solomon presents for our consideration life from the “under the sun” perspective (Ecc. 1:9; 2:18,19,20,22). Simply stated, living “under the sun” means looking for lasting fulfillment in life apart from God. Wealth, pleasure, fame and power are all pursued in the quest for purpose in life but in the end Solomon says it is “vanity” (Ecc. 2:1,11,15,17). Solomon's assessment reveals that man's yearning

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Endurance in the Midst of Suffering

In his book *Sin, Suffering and God* brother Thomas Warren observes that, “The ‘stakes’ in eternity (the *blessings* of heaven and the *punishment* of hell) are of such magnitude as to render all suffering in this life of no ultimate significance.” (Warren. 1980, 280, 281). Brother Warren’s observation is designed not to minimize the significance of our suffering but only to challenge us to keep it in proper perspective. It simply echoes what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

The hope of eternal life gives us the ability to remain faithful to God and endure life’s adversities because perfect joy will one day be ours. This is why Paul could speak of the great suffering and rejection he endured as a “light affliction” when compared with the “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17). Because he always evaluated his suffering in the light of eternity he could also confidently say, “Therefore, we do not lose heart.” (2 Cor. 4:16). This same assurance characterized Jesus as well. The Hebrew writer reminds us that we must “run with endurance the race that is set before us” because Jesus, “*who for the joy that was set before Him* endured the cross, despising the shame and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb.12: 1-2). With the promise that in the heavenly kingdom, “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” and “there shall be no more sorrow, nor crying; and there shall be no more pain” (Rev. 21:4) we can endure anything our “brief” time on earth brings our way.

Freedom from the Fear of Death

In his Pulitzer prize winning book *The Denial Of Death*, anthropologist Ernest Becker observed that human beings are intensely averse to accepting their own mortality and devote most of their time and energy in a somewhat unconscious effort avoiding it. This denial is largely rooted in a fundamental fear of death and this fear is what robs us of peace and purpose in life. As the Scrip-

ture describes it, human beings are those “who through the fear of death” are all their lifetime “subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15).

The message of the Gospel is that Jesus has conquered death by His resurrection and has thereby “released” us from the fear of death (Heb. 2:15). He has “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). To grieving Martha He said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25). He then asked Martha what He asks us today, “Do you believe this?”

The Christian no longer lives in the fear of death and as a result lives a life of courage in service to the Lord even if it leads to death (Rev. 2:10). We fear not “those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul” because the One who is “able to destroy both body and soul in hell” (Matt. 10:28) has conquered death and given us the assurance of eternal life.

In the Sermon on the Mount **Conclusion** Jesus taught that in the course of our lives we are either laying up “treasures on earth” or “treasures in heaven” (Matt. 6: 19-20). Simply believing there is a heaven does not necessarily mean our treasure is there. Let us not deceive ourselves into thinking we can set our minds on the things of the earth (Col. 3:2) and somehow “end up” in heaven when our lives on earth are done. Such thinking reveals what is most important to us and it certainly is not heaven. Remember, Jesus said, “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” and where our heart is will ultimately determine whether or not we will dwell with God forever (Matt. 6:21).

Warren, Thomas B. *Sin, Suffering and God*. NCP, 1980



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word that usually catches our eye is the word “mansion.” But the real point of the passage is not how big it is, rather, that it is a place where we will be with Jesus.

Contextually, Jesus is about to leave His disciples and His words of encouragement are “let not your heart be troubled” for “I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” Heaven will be great because Jesus will be there. We will live with the King, sing praises to the King, and see the King. We sing,

“He is my everything.
He is my all.
He is my everything, both great and small.
He gave His life for me; made everything new.
He is my everything.
Now how about you?”

Heaven will be wonderful because Jesus will be there.

No Tears
In
Heaven

In Revelation 21:1 John tells us that in Heaven everything will be new. Even the vocabulary will be new. There will no longer be a need for words like sorrow, death, crying, and pain for these will all be obsolete (Rev 21:4). There will be no need for words like coward, unbeliever, murderer, homosexual, idolater, and liar for these too will be obsolete (Rev. 21:8). There will be no need for the sun or the moon either, “for the glory of God illuminates it” and “the Lamb is its light” (Rev 21:23).

In Heaven we will drink of the river that flows from the throne of God and eat of the leaves of the tree of life that are “for the healing of the nations” (Rev 22:1f). For all eternity we will live and serve our great God. We will fall down before Him and cast down our crowns before His throne (Rev 4:10). So let me warn you now. If you don't enjoy worshipping God, if you cannot stand an hour or two on Sunday; you can pretty much forget about Heaven. God will not drag you up there and make you worship Him. There is another place prepared for people who don't want to be bothered with

worship. C.S. Lewis has rightly said that there are two kinds of people – those who say to God, “Thy will be done,” and those to whom God says in the end, “Thy will be done.”

In the March 27, 1997 issue of *Time Magazine*, titled “Does Heaven Exist?,” a survey revealed that 81% of Americans believe in a place called Heaven; 61% believe they are actually going there. However, Jesus said, “few will find it.” The Bible says there are only two eternal destinations (Matt 7:13-14). There is a narrow way that leads to life and a wide way that leads to destruction. The narrow way is difficult but its end is peace and hope and joy. The wide way is also difficult but it is void of peace and hope and joy. Which path are you on today?

As Moses was preparing to leave his home and lead Israel to that wonderful and beautiful promise land, he asked his Gentile brother-in-law Hobab to go with them. He said, “We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, ‘I will give it to you.’ Come with us” (Num. 10:29). Dear friend, the Lord's church is eagerly waiting for the return of Christ to take us to our heavenly home. Please, come with us.



Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. for this cause the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is. And everyone that hath this hope set on him purifieth himself, even as he is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

A Closer Look
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