

**SERIES: THE TRUTH ABOUT HEAVEN
SERMON: HEAVEN - BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL
9-17-23**

OPENER:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (NKJV) I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

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 by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Note:

The Bible refers to death for a Christian as being “asleep.” Or it will say “Dead in Christ”

Acts 7:59-60 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”⁶⁰ Then he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” When he had said this, he fell asleep.

The Bible is referencing a Final Resurrection. When at the Rapture those who have died in Christ will return with Him, but their bodies in the grave will rise and join them. Then we will join those who have already died and our bodies will be transformed in a moment and changed to an eternal body.

So, what happens between death for someone and Christ and the Final Resurrection at the Rapture? Do we have physical bodies in Heaven?

1. TO DIE IS TO BE WITH GOD

Corinthians 5:8 NKJV We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

THE BIBLE TEACHES US THAT WHEN WE DIE WE GO TO BE WITH THE LORD.

Philippians 1:21-24 For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.²² But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better.²³ I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me.²⁴ But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live.

NOTE:

The biblical teaching that believers immediately go to heaven when they die differs from what some groups teach. According to the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, faithful Jehovah's Witnesses who die remain in an unconscious state of "soul sleep" until the resurrection. At the resurrection, Jehovah "remembers" them, and they are brought back to life. The doctrine of "soul sleep" is also taught by Seventh-day Adventists. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that all believers, Catholic and non-Catholic, who die enter a place of punishment, "purgatory" to atone for the sins not covered by Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. Once these sins have been sufficiently punished, the faithful, now purified, may enter paradise. Proponents of both views make seemingly good arguments in favor of their beliefs, but neither the doctrine of soul sleep nor the teaching of purgatory is biblical.

EXAMPLE: THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

Luke 24:39-43 One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, "So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!"

⁴⁰ But the other criminal protested, "Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die?" ⁴¹ We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong." ⁴² Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom."

⁴³ And Jesus replied, "I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise."

As Jesus suffered on the cross, another condemned prisoner sought forgiveness. The Lord's response to the repentant thief's request shows the falsehood of doctrine of "soul sleep" and the belief in "purgatory".

Jesus did not say, "After a determined time of misery and suffering, you will be with me in paradise". He did not say, "After an extended period of an unconscious state, you will regain consciousness and be with me in paradise." According to the promise of Jesus, the thief would join Him in paradise that very day.

2. HEAVEN IS THE PLACE WHERE SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL JOIN

We think of Heaven as "spiritual" and so we do not think it is physical. I believe we have a hard time thinking heaven is physical, because if it is we believe that Heaven is physical then we think it is a lot less spiritual. We view physical and spiritual as opposites. We do not see them as co-existing, synchronizing together.

The bible says....John 4:24 God is spirit.

But saying that God is spirit is very different from saying that Heaven is spirit. Heaven is not the same as God. God created Heaven, so he did not always dwell there. Though God chooses to dwell in Heaven, he did not always dwell there. He does not need a dwelling place. We have a hard time believing that God would have a hard time dwelling in any place. Either a spiritual or physical realm, or a realm that includes both.

But, the real question is whether people, being spiritual and physical, can dwell in a realm without physical properties. We know that eventually our new dwelling place will be the physical New Earth. But until then we shouldn't find it surprising if God chooses to provide a waiting place that's also physical.

For us to exist as human beings, we occupy space. It seems reasonable that the space we occupy would be physical. If heaven is the place where God, the angels, and humans dwell, its makes sense that Heaven would accommodate mankind.

NOTE:

We know angels can exist in a physical world because they exist in this one, not just in Heaven. And sometimes angels take on human form.....

Hebrews 13:2 (NLT) Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it.

NOTE: God who is spirit walked and talked with Adam and Eve in the garden who were physical.

**IF WE ARE TO MAKE CONCLUSIONS ABOUT HEAVEN WE SHOULDN'T MAKE THEM FROM THE NATURE OF GOD.
HE IS A ONE OF A KIND BEING.**

**HE IS INFINITE, EXISTING OUT OF SPACE AND TIME.
WE SHOULD BASE HEAVEN ON THE NATURE OF HUMANITY.
GOD CREATED HEAVEN FOR US.**

THE PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF HEAVEN IN SCRIPTURE:

> The same physical tree that was in the Garden of Eden is in Heaven.

Revelation 2:7 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

> The temple of heaven is filled with smoke from the glory of God. *Revelation 15:8*

Is this a figurative temple or figurative smoke? Or is there an actual fire creating literal smoke in a real building?

> There are scrolls in Heaven, elders who have faces, martyrs who wear clothed and even people with "palm branches in their hands." *Revelation 7:9*

> There are musical instruments in Heaven. *Revelation 8:6*

> There are horses coming in and out of heaven? *2 Kings 2:11* and *Revelation 19:14*

> An eagle flying overhead in Heaven *Revelation 8:13*

In Hebrews it tell us that earthly priests "serve at a sanctuary that is a copy and shadow of what is in Heaven. *Hebrews 8:5*

IF THE TABERNACLE THAT MOSES BUILT IN THE WILDERNESS WAS AFTER THE PATTERN OF THE TABERNACLE IN HEAVEN, DOESN'T IT SUGGEST THAT THE ORIGINAL TABERNACLE IS PHYSICAL?

2. BY NATURE WE ARE BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL

Genesis 2:7 Then the Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

**GOD DID NOT CREATE ADAM AS A SPIRIT AND PLACE IT INSIDE A BODY.
HE FIRST CREATED A BODY, THEN BREATHED INTO IT A SPIRIT.**

THERE NEVER WAS A MOMENT WHEN A HUMAN BEING EXISTED WITHOUT A BODY.

**WE ARE AS MUCH PHYSICAL AS WE ARE SPIRITUAL.
WE CANNOT BE FULLY HUMAN WITHOUT BOTH A SPIRIT AND A BODY.**

SO IF HEAVEN WAS CREATED FOR US WHY WOULDN'T IT HOUSE BOTH THE SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL.

3. DO WE HAVE BODIES IN HEAVEN?

2 Corinthians 5:2-4 (NLT) For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands. ² We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. ³ For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. ⁴ While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life.

I believe Paul is saying that at death we are immediately clothed by a heavenly dwelling in which we will await our resurrection.

Because of the consistent physical descriptions of the Heaven and those who dwell there, it seems possible, that between our death and our bodily resurrection, God may grant us some physical form that will allow us to function.

LET'S LOOK EXAMPLES IN THE BIBLE THAT CONFIRM THIS:

#1: JOHN THE DISCIPLE:

John, the disciple, in the revelation He received, had a body when he visited Heaven, because he said to have grasped, held, eaten and tasted things there.....
Revelation 10:9-10 (NLT) So I went to the angel and told him to give me the small scroll. "Yes, take it and eat it," he said. "It will be sweet as honey in your mouth, but it will turn sour in your stomach!" ¹⁰ So I took the small scroll from the hand of the angel, and I ate it! It was sweet in my mouth, but when I swallowed it, it turned sour in my stomach.

#2: JESUS IN HEAVEN:

Acts 7:56 (NLT) But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. ⁵⁶ And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"

We know that that Jesus now dwells in Heaven. And if He is standing at the right hand of God He is actually standing on something. We know told in the Bible that His resurrected body on Earth was physical and that this same, physical Jesus ascended to Heaven, from which He will one day return to Earth.

So, if Christ's body in Heaven has physical properties, it stands to reason that others in Heaven might have physical forms as well, even if only temporary ones.

#3: ENOCH, ELIJAH AND MOSES

Enoch and Elijah appear to have been taken to Heaven in their physical bodies.

ENOCH:*Genesis 5:24 Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. Apparently Enoch's body was not left behind to bury. The Bible says he didn't die.....*

Hebrews 11: 5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, 'and was not found, because God had taken him.

ELIJAH: Elijah was taken to Heaven without dying and without leaving a body behind:

2 Kings 2:11-12 As they were walking along and talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire. It drove between the two men, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven.

We do not know how bodies under the Curse could be taken to Heaven, but they were, since no bodies were left behind.

SINCE WE KNOW JESUS, ENOCH AND ELIJAH HAVE PHYSICAL BODIES IN HEAVEN, ISN'T IT POSSIBLE THAT OTHERS WILL HAVE PHYSICAL FORMS AS WELL?

THE TRANSFIGURATION:

Luke 9:28-36 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. ²⁹ As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. ³⁰ Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. ³¹ They spoke about his departure, ⁹ which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. ³² Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. ³³ As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah." (He did not know what he was saying.)

³⁴ While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and covered them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him." ³⁶ When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and did not tell anyone at that time what they had seen.

Because they'd already gone to Heaven (Moses having died and Elijah having been taken from Earth in a whirlwind), if souls in Heaven right now are disembodied, God would have had to create temporary bodies for them when they came from Heaven to be with Jesus on the mountain. If so, they would have gone from being disembodied to embodied, and after the Transfiguration become disembodied again to await the final resurrection.

But, I believe Moses and Elijah came to Earth in the same bodies they already had in Heaven.

(In Elijah's case, his temporary body might even have been his original earthly body, which had never died.) If Moses and Elijah came to Earth with the same temporary bodies they had in Heaven, they could have returned to Heaven just as they were. Did their joining Christ on Earth require them to become something else, or did it simply involve their coming somewhere else? Was it that they were temporarily embodied, or merely temporarily relocated?

#4:THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS:

In the New Testament account of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus ascribes physical properties to people who have died(Luke 16: 19-31): *There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire." But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go"*

"from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us." He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them." "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent." He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead."

Some believe this story is nothing more than a parable intended to convey a central idea about the after-death consequences of our choices made on Earth. They believe that Lazarus and the rich man were not real people, and that references to fire, thirst, finger, and tongue are not intended as physical realities.

I think it's a mistake to dismiss the parable as strictly figurative based on assumptions that the afterlife consists of disembodied people in a non-physical realm. Jesus could easily have portrayed the rich man and Lazarus in other ways. He could have said, "When Lazarus died, his spirit drifted without a body into a realm without sin and pain." But he didn't. It seems unlikely that Jesus would have depicted the afterlife in such concrete detail if it had nothing to teach us concerning the nature of Heaven and Hell.

Consider the story's major components:

> When Lazarus died, angels carried him to Paradise.

- > The rich man died and went to a place of torment.
- > Lazarus is with Abraham; with his head laid on his chest.
- > Both the rich man and Abraham reasoned and communicated, and they maintained their distinct identities from Earth (as did Lazarus), indicating direct continuity from their earthly lives to their afterlives.
- > The rich man and Lazarus are depicted as having physical forms. The rich man had a tongue and a thirst that he wished to satisfy with water. Lazarus had a finger, and there was water available to him in Paradise, into which he might dip his finger. >The rich man certainly remembers his lost brothers. He expresses concern for their welfare and asks that Lazarus be sent to warn them. This indicates consciousness after death and clear memory of Earth and people on Earth.

The problem with a strictly literal interpretation of this passage is that it presses too far, suggesting things that are unlikely and not taught elsewhere, such as that people in Heaven and Hell talk to each other. The problem with a strictly figurative interpretation is that it makes it difficult to know what, if anything, to take seriously. If no real conclusions can be derived from the story, what is the value of all its details?

But I do believe that Jesus intended for us to picture people in the afterlife as real humans with thoughts and capacities and physical forms, and with the same identity, memories, and awareness from their lives and relationships on Earth. Surely Jesus intended us to envision both Heaven and Hell as real places.