

The Hope of Heaven

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In 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul responded to Christians who taught that there is no afterlife:

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.
– 1 Corinthians 15:19 NIV

If there is no such thing as heaven, Christians are the biggest suckers ever to walk the earth. Christians are called to live their entire life in light of eternity, in the hope of heaven.

A SENTIMENTAL HEAVEN

At funerals, I have heard some interesting ideas of heaven. Granny is teaching St. Peter how to play bridge. Uncle Fred is playing golf with Jesus. Does Jesus play golf?

- These sentimentalities help people deal with their loss.
- I want to go beyond that and learn the truth about heaven.

When I preached on the book of Revelation, I said it was written for the purpose of encouraging our daily life, not to promote speculation about the end times. Likewise, the Bible teaches about heaven to encourage us, not satisfy our curiosity.

- The Bible is sufficient, not comprehensive.

The Bible tells us everything that we *need* to know, but not everything we *want* to know. There's not enough paper in the world to tell us everything about God. God is silent on many things because He knows we are incapable of understanding them. He also wants to prevent us from being distracted by minor points.

Again, the Bible doesn't tell us about heaven to satisfy our curiosity about the afterlife, but to affect how we live our present life.

- The *here after* should affect our *here now*.

Today, we'll look at three aspects of heaven that should affect how we live:

1. Heaven is our present hope

When we use the word “hope,” we usually mean wish – “I wish I could win the lottery.” But in the Bible, hope might as well be a fact. The difference is the authority behind the hope.

- If I were to give you a check for \$1,000,000, you wouldn't have much hope of cashing that check.
- What if Bill Gates gave you that check?

The difference is the authority behind the hope. God's promise of heaven is a good hope, a better gift than Bill's check. We're just more hesitant to cash it in!

NOT FORGOTTEN

Sometimes I find myself getting weary living in this fallen world. I have a very good life, yet it's tiring to live in a world that so far from God's ideal.

- I get tired of the suffering caused by human sinfulness.
- I get tired of constantly struggling with my same sinfulness.
- Marilyn gets tired of me struggling with the same sinfulness!

Sometimes it feels like God has forgotten us. Jesus promised to come back to take us home to be with Him, but that was 2000 years ago! Paul talks about this longing to be with God.

Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling... it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. – *2 Corinthians 5:2, 5 NIV*

Shortly after I proposed to Marilyn, I put her on a plane to fly back here as I finished college in California. I didn't leave her empty-handed; I gave her a ring as a promise I would come back.

- That engagement ring was something meaningful and costly.
- It was \$50!
- And that was before tax!

The Holy Spirit is God's deposit, the most expensive ring He could find. The Holy Spirit's residence in the believer is the God's promise that He will come back to take us home to heaven.

Paul knew that life down here can be tough sometimes – he suffered more for his faith than all of us put together. But the hope of heaven gave him strength to embrace it all.

- The hope of heaven gives us strength in the present.

Heaven gives us hope in the present, because:

2. Heaven is our future home.

When we talk about heaven, we are trying to comprehend the incomprehensible. The Bible uses symbols and figurative language trying to describe it, but they will always fall short.

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him. – *1 Corinthians 2:9 NIV*

Our human, finite minds are incapable of understanding the wonder of heaven. But there are a few key points we can understand:

a) Heaven is where God is.

In heaven we will no longer be separated from God. Our faith will become sight. He will live with us, as He did in the Garden of Eden.

- We will enjoy His presence and worship Him forever.

b) Heaven is a house.

In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. – *John 14:2 NIV*

King James and some other older version use the archaic term “mansions,” which doesn’t make much sense – how can you have mansions inside of a house? Modern translations say “rooms.”

Obviously this is figurative, but Jesus didn’t describe heaven as mansions spread out, but as a community, under one roof. Heaven is a place where we belong.

- I hope you like these people, because you’ll be living with them forever!

c) Heaven is a place of permanence and perfection.

Even at its best, this world is temporary; things die, decay, and rust. Soon this valley will be filled with acres of tulips, but then they'll all be gone. Nothing here is permanent.

Heaven is described as having walls of emerald, gates of pearls, and streets of gold. Again, this is figurative; God is trying to describe the permanence of heaven.

- Pure gold is one of the few substances that doesn't tarnish.
- The gold in Tut's tomb was as bright as the day they made it.
- Perhaps God created gold to teach us about permanence.

Because this world is all we know, it is difficult for us to imagine anything else. So the Bible compares heaven to this world, but emphasizes that it exceedingly better.

- The gold, trees, and mountains of this world are a shadow of the next.
- Heaven is all the good we know, perfected.

The problem is that we get very attached to these imperfect things that should teach us about heaven. Because we can't understand heaven, we think it will be boring, less than this world.

As a child, I remember getting ready to go to Disneyland, praying that Jesus wouldn't come back yet. I was sure heaven was going to be cool and all, but this is *Disneyland* we're talking about.

- I would have been more excited to go to a heaven designed by Walt than by Jesus!

Heaven will not be any less than anything we have on earth; it will be more, and more beyond our comprehension.

- The hope of heaven teaches us to become less attached to this world.

Not only is heaven our present hope and future home, it is also:

3. Heaven is our enduring reality

According to the Bible, in a very real sense, believers are already in heaven, it is already our reality. My marriage didn't begin on my wedding day; it began the first day I met Marilyn.

- She still remembers that our first date was Dutch treat!

The wedding was the end of restrictions. When we get to heaven, we will see that heaven began for us when we first met Jesus. Death is only the end of restriction.

Since we're already part of heaven, we're called to live like it:

...we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure. – *1 John 3:2-3 NIV*

- The reality of heaven demands that we behave like citizens of heaven.

Jim Elliot, a missionary who died spreading the Gospel, said "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose."

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.
– *1 Corinthians 15:19 NIV*

- Because, the reality of heaven calls us to invest in eternity.

You can only live this way if the enduring reality of heaven is in your heart and has revealed the things of real value to you.