



HEAVEN

Week 2 - The Floaty, Floaty View of Heaven (And Other Complex Theological Terms)

Praise to God for today:

2 Corinthians 1:11

Lord, make us a praying people. Help us remember one another in our prayers. Help us to be consistent in our prayers. And, by all means, whatever it takes, Lord, make us effective in our prayers. As the Apostle Paul said to the church in Corinth, "You also must help us by prayer." Help us to see that prayer builds your church. It is to You we pray because Christ has opened the way to Your throne of grace and we are so very thankful

for this glorious One, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Answer our prayers so that many will give thanks on our behalf, that many will give thanks for the blessing granted them through our prayers.

Prayer for the service:

2 Samuel

For you, O Lord of hosts, the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, have made this revelation to your Son, saying, 'I will build you a house.' We're thankful that even the gates of hell will not prevail against it. Therefore we have found courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord God, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servants. Now therefore may it please you to bless this service today, so that we may continue to advance the gospel of your Son. For you, O Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the church of your servants be blessed forever.

Prayer for the persecuted church:

We pray for the Christians in INDONESIA where a man named set up a small business with the purpose of sharing the gospel with his customers, and he has successfully began

discipling a peer. The peer's parents became suspicious and complained to the local Islamic leader. We pray for this brother's ministry to continue and not be hindered. Open the doors for him that only You can open.

Prayer for a local church:

This morning we also want to pray for Frank Shelter and Anthology Church. We pray that they devote themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer. Make them a praying church also, Lord.

Closing:

This morning we open God's truth...

How many of you are spiritual beings? Now, how many of you spiritual beings have a body? If you've been born physically, you are a spiritual being. Everyone is spiritual without choice.

Our first misconception has to do with our confusion about being spiritual beings.

MYTH #3 - The spiritual is the opposite of the physical. (Or the spiritual is superior to the physical.)

FACT: This world is both.

NEW SAYING: The spiritual is part of this physical world.

So, let's get this straight — spiritual means directed by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit or having a spirit (also known as a soul). Spiritual is part of the world we live in. It's part of you.

If you tend to think spiritual is the opposite of physical, it's probably because without knowing it, you've been influenced by gnostic thinking where the spiritual is good and the physical is bad. These ancient heresies don't die. They just get redistributed under other names or without recognition, but they are among us still today.

The other possibility is that you have a Platonic view of reality rather than a biblical one. Platonic just means influenced by the philosopher Plato. That's why we're doing this series, to renew our minds.

The philosopher Plato taught that the body was a hinderance to spiritual progress. To Plato, the body was a prison. Being chained to time and space in a body was the problem to Plato. Salvation, in his view, was being set free from the body. Thus, this idea that the physical is the opposite of the spiritual (or less than the spiritual) has seeped into our culture and influenced our thinking. That's why so many Christians struggle with ideas about heaven or, at the very least, have unbiblical ideas about heaven.

For example, does eating and drinking in heaven seem unspiritual to you? If it does, it's probably because your thinking is more Platonic than biblical.

Here's an example that might give you a better understanding of what is spiritual in the eyes of Jesus.

This is after Jesus has risen from the dead. He appears to His disciples. He just shows up in the room with them and it scares them.

Luke 24:36-43

36 As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" 37 But they

were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit.

38 And he said to them, “Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39 See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself.

“It is I myself.” This is an important statement, because it tells us that He is the same Jesus after the resurrection as He was before, except now He’s in His resurrected body. In other words, there is continuity between His self life and His self.

Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40 And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41 And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate before them.

Now, He ate to demonstrate the complete physicality of His resurrected body.

Here is the resurrected Jesus who will soon go to heaven in this very same resurrected body, which, by the way, He will remain in forever — and he’s eating.

This is the same kind of resurrected body we will all be given. It will be us, but made new, resurrected in physical bodies. This is how we will spend eternity on a new physical earth.

So, as a side note, there will be eating and drinking in heaven. Jesus Himself confirmed as much.

Mark 14:25

25 Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Maybe you think eating and drinking in heaven is unspiritual, but there you have verification we will be eating and drinking in heaven.

Physicality is part of what makes us human. More on that later, but for now:

Genesis 2:7

7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

So, the biblical reality that Adam and Eve were created as both physical and spiritual beings shows us what it means to be fully human. We can’t be fully human without both a spirit and a body. Do you think we’re going to be less than fully human in heaven?

This is one of the glorious things about the truth of Christianity. It's the only afterlife that gives humanity the hope to be better by far.

Let's contrast the Christian doctrine of the afterlife with one of the most popular teachings in American culture today, which is this idea that when you die you become one with the cosmos, like, "a raindrop dissolving into an ocean of being," as Michael Horton has described it.

Now, when you begin to breakdown that view of the afterlife, it doesn't take very long to get to a couple of facts.

First, dissolving into the universe means you will become less after death than you currently are. "But I'll be part of the cosmos." Exactly. You will no longer be you. And when you're no longer you, that's less than you.

Second, the universe is impersonal. So, you're not only going to be less than you are — you are going from personal to impersonal, which is also less.

That's probably why people with such a point of view don't gather together on Sundays

and delve more deeply into their beliefs. Because that's really depressing.

You don't become more or better or complete in this version of the afterlife, you become less than you were before. In other words, you don't become more fully human after you die, you become less than human, part of an impersonal universe.

Only in Christianity do you not only retain your individual and true self, as Jesus said, "See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself," but you are remade into the best version of yourself. It's not your best life now. It's your best you later.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44

42 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. 43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

The spiritual body he's referring to here is your resurrected body, which will be physical. It's like right now you're a seed for an apple tree. That's your natural body. One day you will be an apple tree. That's your resurrected body. You will still be you, but perfected by the

grace of God in Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Now this is where a lot of our thinking about heaven starts to go astray, I believe. It's always by focusing on a single verse.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Sometimes I think we mistakenly equate that with this idea that the spiritual is superior to the physical. Since this verse says that we're away from the body, suddenly, we think of heaven in strictly immaterial terms. Many people still have the idea that we'll be disembodied spirits floating around heaven for all eternity. That's as far as some of our thinking goes.

Now, first things first. To be away from the body is to be at home with the Lord. The fact is that when we die we will go straight to where Christ is presently, which is the present heaven. If you are not a Christian, to be

away from the body is to be in the present hell.

“Going to heaven when we die is the way station, not the final hope announced in the gospel.” (Michael Horton)

Biblically, there is an intermediate state between the final heaven and the final hell. So, if were you to die today you would either reside in the present heaven awaiting the new earth or you would reside in the present hell awaiting the lake of fire created for the devil and his angels.

- Two biblical problems with the doctrine of purgatory
- Life as purgatory

So, when you die you're either in the presence of the Lord or in the presence of hell.

Some of these truths about heaven will be clearer to us than others, such as this first one — spiritual is not the opposite of physical. That's biblically clear and our thinking needs to be corrected.

In other cases, our thinking needs to be expanded and challenged. Our imaginations need to be sanctified. Such is the case with our next misconception, which is related to our last misconception.

MYTH #4 - Your body only houses your spirit, the real you.

FACT: We are not fully human without our bodies.

NEW SAYING: You're not complete without your body and your spirit together.

Physical resurrection on a new earth is our destiny. Or as the Apostles' Creed puts it — "the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting."

This idea that your body is not part of the real you doesn't even come close to a biblical idea of either your true self or heaven.

Genesis 2:7

7 then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

That's what it means to be fully human. It's to be fully physical and fully spiritual. And yet somehow this idea has developed that your body is just housing for your spirit, the real you. If the premise of this series is true, which I believe it is, that heaven is always better than earth by far and right away, then I don't see how being less than fully human is better.

Philippians 1:22-24

22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

So, to depart, to die, is to be with Christ and that is far better even than life now.

But what will that be like as we wait for our resurrected bodies? Will we be disembodied spirits for a period of time in what we call the intermediate state? Possibly. But I don't want us to jump to any conclusions about this until we hear more evidence.

Now, to make sure you're tracking with this, the intermediate state is the state you're in from the day you die and enter the Lord's

presence, until the day of you are bodily resurrected. So, it's the time between your death and your final resurrection.

The Bible speaks mostly about our final resurrected state, because that's the goal, the consummation of the gospel — life everlasting in resurrected bodies on a new earth.

But let's look at some possibilities of what this intermediate state might be like. We have the testimonies of a couple people who have visited heaven and written a bestselling book about it called the Bible.

We have the Apostle John who is visited by an angel and shown a revelation of things to come, but as he describes it, it sounds very much like Charles Dickens snagged this idea for Scrooge when the ghosts of Christmas visited him.

Is John in the body or out of the body or is it just a vision? Well, when John sees heaven in Revelation, it's like he's actually there and he, also, eats in heaven. How can you eat without a body?

Revelation 10:9-10

9 So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll. And he said to me, "Take and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." 10 And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it. It was sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it my stomach was made bitter.

Now, maybe he's in his body and maybe he's not, but it's as real to him as being in his body. That's the point. He's not less than fully human as he experiences the revelation he is given.

Then we have the Apostle Paul, who also visited heaven, and said of his trip there:

2 Corinthians 12:2-4

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. 3 And I know that this man was caught up into paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— 4 and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.

So, he doesn't know if it was a vision or if he was actually there. That's how real it was.

The point is that somehow John is eating in heaven and Paul thinks he may have been there physically.

This is all building up to jury, exhibit A — Elijah, Enoch and Moses.

First, Elijah.

In 2 Kings we have Elijah's departure from this world.

2 Kings 2:11

11 And as they still went on and talked, behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

So, here we have Elijah who went to heaven physically. He wasn't absent from the body.

Then even before that we have Enoch.

Genesis 5:24

24 Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

Hebrews 11:5

5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him.

Here we have two individuals taken to heaven physically. Just a little something to keep in mind.

Now, when Moses died, he was absent from the body.

The majority of us are going to heaven without our bodies. So, why do I bring up two rare cases who went to heaven with their physical bodies? Because we're trying to look at all the evidence about present heaven. All these men went to the present heaven.

That's what we're trying to get a glimpse of — when we die right now, what's it going to be like? Do we just float around in the presence of Christ for a thousand years or so? And if heaven is incorporeal, if it's just spiritual, how can Jesus be there since He's physical?

To be continued...

