

Questions About What Heaven Is Like?

Philippians 3:20-21

"Heaven is a place, just as much a place as is New York or Chicago."

-Charles Ferguson Ball

There's a little town in Texas near the Louisiana border named Uncertain. How would you like to live in *Uncertain, Texas*? Someone asks you where you're from and you would say, "Uncertain."

As a Christian you don't have to live in "Uncertain," spiritually speaking. You don't have to struggle with doubts about your salvation. You can know that you are saved!

A little fellow was standing on the side of the road when a man came up, stopped and rolled down his window: "Son, do you know how to get to town?" The little boy said, "I don't know." The man asked, "Well, do you know how to get to Route 20?" Again the little boy replied, "I don't know." The man then asked, "Where does this road go?" The little boy, as before, said, "I don't know." The man asked, "Do you know the name of this road?" As before, "I don't know." The frustrated man looked at the little boy and said, "Son, you don't know anything do you?" The little boy replied, "I know I ain't lost."

I begin with two statements I believe to be almost universally true:

1-Everyone wants to know about Heaven

2-Everyone wants to go there.

Recent polls suggest that nearly 80% of all Americans believe there is a place called Heaven. I find that statistic encouraging because it tells me that even in this skeptical age there is something deep inside the human heart that cries out, *"There's got to be something more, something more than the pain and suffering of this life. Something more than 70 or 80 years on planet earth. Something more than being born, living, dying, and then being buried in the ground."*

Sometimes we talk about a "God-shaped vacuum" inside the human heart. I believe there is also a "Heaven-shaped vacuum," a sense that we were made for something more than this life. We were made to live forever somewhere.

In a real sense we were made for Heaven.

There is another fascinating statistic I should mention. Not only do most Americans believe in Heaven, most people expect to go there when they die. If you took a microphone to the streets and asked, "Do you think you will go to Heaven when you die?" the vast majority of people would answer, "I hope so," or "I think so," or perhaps "I think I've got a good chance. Not very many people would say they aren't going to Heaven. Perhaps one modest point is in order. Whenever you talk about living forever somewhere, it would help to know for sure where you are going. After all, if you're wrong about Heaven, you're going to be wrong for a long, long time.

With that as background, I turn now to consider some of the most frequently-asked questions about Heaven. But before I jump in, I should make one preliminary point. The only things we can know for certain about Heaven are the things revealed in the Bible. Everything else is just speculation and hearsay. The Bible tells us everything we need to know and I believe it also tells us everything we can know for certain about Heaven.

[Note: There have been many books and articles written in recent years about Heaven based on dreams, visions and near-death experiences. The majority of these should be rejected because they contain bad theology.]

I. Where Is Heaven?

There are three things I can tell you in answer to this question.

First, the most important fact is that Heaven is a real place. Listen to the words of Jesus on the night before he was crucified: John 14:1-3

Twice in three verses Jesus calls Heaven a **PLACE**. He means that Heaven ("my Father's house") is a real place, as real as New York, London or Chicago. The place called Heaven is just as real as the place you call home. It's a real place filled with real people, which is why the Bible sometimes compares Heaven to a mansion with many rooms (John 14:1-3) and sometimes to an enormous city teeming with people (Revelation 21-22).

Second, the Bible also tells us the angels are there, and the Lord Jesus Christ is in Heaven. Philippians 3:20 says very plainly that "our citizenship is in Heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ." That's why Jesus told the thief on the Cross, "Today you will be with me in

paradise" (Luke 23:43).

Third, the Bible hints that Heaven is not as far away as we might think. Because Heaven is a real place, we sometimes think it must be outside our present universe—which would mean that it is billions and billions of light years away. However, it's very clear that the early Christians understood that they would pass immediately from this life into the presence of Christ in Heaven. How can that be possible if Heaven is beyond the farthest galaxy? Hebrews 12:22-24 tells us something amazing about what the gospel has done for us:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the Heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in Heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

The writer is here comparing Mt. Sinai with Mt. Zion. Under the old covenant no one could come near God except under very strict conditions. That's why the mountain shook with thunder and lightning. [Note: three times the writer of Hebrews uses a Greek word that means "to come near" or "to approach closely."] But now in Christ we have been brought near to Heavenly realities. Think of what he is saying:

We're not that far from Heaven.

We're not that far from the angels.

We're not that far from our loved ones in Heaven.

We're not that far from God.

We're not that far from Jesus himself.

Heaven is a real place, it's where Jesus is right now, and it's not far away from us.

II. What Is Heaven Like?

This question came from one of our junior high students. I would answer by saying that the Bible doesn't give us a great deal of information. What we have are images and pictures of Heaven and comparisons with life on earth.

What is Heaven like? Here are some biblical facts about Heaven...

- God's dwelling place (Psalm 33:13).
- Where Christ is today (Acts 1:11).
- Where Christians go when they die (Philippians 1:21-23).
- The Father's house (John 14:2).
- A city designed and built by God (Hebrews 11:10).
- A better country (Hebrews 11:16).
- Paradise (Luke 23:43).

Most of us have heard that Heaven is a place where the streets are paved with gold, the gates are made of pearl, and the walls made of precious jewels. Those images come from Revelation 21-22, which offers us the most extended picture of Heaven in the entire Bible. If you ask me if I believe those things are literally true, the answer is yes and no. Yes, they are literally true but no, Heaven won't be anything like we imagine. It will be much greater.

Here's a delightful legend that makes the point very well:

I love the old story of the rich man who, on his death bed, negotiated with God to allow him to bring his earthly treasures with him when he came to Heaven.

God's reaction was that this was a most unusual request, but since this man had been exceptionally faithful, permission was granted to bring along just one suitcase.

The time arrived, the man presented himself at the pearly gates, suitcase in hand-- BOTH hands, actually, since he had stuffed it with as many bars of gold bullion as would fit. St. Peter said, "Sorry, you know the rules--you can't take it with you." But the man protested, "God said I could ... one suitcase." St. Peter checked, found out that this one would be an exception, prepared to let the man enter, then said, "OK, but I will have to examine the contents before you pass." He took the suitcase, opened it, saw the gold bars and asked quizzically, "You brought PAVEMENT?"

[Note: "Heaven" by Dr. David Leininger, March 30, 1997]

When John writes about a street paved with gold, I do not doubt his words. He simply reports what he saw in his vision. Thus his words are literally true. They are also meant to tell us that the things we value so highly in this life will be used to pave the roads in Heaven.

A City Built By God

Heaven is a real place filled with real people. The Bible pictures it as a great city filled with all of God's people. What would such a city look like? It would be a city with ...

No pollution for the skies would always be crystal clear.
No crime or violence for no criminals would ever enter.
No greedy politicians, no drug pushers, no child molesters.
No potholes and no power outages either.

It is filled with abundant parks, rivers, rolling meadows, and flowing streams. Lining the streets would be flowers in constant bloom, fruit trees of every kind, every species of plant life growing free from pestilence and disease.

The gates would be made of pearl, the walls of jasper, the streets of gold. Precious stones would lie on the ground like playthings, emeralds, rubies, diamonds galore.

On every hand there would be children laughing, bright conversation, music floating from every direction.

In the city that God builds, there are no tears, there is no sorrow ... no regret ... no remorse. Bitterness gone forever, failure left far behind, suffering redeemed and rewarded. There are no eyeglasses, no braces, no wheelchairs, no false teeth, no bald heads, no hearing aids, and no crutches. There are no more hospitals, no more nursing homes, no paramedics, no CPR. Doctors have to find a new job, they aren't needed anymore. Aspirin gone, accidents over, cancer disappeared, heart attacks banished, AIDS a distant memory. In Heaven no one grows old and feeble.

There is one other thing you won't find in Heaven. There are no cemeteries in the city God builds. Why? There are no funerals ... for in that glad city no one ever dies.

If you make it to that city, you live forever, never to die again. Either you believe in Heaven or you don't. It's either a real place or it isn't. This is Heaven-where all our best dreams finally come true.

III. Who Is In Heaven Right Now?

This question is not difficult to answer. **God is in Heaven** because Heaven is

his dwelling place. The Lord Jesus has been in Heaven ever since he ascended from the earth shortly after his resurrection (Acts 1:9-11).

The angels are in Heaven. In fact there are myriads of angels-uncountable numbers of Heavenly beings-all of them serving the Lord in various ways.

The saints of God who died on this earth are in Heaven. [Note: I mean by this that Heaven includes the Old Testament Saints who by faith trusted in God's Word and looked forward to God's redemption at Calvary (which they did not fully understand). It also includes every true believer from every continent and every denomination. Everyone who has genuinely trusted in Christ as Lord and Savior will be there.

I also think that children who died before the "age of accountability go to Heaven and I would also include those born with such mental limitations that they cannot understand the gospel.

The Bible teaches that the moment we die we go directly into the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul spoke of this in 2 Corinthians 5:7-8 and Philipians 1:21-23.

But I do not want to be ambiguous on this point. Not everyone is in Heaven now. Some people won't make it. The Bible speaks of the saved and the lost. The saved are those who trust Jesus Christ as their eternal Savior. The lost are those who do not trust Christ as Savior. This is the great dividing line of humanity-you are either saved or you are lost. And there is no middle category. You will either spend eternity in Heaven or eternity in hell.

The saved of all the ages will be there-and that vast throng will no doubt include many people who would surprise us if we knew it now. Certainly Heaven will be more wonderful than our imagination and its population more diverse than we expect.

But I am sure of this one truth. No one will go to Heaven except by the grace of God and through the merits of the blood of Jesus Christ. If a man says "No" to Jesus, he has no hope of Heaven.

IV. Will We Know Each Other In Heaven?

This is one of the most frequently asked questions about Heaven. I would like to share an answer given by a Bible teacher of another generation-a man

named William Pettingill. [*1001 Bible Questions Answered*, William Pettingill and **R.A. Torrey**, Inspirational Press, 1997, p. 157]

He said, "*We may be sure that we shall not know less in Heaven than we know here.*" In proof he quotes 1 Corinthians 13:12, "*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*" How does God know us?

Answer: He knows us completely, intimately, thoroughly, inside and out, with nothing hidden but everything seen as it really is (Psalm 139:1-4, Hebrews 4:12). When we get to Heaven we'll know each other as God knows us because all the imperfections of this life will be removed. In this life sin causes us to cover ourselves-not just physically but emotionally and spiritually. But when sin is finally lifted from us, then we can be ourselves with no shame, no pain, no embarrassment, and no covering up. Dr. Pettingill concludes that in Heaven we will know every person in Heaven and all of them will be friends and loved ones to us.

In his very helpful book on Heaven, **W.A. Criswell** makes the additional point that individual personality survives into eternity. I'll be the same person then that I am now-only with all the imperfections and limitations of sin finally removed. This is a wonderful thought-that the essence of who we are will remain throughout eternity-yet vastly improved by God's grace. [He also says that in Heaven we can eat all we want and not get fat. I certainly hope he's right about that.]

How old will we be in Heaven? I once heard a preacher say that we will all be 33 years old because that's approximately how old Jesus was when he died. Of course there is no scriptural support for that statement. The truth is, there won't be any age in Heaven in the sense we speak of age on the earth. Growing old is a function of the decaying effects of sin. I do not believe that babies who die in infancy will be babies for eternity nor do I believe that people who waste away of cancer will appear emaciated in Heaven. It will be something else entirely-which I can barely explain and certainly do not understand.

In Heaven we will know each other intimately. That's why Peter, James and John recognized Moses and Elijah, even though they had been dead for hundreds of years, on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). I don't think they had nametags on. I think there was something about those two

men that made Peter, James and John recognize them even though they had never seen them before.

How this can be I do not know, but I believe it to be true. In Heaven there will be no strangers.

V. What Will We Do In Heaven?

One of our more honest junior-highers put the question this way: "*Worshipping God forever in Heaven sounds boring-is it wrong to feel this? Is Heaven going to be fun?*" Again, the Bible doesn't tell us everything we would like to know, but of this we can be sure: Heaven won't be boring and it will be more fun than the best party you ever attended.

So what will we do for all eternity? The answer is, we're going to help God run the universe. Do you remember the story Jesus told about the man of noble birth who gave his servants money to invest? One servant had doubled his money so the man said, "You will rule over ten cities." The next servant had seen a 50% increase so his master said, "Rule over five cities." And the man who hid his money had even that amount taken from him in punishment. (Luke 19:11-27). The story is a picture of what Heaven will be like. We will use our gifts to administer the new Heaven and the new earth. Bakers will bake, teachers will teach, singers will sing, and I suppose that preachers will preach. For all I know, soldiers may march off to battle and quarterbacks will throw passes. Think of the flowers the botanists will study. Gifted astronomers will go from galaxy to galaxy studying the wonders of God's creation.

I can guarantee you this: No one will be sitting around on a cloud eating grapes and polishing his halo. No, we'll all be too busy for that.

Here are five things that will occupy us in Heaven. We will ...

- 1-Worship without distraction.
- 2-Serve without exhaustion.
- 3-Fellowship without fear.
- 4-Learn without fatigue.
- 5-Rest without boredom.

The best part of Heaven will be seeing Jesus himself face to face. We will worship the Son of God and celebrate his great victory over sin while the

endless ages of eternity roll on and on. The best music you've ever heard will pale compared to the music of Heaven. The most awesome worship you've experienced on earth is but a dim reflection of the praise we will render around the throne of God.

VI. How Can I Be Sure I Am Going To Heaven?

This is the most important question of all. Here is a wonderful truth: God has made it easy for you to go to Heaven. He did the hard part when he sent his Son to die on the Cross for you. He paid the price for your sins so that you could one day stand before God in Heaven. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6) Jesus is not only the way to Heaven, he is also the door to Heaven. If you want to go to Heaven, you've got to go through the door marked "Jesus Christ." There is no other entrance.

Several years ago **Dr. D. James Kennedy**, pastor of the famous Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, FL, joined other evangelical leaders in a meeting with **President Ronald Reagan** at the White House. During the meeting Dr. Kennedy asked the president this question, "Suppose you were to die and found yourself standing at the door of Heaven. If God were to say, 'Why should I let you into Heaven?' what answer would you give?"

Before I tell you how the president answered that question, let me ask how you would respond. Picture the scene. You are standing at the very gates of Heaven. It's more beautiful than you ever dreamed possible. This is where you want to spend eternity. This is where you belong. But before you enter, the Lord himself asks what possible reason you have to claim admission. You pause, knowing that all eternity hangs on your answer. What will you say?

Back to the White House. The President paused, thought for a moment, then replied, "Well, I guess I'd have to answer with John 3:16, "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" That is indeed a good answer because your only hope of Heaven is through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me make this very personal. If you were to die tonight, do you know for certain that you would go to Heaven? I've already said that this is too important to say "I think so" or "I hope so." If you're wrong, you're going to be wrong for a long, long time.

What we need is solid ground on which to stand. And we have it in the death

and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Our entire hope of Heaven is wrapped up in what Jesus did when he died on the cross for the sins of the world and rose from the dead on Easter Sunday morning.

One of our most beloved hymns puts it this way:

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ the solid rock I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand;
All other ground is sinking sand.*

That says it all. If you want to go to Heaven, you must base your hope on the solid rock of Jesus' blood and righteousness. Are you standing on the Rock this morning? Are you wholly leaning on Jesus' name?

One final word and I am done. No one goes to Heaven by accident. Heaven is God's prepared place for prepared people. We prepare for Heaven and then God prepares Heaven for us. I've already told you that most people believe in Heaven and most people think they are going there. But are they on the right road? Are they building their lives on Jesus Christ-the solid rock? Too many, I fear, are standing on sinking sand and do not know it.

What is your hope for Heaven? Mine is Jesus Christ. I've staked everything I have on him. If he can't take me to Heaven, then I'm not going there. What about you? When the dark night falls, the lights go out, and the waters of death swirl around you, what will happen to you then? If you know Jesus, you have nothing to fear. Put your trust in Jesus. Run to the Cross. Stand with your full weight on the Solid Rock of our salvation. May God help you to trust in Jesus Christ and him alone for your salvation. And may God grant that we will all meet one day in Heaven.

Safe at home. In Heaven at last. I'll be there. What about you?

