

# Heaven | Week 1

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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I want to spend the next two weeks talking about heaven. It's one of those things that we talk about in conversations with one another. And you know we come across it in Scripture, we talk about it in church, but it's something that we don't really dive into. And there's a lot of weird ideas that are out there. If you were to take a microphone and if you were randomly to go to Trine University and just ask students, do you believe that there is a place called heaven?

Statistically, over 80% of them would respond, "Yes." Yes, we do believe that there is a place called heaven. But if you were to ask more specific questions about heaven, the answers would differ as much as students would differ. Questions like, "Where is heaven? What is heaven like? Who is in heaven right now? Will we know each other in heaven? What will we do in heaven?

And most importantly, how do we get to heaven?" Again, there's a lot of crazy theories floating around our society, but the only thing that I am comfortable with standing up in front of you and sharing is what Scripture says about heaven. I know there's a lot of people. There's books that have been written of people that have had near-death experiences, and we maybe even know people that have shared some of those experiences with us. And I'm intrigued by those.

I like to read those books and hear what kind of happened. But the only thing that I am comfortable believing to be 100% true is what is revealed to us in Scripture about heaven. I believe that Scripture gives us the most certain argument for the reality of heaven. Now, I understand that most of the people that are here, if you're watching online or listening on the radio, you probably believe in the authority of Scripture.

But even if you don't believe anything in it, the Bible truly is a stunning piece of literature. So maybe you're here today and you say, "Pastor, I'm just kind of checking things out. I'm not sure I buy into all of this." Let me explain the scriptures to you just a little bit. What is the Bible? Does it truly have the authority to tell us about heaven? Well, first, you need to know that the Bible was penned. It was written by at least 40 traditional authors.

40 different people wrote what we have collectively as the scripture. The scriptures are written in three languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. Before it was codified in what we have as the Bible, it was passed down orally in many languages from the earliest time until these stories were finalized in what we have as our canon or what we call the Bible.

Even more impressive is the story of what the Bible tells. According to John Collins, I love his definition of the Bible. It tells the epic story of God and His creation, of blessing, temptation, sin, exile, and salvation. Those of us that have grown up in the church and have spent our time studying scriptures, of course, we have the advantage of knowing that this entire story leads to Jesus.

He is the foundational truth of all of Scripture. But how does that story end, the story of Jesus? That is what we are going to discuss today as we talk about the concept of heaven from Scripture. Some of you may not realize that this idea of heaven goes all the way back to Abraham in the book of Genesis. Abraham had this concept of heaven in his mind way before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

Because according to Hebrews, Abraham was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. Of course, Jesus talked about heaven quite often. He promised the reward of heaven for those who would endure persecution in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. Jesus encouraged you and I as His followers to lay up treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break and steal in Matthew chapter 6.

Jesus even promised to prepare a place for us for His faithful followers who will ultimately be with Him in John chapter 14. Paul, the apostle, tells us about our citizenship in heaven in Philippians. Peter mentions this inheritance that will never perish or spoil or fade, which is kept in heaven for us. John speaks of heaven as a city that is let down from the sky in Revelation at the end of time.

And in Revelation chapter 21, which we're going to spend some time today, gives us our largest picture of what heaven will be like. One of the questions that we will have to answer concerning this biblical text on heaven is this. This is our foundational question that we have to answer before we even get started. Do we take it all literally as we're reading Scripture or is some symbolism required to represent the non-material spiritual realm?

Do we take it literally or is it figurative? This is a big question. And if anybody has ever spent any time studying what theologians and people of the past where they have fallen on the answer to this question, you will know that great theologians fall on both sides of this question. Some people take everything literally. Some people believe it is figurative. So let me answer one easy question before we get into the difficult questions, and then we'll pray and we'll jump in. All right? We're going to start with an easy one.

Here's the question. Do we become angels when we die? People will often ask this question, "Pastor, do we become angels when we die?" The answer is no. I'm sorry. That's all I'm going to give you for now, okay? The answer is no. If you don't agree with me, you can write me an email later and we can go back and forth, all right? But that's the easy one. Do we become angels? No, we do not become angels. Angels are one type of created being. God created angels. Humans are another.

When we die, Scripture doesn't talk about being transformed into a new being, a different type of creation that God has already created, we simply change places or location, all right? We do not become angels. Now that you're mad at me, let's pray and we'll jump in, all right? Heavenly Father, I do thank you for the opportunity to gather together as we talk about this idea of heaven and what Scripture teaches us about heaven, what you have revealed to us.

Father, if we're honest, we want to know a lot more than what Scripture tells us. We try to fill in the blanks. We're not good at just trusting, just believing, just being okay with not knowing all of the details. But God, for whatever reason, you decided we didn't need to know. And so with what you have shared and revealed to us through Your Word, I pray that our eyes would be opened, Lord, that we would answer the most important question that is totally clear, 100% clear, how do you get to heaven?

We know the answer to that. And so, Father, just be with us today. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen. All right. So let's answer the first real question that we're going to get into. And that question is, where is heaven? Did I not have that? Okay. I don't have that. Where is heaven, okay? First, we need to establish that heaven is a real place. Heaven is a real place. These are the words of Jesus. I already showed a little bit of this scripture earlier. These are the words of Jesus.

The night before he was crucified that he shares with his disciples in John chapter 14, verses 1 through 3, Jesus says this to them and to us, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God. Believe also in me. My father's house has many rooms. If that were not so, what I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am.

Jesus was very clear here as he was speaking to the apostles, to the disciples, that he refers to heaven as a real place that's just as real as your home or the city that you live in and you come from. It's a real place filled with real people. It is sometimes compared to a mansion as Jesus describes it here or to an enormous city that is let down from the sky as John shares with us in Revelation chapter 21.

The second thing that we know about heaven is that heaven is the dwelling place of God. It is a real place and it is the dwelling place of God. Now this is going to give away an answer to a later question that we're going to look at next week. But God is there in heaven. His throne is there in heaven. The angels are there in heaven and Jesus is there in heaven. Really, it's God's hometown. Where does he come from? God comes from heaven.

The Bible doesn't give us a physical exact location of heaven as in 3 billion light-years to the east of Orion's belt. We don't have that exact location. And I personally, just so you know where I come from, I don't know. There's no scripture that shares with us exactly where heaven is, but I personally do not believe it's a place that we could even see if we had a telescope large enough to see that far. I don't believe that's necessarily what it is like.

I believe with others who also carry the stance that heaven is best understood as a different dimension, a different dimension. Still reality, still physical, still an actual place, but a different dimension. Now, if you want to know more about that, you're going to have to come next week because I'm not going to dive into all of that because that would be a whole 'nother rabbit trail that we're going to spend an entire week talking about. So the first question, where is heaven? You just need to know heaven is a place. I believe it's kind of a different dimension.

You don't have to believe that. You can believe that it is 3 billion light-years to the east of Orion's Belt, okay? I'm okay with that. All right. Next question. What is heaven like? This is one that comes up often. As people are talking about heaven, what is it going to be like in heaven? And I've shared with you before. I share again. I remember growing up as a child, a teenager, in church, and the Sunday school class would talk about heaven. And I remember watching cartoons where there was this angel with a harp on a cloud. And I remember thinking, "I'm not sure I want to go there."

It doesn't look like a lot of fun. It's going to get boring. You're going to be there forever. That's what you're going to do." And so I had in my mind that this doesn't sound like a fun place. Now, granted, it's a lot better than the alternative, right? So if I have to choose one, I'm going to choose heaven, but it just shows how limited, even as a child, my mind was in thinking about heaven. Now, I wish that the Bible gave us great detail of what heaven was like. What is it actually like in heaven? But instead, we are given images.

We're given pictures of heaven that compare it with life on earth. And as I try to make sense of that and go, "Okay, God, why didn't you share more with us?" I suppose it makes sense because it's all we understand is what we know. I often use the analogy. It'd be like trying to explain algebra to an ant. It's just not going to work. There are some things that we just can't comprehend as human beings. So what is heaven going to be like? What do we know about it?

The first thing we know about it is that it is where believers go when they die. In Philippians, we know that those that have confessed Jesus Christ as their personal Savior will end up in eternity in heaven. We know that it is referred to as the Father's House. We read that in John chapter 14. Jesus refers to this place as his father's house. We know that it is called a city that is designed and built by God in Hebrews chapter 11. That's what heaven is referred to, a city that is designed and built by God.

We already saw. It's also called a better country. As I shared with you earlier, Revelation 21 gives us the most extended picture of what heaven is like in the entire Bible. We're given a physical description. John gives us a

physical description as he has this vision that he shares with us in Revelation chapter 21. And as John is sharing this, he is seeing this vision of a large city that is being let down from heaven.

And in this city, he sees the streets are made of gold. And so we often refer to that in our songs and in our celebration, the streets of gold. John tells us that the gates to that city are all carved from a single pearl. So imagine a pearl that is larger than you've ever seen, and then some artist carves a gate out of that one pearl. John tells us in this vision that the walls are made of precious jewels, and he goes on to list all of the jewels that the walls are made of.

John tells us that in the center of that city, there was the tree of life. For those of us that read Scripture that should immediately take our mind all the way back to Genesis in the Garden of Eden, right? The tree of life that existed there. John tells us that in heaven there will be no night. While at the same time, there is no need for a sun. There's no need for lamps because God is the light of the city.

He is what provides the light for the entire city. And so we ask the question, are these things to be taken literally? Is this literally what heaven is going to be like? Are we going to walk on streets of gold? Are we going to walk through the pearly gate? Are there going to be mansions and hills and things like that? Now, I'm certainly not mad at anybody that takes that literally because that would be pretty cool, right? I mean, if you want to take that literally, I have no problem with that. You can.

I will just share with you personally I believe that John is using these images, this revelation that he received to share with us from a human perspective that heaven is going to be better than anything you could possibly imagine with your mind. We'll talk about this more next week. But I believe part of this vision, even as the Israelites were building the temple and they had the most holy place, the holy of holies, where God's presence was.

If you read about how that was to be designed, there were images of animals that were on the walls. There were images of trees and palm branches and pomegranates and things like that. And all of that should take our mind back to the Garden of Eden. Heaven, as best as we can understand it, is going to be like the Garden of Eden before sin, a perfect world where God's presence exists.

Remember in Genesis, we read that God walked amongst them. That's what makes heaven heaven. Let me give you another truth about heaven. We will not miss our old lives. Again, growing up, I remember saying, "I'm not ready for Jesus to come back. I don't want him to come back. I want to get married. I want to have kids. I want to have a job. I want to experience life." And I know I've shared this with you before. I'm only 41 years old, but Jesus can come back whenever he wants now, all right?

Even though I love my life and God has blessed me, I don't need to live to be 50 or 60 or 70. I don't need to experience anything else here on earth. I'm ready for Jesus to come back. Heaven will be so much beyond what we experience here that the things of this earth will seem like rubbish. We will not miss anything here once we get to heaven. Someone once said, "It's like being upgraded to first class on an airplane.

When you're sitting in first class enjoying the luxuries, you never think about what you're missing out in the back of the plane." I've never really been in first class on a long flight. I've been upgraded because you know they ran out of seats, but they don't really treat you like first class when you've been upgraded for free. You know They're just like, "Okay, you can sit here, but we know you didn't really pay for this." I wonder what it's like to actually sit in first class. Maybe one day I will do that. But I can tell you when I'm in first class, I will not miss what I experience in the back of the plane where I normally sit.

You will not miss anything here. The second thing I can tell you about heaven that is clear from Scripture is that we will have work to do in heaven, but it will be refreshing and burden-free work. This sometimes comes as a surprise to individuals. They think, "I got to go to heaven. I'm going to work. I'm going to have a

job. I hope I got a good job. You know I hope I'm not the street cleaner, you know polishing the gold the whole time for all of eternity." You will have a job. It was part of the Garden of Eden before sin.

If we look in Genesis 2:15, we see that God made Adam. And even before sin entered creation, Adam had a job to do. There was work. Work was a part of the perfect human life. God works. It's part of his character. In John chapter 5:17, Jesus said, "My Father is always at His work to this very day. We will have work to do in heaven, but it will not be like the work we experience here.

I believe we get a small taste of it, but the work in heaven will be satisfying. It will be enriching. It will be work that we can't wait to get back to because our work will bring glory to God and it will bring us joy." you know I think we can experience a small piece of this. Whatever your job is, for those of you that like working with your hands or whatever you do, when you are doing what God created you to do, there's a sense of accomplishment. There's a sense of purpose. There's a sense of fulfillment.

For me, you know my job, it's hard to measure progress. It's hard to measure if you're successful or not. And so I like to do woodworking because I start with a raw piece of wood and I can end with a finished project. And when I'm done with it, I look at it and I think, "Wow, I made this." And there's a sense of accomplishment, fulfillment, purpose. You feel like you're part of something greater than yourself. These are some of the feelings that we will experience when we are in heaven and in perfection there as we are working, serving our Creator.

It will bring us a sense of joy and peace, which heaven will be filled with. Heaven will be filled with peace and joy and praise. Revelation chapter 7 verses 15 to 17, we read, "Therefore, they are before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His temple. And he who sits on the throne will shelter us with His presence. Never again will we hunger. Never again will we thirst. The sun will not beat down on us nor any scorching heat.

For the lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead us to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. Notice I inserted us in that list. Heaven will be a place of peace, a place of joy. There will be no police in heaven. That doesn't mean if you're a police officer and you die, you don't get to go to heaven if you trust him. You won't need the police in heaven.

There will be no prisons, no most wanted lists. There will be no suffering, no tears, no pain. In heaven, there will be no death, no more disease, no more searching for cures. Instead in heaven, we will rest, John says, in the shade of God's presence. This will be true rest from our painful labor and toil.

We will be blessed, and we will live in this eternal state of happiness and bliss. We will be filled and never have want, can you imagine? Never having want because you have everything you could ever want. You never hunger again, you never thirst again. Try to summarize this in a statement. I don't know that you really can, but heaven will be a place of beauty, peace.

It will be a place of constant health and happiness filled with people from all the earthly ages who have one thing in common, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. Can you imagine that place? And then the best thing, in heaven, we will have a face-to-face relationship with our Savior.

This is what makes heaven heaven. I truly believe that this is all we really need to know about heaven. I think all of the other stuff is just fluff. I don't think it's going to matter. I think once we see Jesus face to face and we experience a true relationship, all the things of earth will fade away. No heartache, no grief, no sin, no threat of death.

All things will be made new. Now, we're going to have to take a break right here. I know some of you might say, "I got some more questions. We'll get to those next week, okay? Here's some of the questions we'll look at. Who is in heaven right now? Will we know each other in heaven? What will we do in heaven?" That's

probably one of the biggest ones. We're not just going to play harps, okay? What will we do? We don't fly around. I'm not sure we get angel wings, okay? Next week, though, we're also going to go a little deeper into what heaven actually is.

And I am going to share with you the beautiful idea, and it's not new with me, that heaven possibly begins here and now. For when Jesus came, the very first words of his ministry were, "The kingdom of heaven is near." What did he mean by that? Before we close, let me share one more thing. Just as I said at the beginning of this morning's message that if you were to go to Trine University and ask the students if they believe in heaven, over 80% of them would say yes.

If you were to take those same students and you were to ask them another question, do you believe you are going to end up in heaven? Do you know that statistically over 95% of Americans believe they will end up in heaven? 95%. They either say yes, I hope so, or I think so. Can I remind most of you and tell the rest of you, maybe if you're watching online or listening, maybe for the first time, you don't have to hope that you will end up in heaven.

That never needs to be your answer. Christianity is not like any other religion in the world. All other religions have a list of all the things that you have to do. It's like there's going to be a scale, and you just hope that the good things will outweigh the bad things. Can I just share with you that you don't have to accomplish a to-do list and hope that you did enough when your end comes because heaven and our eternity is not about what you have to do.

It's about what has been done. The apostle Paul said that 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. No hope about it, no question, no I wonder. I think you will be saved. So what does it mean to confess Jesus as Lord? It means multiple things. It means when you are confessing that, that you recognize you are a sinner in need of a Savior.

It means that I have done things that are wrong. I have made mistakes and I need to repent of those. I need to turn from those and try to do my best because Jesus is my God. I must repent. When I proclaim Jesus as Lord, it means that I'm giving up control of my life to Jesus. When you call somebody your Lord, it means I am now their servant. I am going to do what they tell me to do.

You see, some people believe that you can just pray a prayer on the outside but internally not be changed, or you can just say something. Yes, Paul says, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord." But notice that he says, "But you have to believe in your heart." That is deeper than just saying something. It's believing something with everything you are, giving up everything that you thought was important, knowing that it will become rubbish.

But if you do this, we can have 100% confidence that we will spend eternity with Him. Though it may be frustrating to us, me included, that we're not given an exact picture of what heaven is going to be like. We want more details. We want to know exactly what it's going to be like. We're not very good at not knowing all of the details. The one thing that's the most important thing God makes very clear.

It is a relationship with Jesus Christ that allows us to spend an eternity with Him. As always, the altar is open if you want to come and celebrate. The closing song we're going to sing is going to be a song of celebration because many of us here have our citizenship in heaven. And so we celebrate that. Maybe you're here today and you just want prayer. Maybe it's not about salvation. It's just something going on in your life. As always, we'll have people on both sides up here. You can just walk up there and pray with them, go back to your seat.

If you come to the altar, no one will bother you unless you ask us to. It's always open. We may not know exactly what heaven will be like, but we know the most important thing. God will be there. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us. Thank you for offering us the hope of salvation, the assurance of salvation.

We look forward to that day when there will be no more tears and suffering, no more pain, for the old things will be made new. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.