

Knowing Heaven Awaits the Faithful

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We live in a world of uncertainty—uncertainty about affairs near and far away. We do not know what will be the outcome of wars abroad. We do not know what will be the outcome of the economic situation we face. We do not know about the political situation. In short, we do not know with certainty much of anything; however, there is good news. The child of God has a great deal of certainty. He has been given absolute assurance that he is of the truth (1 John 3:19) and that heaven's reward is certain (Phil. 1:21; 2 Tim. 1:12; 1 John 5:13). Instead of fearing death, God describes death as a glorious day in which the faithful child of God finally gains his glorious victory (1 Cor. 15:51-57; Rev. 14:13).

Heaven is a place we long for and a subject of great interest. Heaven is usually very interesting to those who are old in years, but the subject of heaven can be just as interesting to the young. "The more interest we have in heaven the better our opportunity of reaching it. The more we know about heaven the greater our interest will become" (Elkins).

Heaven is the reason for all our labor and sacrifice and it is worth our best efforts. There is a song by W. Oliver Cooper, entitled "Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All," that tells about the different struggles Christians will face in life and how great heaven will be if we endure

them until we get there. In this lecture, I will suggest some reasons why we should be interested in going to such a wonderful place—a place that we know awaits the faithful.

First, I am interested in going to heaven because it is a place of great associations. All of us like to be associated with those we regard as great. Even children wish to sit by the visitor at the dinner table because they think there is something special going on. In heaven we will be able to associate with the greatest of all—the entire heavenly host—God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the redeemed of all the ages.

Jesus tells us that God is in heaven (Matt. 6:9). How great it would be to be in the presence of God for eternity! John says, “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them” (Rev. 7:15). [All Scripture references are taken from the King James Version unless otherwise noted.] Also note Revelation 21:1-3. Heaven will be a place of rejoicing, where all heavenly beings will be worshiping and singing praises to God.

Jesus tells us in John 6:38 that He came down from heaven, “not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me” (cf. John 1:1-2, 14). Jesus wants us to be with Him. Why would He have prayed, “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world” (John 17:24)? Jesus told His disciples not to be troubled, because He was returning to prepare a place for them and that He would come back so that they could be there with Him also (John 14:1-3). Paul tells us that when Jesus returns, the dead in Christ will rise first, then the living

KNOWING HEAVEN AWAITS THE FAITHFUL

will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:16-17); further, he says that Jesus will return from heaven (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

Second, I am interested in going to heaven because of the type of place it is. Paul refers to the gospel message this way, "But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. 2:9). Surely, it would be true to say the same about the wonderful place God has prepared for those who obey His gospel and remain faithful to Him. Humans are not able to describe what heaven is really like because they are limited by time, space and distance. To illustrate the problem, consider how one might describe such things as skyscrapers, subways and airplanes to someone who had never seen such. One could give his best effort, but in the final analysis, one would not have exhausted the description.

So, how do we describe what heaven is like? We let God describe it for us. God inspired John to write a good description recorded in Revelation 22:1-5:

And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever.

John tells us further that “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4). This is discussed further in Revelation 21:27, when we are told that nothing that is defiling will enter into heaven. These passages all paint a gorgeous picture of what heaven will be like for us. Heaven is called the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7). The author of Hebrews writes, “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:16). It will be better than any vacation spot a person has ever had. Can you imagine being in a place like this?

It is a place where we will be able to rest. Heaven offers the best rest possible. It is the ultimate place of comfort. Jesus invites us to a spiritual rest (Matt. 11:28). There is a difference between physical rest and spiritual rest. Those who labor for the Lord will have true rest ultimately. Those who labor for the world may only have physical rest, if they receive any rest at all (cf. Rev. 14:11). We should strive for that spiritual rest (Matt. 7:13-14; Luke 13:24). If Christians put God’s concerns above their own and do what He says to do, then they should have no problem receiving eternal rest. The spiritual rest provided by Jesus to those who answer His invitation is but a taste of good things to come—the rest and glory which heaven provides. John tells us, “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Rev. 14:13). As the song says, “Toiling and pain I will endure, till I shall hear the death angel call.”

Third, I am interested in going to heaven because it is the permanent home of the soul. We strive for some permanence in this life. We want a place we can go to, a place called home. In this place we feel safe. All of us want this in this life. We are not promised that long (Psa. 90:10). Each day we are given evidence that our earthly house is dissolving. The Bible promises the same (2 Cor. 4:16; 5:1-2). The apostles recognized that there was a time when they would be no more in this physical frame (2 Tim. 4:6; 2 Pet. 1:14-15). Heaven is a place of permanence. Paul tells us that the things we see are temporary, and the things we do not see are eternal (2 Cor. 4:16-18). Paul also tells us that when the Lord comes back, we shall be with Him forever (1 Thess. 4:17). Jesus says the righteous will have life eternal (Matt. 25:46). "Forever" means eternal, everlasting, without end (cf. Rom. 16:26; Heb. 9:14).

Fourth, I am interested in going to heaven because it is a place of great rewards. Jesus calls us blessed when people persecute us for His sake, because we will have a great reward in heaven (Matt. 5:11-12). Peter tells us that we have "an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet. 1:4). Paul says that we have a crown of righteousness waiting for us in heaven (2 Tim. 4:6-8). Jesus says, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

Fifth, I am interested in going to heaven because of the price that was paid for me to go. At one time man had a relationship with God. He became separated from God (Rom 3:23; Isa. 59:1-2; 1 Pet. 3:10-12). To remain in this condition was inevitable spiritual death (Ezek. 18:20; Rom. 6:23). The only answer to avoiding such a spiritual disaster was the "righteousness of God" (Rom. 1:14-17; 5:6-

10). Jesus paid the price for all of us (Rom. 3:24-25; John 14:6).

Not everyone will go to heaven (Matt. 7:13-14; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 21:8, 20:10-15). Heaven is for those who prepare to go (John 14:1-3; 6:44-45; Luke 6:46). Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. No one will just accidentally enter. Those who go will be planning on going. Many who plan will not make it because they have not planned according to the Lord's will. Those who do not obey God's will cannot go to heaven.

There is a familiar story told of a famous actor and of an aged preacher who were on the same ship. The passengers wanted the actor to read Psalm 23. The actor did so in a flawless manner, so there was a large applause at the end. Then the old preacher read it in a quiet and humble way with hardly an eye dry. The actor said, "I know the 23rd Psalm, but this man knows the Shepherd." Do you know the Shepherd?

Each person should ask himself the question, "Am I nearer to heaven today than I was a year ago?" As the song says, "After this life with all its strife, Heaven will surely be worth it all."

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