

STANLEY FAITH EV FREE

Pastor Michael Thompson Sunday August 20th, 2017

HEAVEN AND HELL PART ONE (Heaven)

INTRODUCTION

Today we are beginning a new series called Heaven and Hell. Now that sounds like a really scary series. Why should we do a series called Heaven and Hell? The answer is simple. That is the bottom line for every person of faith. For every single person for whom we have a heart to share the faith we are asking them to join us in eternal life in the presence of Jesus in heaven. And when people harden their hearts toward God we fear for their soul because we know down deep that if they do not get right with God they face eternity in hell. Heaven and hell are the ultimate bottom line. And I am so grateful to Jesus because I know that I deserve hell but by His grace and His good gift I have received what I do not deserve, eternal life through Jesus Christ.

The New Testament mentions the term heaven 276 times. Hell is mentioned about 100 times using various words and references.

Most of what people believe about heaven and hell comes from movie, books and folklore passed from one generation to the next.

Here are some of the questions we will answer in this series. What is heaven really like? What is hell really like? What does it take to get to heaven? Will there be marriage in heaven? Will we recognize people from our former life on earth? How big is heaven? Where exactly is heaven located?

I wrote on the youth group page and I will offer this to you...that if you have questions about heaven or hell or questions that your friends are asking you that are difficult to answer, pass them along to me and I will put them together and use those questions as the basis for the 4th week of this series. So, this is an opportunity. Don't let it go by. How will people try to blow off your faith? What will they say? Will they try to push reincarnation or try to tell you that Jesus was married or that the Bible is just one of many books? Or that all roads lead to God? If that is what you are hearing let me know and I will help you with some solid biblical and logical answers.

Today we are going to begin our study with a focus on heaven. So, let's begin our discovery of heaven and hell by answering some basic questions.

Q 1: WHAT IS HEAVEN LIKE?

Most movies and TV shows portray heaven with as a place with people in white suits walking out of white clouds to greet you at a gate that leads to more white clouds with more people in white clothes. The notion that heaven is like a white cloud is one of the most boring and incomplete portraits I could possibly think of.

MORE LIKE NARNIA

If you want a quick contrast, heaven might be more favorably compared to Narnia than a white cloud. Let me explain. Satan would love for us to put off ever thinking of the idea of eternity so that we would be careless with our soul and go to hell. The problem for Satan is that every person that ever lived will die. That means the subject of death comes up 250,000 times every day as people around the earth pass away.

BORING PEOPLE TO HELL

Satan cannot get people to stop thinking about heaven or hell. So, his strategy is to make heaven seem so boring that almost no one would want to go there. He wants to bore people to death, or bore people to hell. For me, the idea of a world with no color, and nothing to do, no productivity, just floating on clouds and singing does not sound like a well-rounded and fulfilling life. Especially when you have a voice like mine.

PRAISE THE GOD OF GLORY AND BEAUTY

Praise the Lord, the same God that created so much beauty and color and texture and so many fulfilling experiences in this life is the same God who created an even better life that is to follow. So, the next life could not be boring, and free of color, and texture, and feeling, and emotion; it could only be more intense than what we are now experiencing.

(insert striking visuals)

Think of God's creation like the **Grand Canyon**. Think of the **sunrise**. Think of the **Oceans** and the spectacular view from the **mountain tops**. God created all of these things. Think of the **summer flowers**, purple, red, orange, with colorful butterflies and striped bumble bees. God created them along with all the wonderful aromas associate with spring. (END striking visuals)

God created the pattern for every tree and bush and all the animals. How could such a creative God make a heaven in which there is no color?

How could He make an existence with nothing but white and no music but harps and (Lord help us) opera music?

The same God that created all these wonderful things we experience in this world is the same God who created heaven. Based on God's creative powers how could there be a heaven created for us with nothing to do but sit around and look at the white clouds and white walls and white robes? Wait until you discover what heaven is really going to be like. Some of you might be in for a surprise.

Q2: WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT HEAVEN?

The first reason that we should care about heaven is because every one of us will die one day. God has given only two possible destinations for our souls; heaven or hell.

Hebrews 9:27

And just as it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment,

Another reason to care about heaven is that we currently do not live in paradise. If we think this is paradise, then we have no imagination. Look at all the pain and disease and failed relationships. And then there is the curse of death. We are born and then we begin to die.

So, all creation exists as something that God created good, but that is under the curse of sin. We see earthquakes and floods and pollution. We see tsunamis that kill thousands in a single demented sweep of a wall of water.

Yes, the beauty of the Lord is on display in all the earth. But at the same time, it is obvious to even the casual observer that the earth is under a curse. We need to be rescued from death. And the whole earth needs to be rescued from all its turmoil.

So, we see on one hand all this beauty of the sunrises and the glory of childbirth. We see the amazing transformation of people born again and the change that happens in their life as they turn to God. We see the glory of nature and all the wonders of God in space.

But turn on your tv or talk to a few people on the street and it does not take long to remember that this is not heaven. This planet is under a curse and there is a groaning and agony of souls that long for peace. And it will never come until the return of Jesus and the glory of His heaven are revealed.

We long for heaven and are comforted by heaven because the dangers of this world are gone. Maniacs with nuclear weapons will be gone. Racism will be gone. All races will be represented in heaven and we will have no underlying suspicions or fears of one another.

There will be no more women slapped around in heaven and no more crisis shelters. And the thing that appeals to me more than anything is that I will not even have the capacity to sin. None of us will. Our sin nature will be removed.

Revelation 21:4 (speaking of heaven) Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore

Q3: DOES GOD LIVE IN HEAVEN OR DOES HE LIVE EVERYWHERE?

First of all, we know that even though God has the ability to exert His influence in every single inch of creation He resides primarily in heaven.

Isaiah 66:1 Heaven is my throne

And Jesus prayed;

Matthew 6:9 Our Father in heaven

1 Peter 3:22 Jesus went into heaven ***“at the right hand of the Father.”***

So, if we want a specific place to go and find the body of Jesus and the greatest manifestation of God’s power that place is in heaven. Heaven is a specific place.

It’s Not Just a State of Mind

Many cultures and people claim that heaven is a state of mind. But Jesus ascended into heaven. He ascended not into a state of mind but He went to a specific location.

Acts 1:9 and ***Luke 24:51*** tell us that Jesus went to a specific place at his ascension.

Stephen full of the Holy Spirit gazed into a specific place called heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and He said;

Acts 7:55-56 Behold I see the heavens opened, and the Son of God standing at the right hand of God.

So, we have established that God manifests His presence in heaven. Yes, He is everywhere, but the greatest manifestation of His presence is in heaven from where He rules with His Son.

Q4: WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT EARTH? WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO EARTH WHEN THE LORD RETURNS? IS THE EARTH GOING TO BE BURNED UP IN THE END?

Many people think that the earth is going to be abandoned by God. At His return, every saved person will go to heaven and the earth will be cast away. God will call Gabriel's cousin who runs a cosmic Waste Management service and tell him to bring the biggest dumpster they have so the earth can be thrown out. But that is not what Scripture says.

Isaiah 66:1 (NIV)

This is what the LORD says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me? Where will my resting place be?"

We know heaven is the throne of God. But remember, earth is God's footstool. God is not going to throw away the earth. God is going to restore and heal the earth at His return and then return as it's just and gracious ruler.

2 Peter 21:1 says; *The creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.*

So, God's plan is to heal the earth of its curse and bring this earth to its full glory. If this world was literally done away with, Satan would win. Something God created and considered "very good" was contaminated so much by the devil that it had to be thrown away and destroyed. That would be a victory for the devil and I do not believe God will allow Satan to have any victory when it comes to God's creation.

So how can it be that God is in heaven and we will be on a restored earth? If that were so, how could we live in His presence forever? The answer is in the word of God. The word tells how God can be *in heaven and earth His footstool*.

Revelation 21:21-26 describes Heaven will literally come down and meet up with the earth. Heaven and earth will be joined. Scripture tells us we will

rule the earth and judge angels. And our rewards for faithfulness will determine what responsibilities we are trusted with in the New Jerusalem.

This new Jerusalem will be the new place in which God manifests His presence in a powerful way. The New Jerusalem is the new heavens. The dimensions of this new city brought down to meet up with earth is about 1400 miles by 1400 miles, or about 2/3rds of the size of the United States. Heaven will meet up with earth.

Heaven is the dwelling place of God. Earth will truly be His footstool. And now we can understand passages such as;

Revelation 22:5 *There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever.*

Q5: HOW WILL HUMANS RULE WITH CHRIST?

So now that we know that heaven and earth will join up. Heaven is God's throne and earth is His footstool. In light of this we can make sense of so many other things written about the world to come.

One of the things that I have wanted to understand relates to how we will rule with Christ. Now it makes a little more sense to me.

Hebrews 2:8 *We do not yet see everything in subjection to man.*

We know that one day everything will be subject to man. But how can that be? That answer is that when the earth is recreated and healed of its curse, the God-man, Christ Jesus, will rule all of creation. Justice will occur in real time. Everything will be fair. And then we, who place ourselves under the authority of Jesus Christ right now, will also inherit this new earth. We will rule the earth by taking our lead from Him.

Matthew 5:5 *The meek will inherit the earth.*

Our resurrection bodies will be part of the renewed creation. There will be activities for our bodies which will never grow old or become ill. There is nothing inherently evil or unspiritual about the physical world. The Gnostics are wrong! Flesh and blood sanctified is good. It is part of God's good creation.

In **Matthew 25:34** Christians are told they will inherit a kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world. This kingdom will be a

kingdom in with heaven and earth meet. And this new earth will include very important roles and duties entrusted to the faithful.

It is going to be so exciting when the Lord returns. It will not be a boring world of all white and clouds and strumming harps. There will be so much color and texture and so many experiences that will bring joy, it might even shock us to see it. Here are a few things the word of God tells us about the physical elements that are present in heaven.

Q6: WHAT ARE SOME PHYSICAL ELEMENTS OF HEAVEN AS THEY ARE LISTED IN SCRIPTURE:

Banquets: **Revelation 19:9** tells us we will eat and drink at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Wine: **Luke 22:18** tells us that wine is drunk with the disciples in the heavenly kingdom yet there will be no abuse of wine.

River of Waters of Life: **Revelation 22:1** Tells us there is water and rivers in heaven. The river of the water of life will flow from the throne of God through the middle of the street of the city of God. And there could be a lot more rivers and bodies of water as well.

Trees of life with Fruit: **Revelation 22:2** Tells us there will be a variety of fruits and probably all kinds of vegetables and tasty things. The tree of life **will bear *twelve kinds of fruit yielding its fruit each month***

Music. **Revelation 5:13** And probably the creative use of technology and invention. This makes sense to me based on the truth that we were created in the image of God. And God is creative and inventive. Our creativity then shows off the creativity of our creator.

Construction Including Huge Jewels: **Revelation 21:18-21** Parts of the City from Heaven that will come down to meet up with earth are constructed of huge precious jewels of all kinds of color.

Q7: WHAT KIND OF BODIES WILL WE HAVE?

We know that in this fallen world humans are unable to stand in the presence of God's glory. For example; shepherds were filled with fear. And nearly every person who saw a vision of heaven collapsed under the weight of God's holiness. **2 Chron 5:14, Luke 2:9**

So how is it that we will be able to exist in the same place as the Lord of Glory? With new glorified bodies, we will be able to stand in the presence of God.

Revelation 22:3 **3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.**

So, we know that the Lord is in heaven. We learned from Jesus' statement to the repentant thief on the cross that as soon as we die we enter into the Lord's presence immediately. We enter into heaven. And then when it is the right time, the Lord Jesus Christ will return. And the end result of the Lord's return is that the earth will be restored to a perfect state.

At that time, a revised version of heaven will come down. This is the place that the Lord went to prepare for us since the foundation of the world. And It will come down and heaven and earth will merge. God's presence will be there. The glory of the Lord will shine, and we will serve Him and also enjoy the re-created earth with Him. What an amazing time that will be! All the color and variety of the wonderful things of this earth will be available. But they will be much better. And heaven will also be there. Wow! That is going to be an amazing event and an amazing life. Forever!

With the backdrop of a new heaven and earth joined, let's address a few questions that were asked.

Q8: WILL WE RECOGNIZE OTHERS?

Many people have asked if they will recognize people from earth in their past life before being transported to glory either through death or the second coming of the Lord.

I agree with Ken Kelly who said that; "*nothing in scripture tells that we will have a memory lapse and forget everything that happened in our former life.*" So yes, I do believe we will recognize others in heaven.

In fact, Paul addresses the end time in 1 Thessalonians. One of the great joys of going to heaven will be to meet up with friends and family that we have lost or have not seen in a while. **1 Thessalonians 4:14-18.**

Some of us have children lost at birth. Others have been cut off from their kids and do not get to see them. Many of us have lost husbands or wives; fathers and mothers. All these relationships will be restored. What a reunion this will be.

Another part of recognizing others in heaven is that our skin color and ethnicity in this life will be preserved and appreciated in the next life.

People from every tribe and tongue will unite under the only flag that could bring us together; the banner of Christ Jesus.

Q9: WILL THERE BE ANIMALS?

Someone has asked whether there will be animals in heaven or not. *Isaiah 11* teaches us that a child will lead the calf and the lion. If this is literal then there will be animals in heaven. In fact, Ken Kelly suggests that the animals may even join us in giving praise to The Lord as seen in ***Revelation 5:13***.

Q10: WILL WE BE MARRIED?

Jesus taught that marriage would end. But He never suggested that we would not have a special relationship with our husband or wife or kids. The Bible teaches there will be some continuity between this life and the next.

For example; my guess is that each person will be in the prime of their youth before our bodies began to fall apart. So, if all family members are the same age (which I concede is speculation) then we would not have the dynamic of parents trying to raise small children. The family dynamic would change considerably.

All the people that are supposed to be in heaven will exist. There will be no need to have more children through procreation. The Bible speaks about the total number of Gentiles added to God's people must occur before His return. There will be no need to repopulate the earth as no one will die.

Defects of speech, or reading disabilities will all be gone, and all will be healed.

Q11: WILL OUR PAST SINS BE REVEALED?

Romans 14:10,13 "We shall all stand before the judgment seat of God...Each of us shall give account of himself to God"

2 Corinthians 5:10 "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad"

The picture of the final judgment in ***Matthew 25:31-46*** includes Christ separating the sheep from the goats, and rewarding those who receive His blessing. Both the saved and the unsaved are in this judgment.

According to Grudem; *It is important to realize that this judgment of believers will be a judgment to evaluate and bestow various degrees of reward, but the fact that there will be judgment should never cause believers fear that they will be eternally condemned.*

Jesus says in **John 5:24** ***"He who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life"***

Romans 8:1 ***says; There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***

Believers are rewarded and unbelievers are punished.

TAKING IT HOME

1. Are you willing to take God's at His word that there is either heaven or hell?
2. Are you willing to bank everything on Jesus and His offer of grace?
3. What new realities of joy and amazement is God creating in you about the way heaven will really be?