

The Next Life, Part 1: Where Christians Go Before He Returns *Heaven, Pt. 2*

Dec. 8/9, 2007

Good morning New Song!

I want to talk to you again today about heaven. What we started two weeks ago, we will complete two weeks from now. And by the time we're through, you are going to have a new and clearer view of life in the world to come. So, are you ready to do some learning today? If so, say, "I'm ready."

I guarantee, when you leave here 45 minutes from now, you'll know more than you know now, and you'll know that you know more than you do now. And you MAY wish we hadn't covered as much as we will, because we will be learning today.

Are you ready to do some learning today?

You will be learning today, because most of us are foggy on this subject of heaven. We're confused by pictures of angels, and people floating on clouds, and movies like *It's a Wonderful Life* that picture not-so-bright, but certainly well-meaning angels like Clarence bumbling around on earth, trying to earn their wings.

I want to suggest to you that there is huge confusion in western culture today over the nature of heaven. Huge confusion for two reasons:

1. Because of what we inherited from the Greeks.

Do you remember hearing about a Greek named, "Plato"? Plato was one of the foremost thinkers, or philosophers in ancient Greece. He did not invent the Greek way of thinking, but he furthered it, promoted it, and today, represents it as its figurehead. From Plato we get words like, "Platonic." And we get the philosophy of Platonism. Platonism – or "dualism" says that the universe we inhabit is made up of two essences: spirit and flesh. Or material and immaterial.

Plato, and others like him, taught that the spiritual, or immaterial was good, while the flesh, or material was bad. Hence, the next life, if it is to be better, *must* be immaterial. That thought has clouded Christian thinking in almost every age. We've confused Greek thinking, that matter and physicality are bad, with Christian thinking and come up with an image of heaven that is mostly about immaterial life.

2. The second reason we have confusion about heaven is because there are actually two phases, or stages to heaven. What our loved ones who have died in Christ experience now, is not what they, or we, if we trust Christ, will experience forever.

So, are you ready to do a little learning today? ("I'm ready.")

This morning, I want to take us one step deeper into what the Bible says about heaven.

I'm going to ask you to open a Bible a little later, but for now, read this verse on the wall with me:

1 Thessalonians 4:13 -

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of me, who have no hope.

“Fall asleep” here is a euphemism for death. Apparently, God doesn't want us to be ignorant about what happens to people when they die. Would you agree?

Here's what we touched on two weeks ago, if you were here. If not, this will be a bit new for you and you might want to catch up by picking up a CD at the Information Center after the service.

Two weeks ago, part of what we learned about Heaven was that

A. We live in an in-between time. Right now, there is a temporary Heaven. One day there will be a new Heaven. – Revelation 21:1 (as well as a New Earth. And we will live on that New Earth forever.) But for now, just as we live on an earth that will one day be superseded, there is a heaven that will one day be superseded.

Speaking of a time in the distance future, Rev. 21:1 says, ***Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away... Revelation 21:1***

What we live on is temporary and will one day pass away. The heaven our loved ones live in is also temporary and will one day pass away. The “day” pictured here is the day following the millennium, a 1,000 year period when Christ will reign on the earth.

If you want the whole chronology of our planet, it goes like this:

- 1. The Garden***
- 2. The Fall***
- 3. The War***
- 4. The Millennium***
- 5. The New Heaven and New Earth***

The Garden period was enjoyed by Adam and Eve until they ate of the forbidden fruit and fell. These first parents of ours were appointed by God to rule over the Earth. Instead, they ceded sovereignty of our planet to Satan when they chose to follow his advice and eat the fruit that was forbidden. We live in the “Fall” time, awaiting the reclamation of the world by God's Son, Jesus.

As we learned during our Future History series on the book of Daniel several months ago, that reclamation will begin with a war that takes place during a period of time in which the Anti-Christ establishes himself as the sole ruler of our world. The technical term for that period is “The Tribulation.”

That war period will last seven years. (Sidenote: for the first 30 years of my Christian life, I believed that that war was a long ways off. I don't any longer. I believe it could begin soon.)

The conclusion of the 7 years' war will culminate in a battle called, "Armageddon," in which the armies of the world will gather in, I believe, the Megiddo Valley, and Christ will return at the height of the conflict to end all war and oppression and establish His rule on the earth. That rule, on this present earth, will last 1,000 years. At which time, Jesus will make a final judgment of Satan, cast him into the lake of fire, complete the final judgment of the world, and bring the New Jerusalem to earth, establishing a New Heaven and New Earth.

Have we done enough learning yet, or, are you ready for more? ("I'm ready.")

Randy Alcorn, in his book titled, *Heaven*, says, "Let me suggest an analogy to illustrate the difference between the present Heaven and the eternal Heaven. Suppose you lived in a homeless shelter in Miami. One day you inherit a beautiful house, fully furnished, on a gorgeous hillside overlooking Santa Barbara, California. With the home comes a wonderful job doing something you've always wanted to do. Not only that, but you'll also be near close family who moved from Miami many years ago."

"On your flight to Santa Barbara, you'll change planes in Dallas, where you'll spend an afternoon. Some other family members, whom you haven't seen in years, will meet you at the Dallas airport and board the plane with you to Santa Barbara. You look forward to seeing them."

"Now, when the Miami ticket agent asks you, 'Where are you headed?' Would you say, 'Dallas'? No. You would say Santa Barbara, because that's your final destination. If you mentioned Dallas at all, you would only say, 'I'm going to Santa Barbara, *by way of* Dallas.'"

"Similarly, the Heaven we will be going to when we die, the present Heaven, is a temporary dwelling place, a stop along the way to our final destination: the New Earth."

A. We live in an in-between time. Right now, there is a temporary Heaven. One day there will be a new Heaven. – Revelation 21:1 If you will, we're in Miami, but some of our loved ones are waiting for us in Dallas.

This raises the question of the day:

B. What is it like in the temporary Heaven?

You'll be encouraged by this friends. The Bible says,

1. It is better, by far. – Philippians 1:23

Paul says, in Philippians 1:23, ***“I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far...”***

You’ll be encouraged by this: This temporary heaven

2. It is called Paradise. – Luke 23:43

Paradise is a Hebrew word, borrowed from the Persians. Remember the Persians? We studied them in Future History as well, because they play a key role in human history. The Persians loved gardens. One of the seven wonders of the world was built by Nebuchadnezzar for his wife who missed the lush green of her Median homeland. Nebuchadnezzar built her the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Cyrus, the Persian king who overthrew the Babylonians, also built elaborate gardens. The word, “Paradise,” in Persian means “a walled garden.”

The Temporary Heaven will be a place of “Paradise.”

You’ll be encouraged by this too:

3. People are made perfect there. - Hebrews 12:23

Look at this: The author of Hebrews writes, ***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... Hebrews 12:23***

In Romans 6, the Bible speaks of the “old man” or “old nature” inside of us, and the “new man” or “new nature” we receive when we come to Christ. In the Next Life, the old man will be extracted and we’ll be made morally perfect.

You’ll be encouraged by this also: The Bible indicates that this temporary heaven we’ll be going to

4. It is the original; we live in the “copy.” – Hebrews 8:5

Look at this: speaking of the priests in the Temple in Jerusalem, the author says, ***They serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in heaven.... Hebrews 8:5*** We live in the copy. If you’ve seen Multiplicity, or if you’ve ever made a Xerox copy, you know that every succeeding copy is less than the original.

Alright, now are you ready to do some real learning?

Find a Bible and open it to Luke 16:19, p. 1036.

What you’re turning to is a story, called a “Parable,” which is a story with a point to it. This is a unique parable, however, because, of the dozens of parables told by Jesus, this is the only one that includes a name for one of the characters. Because of this, scholars believe that Jesus was doing more than telling a story with a point to it. Many, including

me, believe that this parable is rooted in reality. – It reflects what the surroundings really are like.

I'll read, you follow along:
(Luke 16:19-31)

Let's walk through some learnings together:

C. Learnings from Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31):

1. When Lazarus died, angels carried him to Paradise.

Did you notice that in the text?

2. When the rich man died, he went to a place of torment.

Not what we would wish on anyone, but a real person went there.

3. Lazarus is with others. The rich man is alone. Abraham, and therefore I speculate, many others, were with Lazarus. The rich man is in complete isolation. There's a popular myth that says, "I'd like the climate of heaven and the company of hell, because all the fun people will be there." The climate part is right, but the company part is wrong. Everyone in hell will be in isolation, because when we reject God, we reject all that He offers, and one of God's great offerings is community. There will be no community in hell.

4. The present Heaven and Hell are separated by a fixed chasm. A chasm is a gulf, and unbreachable gap. No one can traverse it. Finally, on an encouraging note:

5. The rich man and Abraham reason, communicate, and remember.

Can you see that? This tells me we'll be thinking, reasoning, fully aware beings in the next life.

Of minor note: Lazarus and the rich man have tongues and fingers, did you notice that? These may be images, but many believe they are real, that we will have some sort of physical body in the temporary heaven. You'll see more of that when we open our second passage, which is in **Revelation 6, on p. 1219**. Turn there, please, there is a lot to see here.

Revelation, of course, is the final book of the Bible. It's the story of one pure-hearted soul, the Apostle John, who in his old age is taken up in a vision and given the ability to see into heaven for a time.

This is his report: (Rev. 6:9-11)

One more set of learnings:

D. Learnings from Revelation 6:9-11:

1. After death, these people relocated to Heaven. (v. 9) You already had evidence that that's what happens, from the Lazarus story.

2. People in heaven are remembered by what they did on Earth. (This could be good news or bad news, depending on what you did last night.) This particular group of heaven-dwellers was known as "martyrs," they died for the cause of Christ, and everyone knows it.

3. They have voices. (v. 10) Which means, they probably have bodies. And their voices are raised as one voice, so there's evidence of a unity of spirit among the peoples of heaven.

4. They are fully conscious, rational, and aware. Can you see that? They aren't dazed or confused, wondering where they are. These are fully functioning humans.

5. They are free to ask God questions. So there is free-will, and thinking in heaven, as well as access to the Father.

6. They know what's happening on Earth. Somehow there is an ability to know what's happening here, at least on a grand scale, but possibly on a micro scale as well. If you've ever wondered if loved ones could be aware of the "doings" of earth, they're at least aware of the "big doings," perhaps more.

7. They have feelings about what is happening on earth. They're very passionate about justice, and having wrong rectified. I think it's fair to conjecture from this that they are able to *feel* just the way we feel here and now.

8. They remember what happened to them on earth. We saw this with Lazarus and the Rich Man too.

9. They wore white robes. (v. 11) Or at least were issued them, which would indicate that they have bodies, and individual needs.

10. God answers their questions. Can you imagine living in a place where all your questions can be answered? That alone would make it Heaven for most of us.

11. God promises to fulfill their requests, but tells them they will have to "wait a little longer." So, they exist in time. "How long" is a time indicator, as well as, "a little longer." For years I thought people in the next life existed outside of time. That's no longer the case.

12. They learn in heaven. Think about this: Because God is infinite, He knows an infinite amount. It will take us a infinite amount of time to absorb an infinite amount of information, so we will always be learning.

13. They have strong family ties to people on Earth. Verse 11 says, "They were told to wait until the number of their fellow servants and brothers were to be killed." "Fellow servants and brothers" are close kinship terms. Our loved ones, and one day, we, will feel for our family in the temporary heaven. Finally,

14. God knows every detail about what is happening and will happen on Earth, including every bit of suffering undergone by His children. He knows the full number of those who are to be martyred for His name's sake. The Voice of the Martyrs organization estimates that there are now 150,000 martyrs a year around the world. 400 people will die today for the cause of Christ, and 400 tomorrow, and 400 the day after. And God knows them all. These have a very special place in the temporary heaven, they're as close to God as you can get: right under the very altar of heaven. Revelation 19 says that they'll be given special places of rulership during the millennium as well.

Review:

Friends, we now know *a lot* about the Next Life, phase 1. We know...

- It's a temporary lodging place, a waiting place until the return of Christ and our bodily resurrection.
- It's better than here, by far.

- We know that we will be fully alive, with all the faculties and feelings and awareness we have now, and even heightened awareness, because we'll not only know what's going on around us, we'll know what's going on on earth.
- We know we'd rather be there than the place of torment.

What we might not know yet today is how to get there.

Here's what the Bible says on that subject:

Jesus says, ***"I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved."*** *John 10:9*

Paul says, ***"If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."*** *Romans 10:10*

In the book of Revelation, Jesus gives us an image that I really like. 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 him, and he with me."*** – *Revelation 3:20*

He stands at the door, but He doesn't open it. If He did, His attractiveness to us would limit our free will, we couldn't resist Him. So He knocks, and He waits for us to open the door. It's our choice. If you have never had a time you can mark when you invited Christ to open the door, then let today be your day. Open the door by praying a simple prayer like this: "Lord Jesus, I invite you into my life. I believe you are the Savior of the world, and I invite you to be mine. Forgive me for the things I have done wrong, and lead my life from now into eternity."

That prayer is the invitation God is waiting for. I invite you to pray it now.