

Heaven

The Present Heaven

April 22, 2018 am

HDBC

Continuing our series on Heaven. We have considered the **Reality** of heaven. We've considered the things that will make heaven **Home sweet home** for us. Then, last week we looked at the **New Jerusalem** which will be the central city.

This morning I want talk with you about the **present heaven**. The Bible makes is a distinction between the **present heaven** and the **future heaven**. When I speak of the present heaven I am talking about the place a believer goes the moment he or she dies. You might say, "isn't that heaven?" Of course it is, but it is not all that heaven is going to be.

In the book of Revelation John saw a new heaven and earth. That new creation will be the future heaven that all the saved will enjoy. That clearly has not happened. People in heaven right now are not yet experiencing all that is seen in Revelation 21-22, at least not in the way that it is described.

That raises a number of questions for us.

What is it be like? What will we be like? Where is it? And more.

I can't answer all the questions you have, but I can answer some. I can offer informed speculation about others based on what the Bible says. Here is what we can be sure of:

It is a place where we will be free from pain, suffering and sorrow.

It is a place where we will be reunited with believers who have already died.

It is a place where we will be delivered from the presence of sin.

It is a place where we will be with Jesus. (Paul and Jesus)

It will be all the heaven we need while waiting for the ultimate heaven.

1. Is it a physical place?

We can say with great certainty that the ultimate heaven will be physical.

Physical earth, universe, city, walls, etc. But what about the present heaven?

Some assume that the present Heaven is only a spiritual realm. **God is spirit**, so it must exist only in the spiritual realm.

When you die, there is a separation between the soul and the body. We all understand that the soul is what goes to heaven while the body is buried, cremated or destroyed. You go to the present heaven without your body. Since you will enter heaven without a physical body, there is no need for a physical place. **But think about these things . . .**

1) Physical items in the present heaven.

All kinds of physical things are seen in the present heaven. **Scrolls, elders** with faces, **martyrs** wearing clothes, **people** with palm branches, **musical instruments, a throne, crowns**, and much more.

2) Jesus's statement to the thief on the cross

Jesus told the thief that they would be together in a place called **paradise**. Great word. At the very least it points to the beauty and greatness of this place. But I think it implies more than that.

It comes from the Persian word which means ***an enclosed garden***. It was used to describe the gardens of king Cyrus's royal palaces.

In Jewish thought **paradise** was the word used to describe the present heaven, which was envisioned as Eden restored.

3) The tree of life

In Revelation 2:7 God says, ***to him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*** The same physical tree of life that was in the Garden of Eden will one day be in the new Jerusalem. Where is it now? It is in the present heaven, according to Revelation 2:7. Physical tree needs a physical place.

2. Will we have physical bodies?

If we believe the present heaven is a physical place, it would certainly seem plausible that we would have physical bodies. But . . .

We know that when we die the soul exits the body, which is buried or consumed. We know that there will be a resurrection of our bodies and they will be made new and ready for heaven. Those already in heaven will be reunited with their new bodies. Those alive at that time will be caught up to join Christ and their bodies will be changed. 1 Cor. 15:50-55

However, does that automatically mean we will remain disembodied souls until the resurrection of our bodies? Think about this . . .

God and the angels are spiritual beings. However, human beings are by nature both spiritual and physical. We were not created as spiritual beings and then later given a body as extra baggage. At the inception of man's creation, he was body, soul and spirit. There was never a time when a human existed without a body.

Given the consistent physical descriptions of the present heaven and those who dwell there, it seems possible that before the resurrection of our buried bodies, God may grant some physical form that will allow us to function as human beings while awaiting our ultimate new bodies at the resurrection.

The martyrs in heaven are dressed in clothing. (Rev. 6:9-11). Disembodied spirits don't wear clothes.

The apostle John appears to have had a body when he visited Heaven because he is said to have "grasped, held, eaten, and tasted things."

3. **Will we remember our former life experiences?**

I believe we will. In fact I believe our memory will be much sharper than it is now. Not only will we remember events and situation as we do now, but I believe we will have an ability to **see the hand of God** in those things in a way that is difficult if not impossible right now.

In Revelation 6 we find a group of martyrs in heaven and they very much remember what happened when they were on earth. Crying out to God, wondering when their death's will be avenged.

The rich man and Lazarus remembered what happened on earth. The rich man was reminded that in life on earth, he had a life of ease and wealth. Lazarus knew he had been poor.

Presence of rewards. The fact that we will be judged for our works and rewarded accordingly means that we will have a memory of those things.

Memory is a basic element of human personality. If we are truly ourselves in heaven, then memory will be a part of that. We will forever be grateful to the Lord and will glorify Him for his grace toward us in getting us to Heaven. Without memory, we would lose the ability to be grateful to the Lord for His grace.

I don't know about memories of negative things. I assume they will either be erased, or our understanding will be so enhanced that what would have caused sorrow will no longer do so because we see the hand of God in that situation.

4. **Will we see what happens on earth?**

Again, the martyrs of Revelation 6:9-11 clearly do. They are aware that God has not yet brought judgment on their murderers. At least to some extent it seems clear that they are aware of what is happening on earth.

In Revelation we see times when people in the present heaven respond with rejoicing and praise as a result of something happening on earth. Revelation 19:1-5 is an example. The saints in heaven are clearly observing what is happening on earth.

Moses and Elijah were called from present heaven to come and visit with Jesus. They talked of His impending death. Clearly they were aware of what was happening on earth, as Jesus was moving toward the cross. They seemed fully aware of the drama that was unfolding on the earth.

Hebrews 12 tells us of a great cloud of witnesses who seem to be cheering for us as we run the race that is set before us. This picture certainly suggests the possibility that those who have gone before us can see what is happening on earth. That knowledge is to be a motivating factor for us still on this earth.

Christ said there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine who are in no need of repentance. How could those in Heaven know when to rejoice unless they are aware?

5. How quickly will we get there?

Both Paul and Jesus indicate that we arrive in heaven quickly after we die.

Jesus said to the thief on the cross, **today** you will be with me in paradise. That was simply an indicate that they would both die that day. There would be no waiting period.

Interesting that there was a prevailing belief among the Jews that the spirit or soul of a person would hang around the body after death for three days, then depart. Jesus debunked that when he told the thief he would be in paradise that same day.

Paul indicated that the soul would be in the presence of Jesus instantly upon death.

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

So we are always of good courage. 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.

There are so many misconceptions about Heaven. These are absolutely unnecessary. The Bible tells us so much about this wonderful place.

Heaven is not a place where we will live out a post-human experience, leaving behind all that we know and much of what we love and enjoy.

No . . . heaven is the place where we will experience our humanity to the fullest.

C.S. Lewis said it better than me. ***To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth.*** That starts in the present heaven.