

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known  
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

## **The Intermediate Heaven**

*Selected Passages*

**Keywords:** Heaven, New Heavens and Earth, Eternity, Intermediate Heaven

**PowerPoint Presentation included:** NONE

**SermonAudio Blurb:** The idea and reality of heaven is often muddled in our minds. We believe in it and hope for it, but we really don't know how it works. It is usually something that happens "later" and a "place" we go. But beyond that, we don't know much. The bible speaks much on heaven and one will discover that the heaven of which we think about much of the time is not the final reality. It is better understood as an intermediate place that awaits the final stage of eternity. A lot of the problem arises due to a shifting away from the biblical text and into a more theoretical and philosophical approach to heaven.

### **I. Introduction.**

- A. We return to this extended study on the nature of heaven.
- B. The question today is, "What happens when a Christian dies?" One whose faith is resting in Jesus Christ alone?
  1. This is where things can be a bit vague for people. But the normal response is 'heaven.'
  2. But that is only mostly correct. It is fine to say 'heaven' but it is key to understand that it is not the final state of things. The heaven that you go to is best understood as an intermediate heaven.
  3. We have in the scripture a place Jesus calls "Abraham's Bosom" and it is also seen as being "Paradise." I will develop this in detail today, but you can get the sense of where we are going.
  4. Show slide "Three Places of Rest for Believers in Different Times."

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**II. An Introduction to Heaven in its intermediate state.**

- A. The Shadow of Heaven on Earth.
  - 1. Genesis 1 & 2 God dwelt with man in the garden.
    - a. Genesis 1:26-30
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - b. 2:7-8, 15-22.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - c. 3:8-9.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - d. vss 22-24,
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
    - e. The entrance of the garden was to the East and it was now blocked by the Cherubim—a unique type of angel.
  - 2. Later we have the creation of the Tabernacle/Temple and it was where God dwelt among His people.
    - a. The temple had many images that gave the idea of it functioning like a garden.
    - b. It faced the East, unlike all other temples in the pagan world.
    - c. That garden was destroyed with the flood. The temple becomes the new place to meet and dwell with God.
    - d. If you remember the Cherubim that guarded the entrance to Eden, now we see in the Holy of Holies the Ark of the Covenant.

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- e. Also, all of the priestly work of worship took place in the temple, a picture of the garden.
3. Hebrews 8:1-5.
- a. In vs 5 we see that the plans and model for the tabernacle was given by God and based upon the heavenly temple.
  - b. Here we are given the idea of copy and shadow in vs 5a. And we can apply this backwards in this chapter.
    - (1) The offerings given by the high priest on earth was a mere shadow of the perfect offering the True High Priest offered, which happened to be Himself.
    - (2) This is described in 9:11-12.
    - (3) And also in 9:24 where we see it explicitly said that He entered Heaven itself.
  - c. In these passages we can see that the writer treats heaven as a real place and that it has form and substance.
  - d. Again, the tabernacle plans given to Moses were not just made up. They followed the dimensions of the one in heaven.
    - (1) So we can give a tentative statement that heaven has a physical quality to it but not in the same way it is now.
    - (2) The best way to express this is Jesus, Himself. John 20:11-17, Mary clings to the risen Lord. 20:19, Jesus just appears without opening the doors. 20:22, breathes on them. 20:25-27 the wounds still present and Thomas could touch them.

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- (3) So Jesus, resurrected, was still physical, but not like we are. He didn't lose form or shape or substance, but it was also different.

## B. Paradise (Luke 23:43).

1. The term comes from a Persian word that means a walled park or garden. And this should bring your mind all the way back to the Garden of Eden.
2. It is not a picture of a wilderness, untamed and raw; rather, it is a park where it is carefully and properly managed to maximize its beauty and glory.
3. The key point we draw from this passage is that when Jesus died He would be in Paradise. And the thief would be there as well.

## C. Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:19ff) adds to this idea,

1. Note the following points
  - a. First, when Lazarus was dead angels carried him to Abraham's bosom, which would be an image of rest and repose.
  - b. Second, the rich man is now in Hades.
  - c. Third, this place was able to hold both Hades and Abraham's bosom with a large chasm between (26). But they were able to communicate.
  - d. Fourth, they all had forms. And they also maintain their individuality. The rich man showed concern for his family.
  - e. As an aside, though our bodies are in the grave awaiting the resurrection, there is good reason to see that our souls somehow have a form, or body, in the mean time. This passage is one indicator, but you will see others as you study this yourself.
2. There is always the question of whether this is a parable or story that is not rooted in actual reality. There is no evidence to make it a parable or made up story.
  - a. This comes off of a strong warning against the love of wealth.
  - b. I see no reason to not take it at face value and I believe it is simplest to see this as Paradise.

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- c. Now, here you need to hold on a bit as I take you down a small path regarding what Jesus Christ did while in the grave.
- d. We saw already that He entered into the heavenly temple and offered Himself as the one time, perfect sin offering.
- e. 1 Peter 3:18-19. We have a bit of a revelation about what He did before His resurrection.
  - (1) First, reason for Christ's death, to suffer in our place.
  - (2) Two, to do what no other sacrifice could do.
  - (3) Three, to remove the barrier to His .
  - (4) Four, it destroyed the power of Satan.
- f. This final one is what I want to speak about here. There are five different ways people approach this, but for time sake I will only elaborate on the last one.
  - (1) First, these are disembodied spirits of men after death, awaiting the day of judgment. The victory of Christ's death is proclaimed following the crucifixion.
  - (2) Second, these are men who did not listen to Noah's preaching before the flood. They are now being given a second chance after death to repent.
  - (3) Third, these are men of apostolic times who heard and refused the gospel as preached by Christ through the Apostles. They are prisoners of sin because of their rejection of the gospel.
  - (4) Fourth, These are the men of Noah's day to whom the pre-incarnate Christ through Noah preached. These rejected the preaching and are now in prison.
  - (5) Fifth, these are angelic beings, namely fallen angels, who have been imprisoned until judgment. Christ's preaching to them following death was a victory proclamation.

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- g. Ephesians 4:8-10.
  - (1) Here we have a similar image.
  - (2) vs 8 we see that “He led captive a host of captives”
    - (a) Psalm 68 is a psalm where God (YHWH) is portrayed as the divine warrior who conquers His enemies and blesses His people with gifts.
    - (b) The phrase in vs 8, "He led captive a host of captives" speaks of that event of His victory over the powers and principalities that Paul has described in chapter 2.

### **III. Conclusion.**

- A. Heaven, now.
  - 1. So, here we can put all of this together.
  - 2. Heaven, at this point in time, is not the full and complete heaven for which we wait. It is an intermediary which waits for the fulness of the end, when heaven and earth truly become one.
  - 3. Whether it was before the resurrection of Jesus Christ or after, heaven has been a place of comfort and rest. It is a place of joy and anticipation.
  - 4. All who were in paradise or Abraham’s bosom, are now in heaven where their blessed Savior is, seated at the right hand of the Father.
  - 5. But it is also not sufficient.
    - a. Still there is the awareness that sin still abounds on earth. Still there is the awareness that Satan roams the earth seeking whom He might devour.

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- b. In Revelation 6:4, in the midst of the judgements of God flowing upon mankind, there is the vision of John of the souls of those who had been murdered because of the Word of God. They asked, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”
  - c. And the answer from God was that they should rest for a little while longer.
- B. But, though those in heaven are aware of the injustice and sin in the world even now, it is still a place of rest.
- 1. Philippians 1:23 is our key passage for that. To die is gain for Paul because it means that he will “be with Christ.”
  - 2. Death here is the moment when faith now becomes sight. When you see the One in Whom you have trusted and loved.
  - 3. When the burden of sin in and around you is gone

## **Benediction**

**May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord cause His face to shine upon you and give you peace.  
Amen.**