

Heaven 8-25-02

Heaven was a more popular topic of discussion and the subject of many books in generations past. Perhaps the reason it is not more commonly in our conversation and literature today is because we don't long for it as previous generations have. Philip Yancey wrote, "A strange fact about modern American life: although 71 percent of us believe in an afterlife (says George Gallup), no one much talks about it. Christians believe that we will spend eternity in a splendid place called heaven... isn't it a little bizarre that we simply ignore heaven, acting as if it doesn't matter?"

With all our conveniences and advances we are wrapped up in enjoying this life to the full. It may be that it is politically incorrect to speak of heaven. Whatever the reasons are, I believe we need to speak of it more often. If we only speak of heaven when someone is dying, we relegate it to the topic of death, and no one wants to go to talk about that! Why is that? Because we are so focussed on enjoying life. We should enjoy life. God has given us all things richly to enjoy. But we should also consider our mortality and realize we are only here for a short time. The things of this world are passing away. We have something waiting that is so much greater than anything this world has to offer.

In spite of our failure to bring up the subject of heaven, there has been more research in this generation into the reports of those who have died than ever before. That may be because we have come so far in the field of resuscitation. The results of those studies into after death experiences have led in two very different directions. The prevailing view, led by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, is that we all end up in a wonderful place, so we should accept death and not resist or question it. Dr. Raymond Moody leads the other view with a more Christian perspective. In the Christian camp is Dr. Maurice Rawlings who proposes that too much of the Kubler-Ross perspective is based on near death experiences – not actual deaths. He also suggests that there is an intentional neglect of those cases in which a person reports of entering a hellish place.

Dr. Rawlings was converted when his patient's heart stopped while performing a treadmill test. As Dr. Rawlings massaged his patient's heart and attempted to implant a pacemaker, the dying man asked how to escape the hell into which he was entering. Dr. Rawlings said he was a Doctor and not Priest. The next time the patient came to he pleaded again for some kind of help to escape his fate. Dr. Rawlings told him to call out to Jesus to save him. When he came to again, his face was at peace, and he thanked Dr. Rawlings. Dr. Rawlings went home and decided he needed that same peace in his own soul. People don't need to be told to accept death, they need to be told to be prepared for death by accepting the One who can save them from judgement.

If you were boarding a ship or plane to an unknown destination to meet people you had never seen you would go with some fear and trepidation. I certainly would. But if you board knowing where you are going and who you will meet, you can go with the warmth of assurance that things are going to be wonderful. No wonder so many face death with fear and anxiety! They don't know where they are going.

Someone once said, "Until you are prepared to die you are not really prepared to live." If you are prepared to die you have your priorities straight. You are at peace with your Creator. Christ is Lord of your life and Savior of your soul. That is the only way to really live.

If you are prepared, what is it that you are prepared to enter? The most reliable description we have of heaven is in the book of Revelation, chapter 21. There are several views as to when this chapter actually takes place. I won't get into that as we are focussed on just where and what heaven is.

Rev 21:1 (NIV) *1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*

The Bible refers to three heavens. Very simply put there is the atmosphere, the universe, and the place of God's throne. So much of what we will be looking at is beyond our comprehension. Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor entered into the hearts of men what God has prepared for us. (1Corinthians 2:9-10) We may be referring to another dimension in which ours exists. How could writers of the first century express that? Suffice to say that the end of the old heaven must be limited to our atmosphere and possibly space. Though the Bible promises the foundation of the earth will remain, it does not promise the earth itself will. (Psalm 104:5) In fact, Peter also foresaw this passing of the old physical realm. 2 Peter 3:10-12 (NIV) *10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. 11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives 12 as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.*

Notice both the earth and the heavens are mentioned. The old creation was under a curse. This old tired and scared planet will be delivered by total destruction and replacement. Isaiah the prophet agrees. Isaiah 65:17 (NIV) *17 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.* The new earth and heavens will have nothing of the curse that sin brought. There will be no sickness, death or destructiveness. All the brutality of this world will be a thing of the past. The lion will lie down with the lamb. If the sea is no more, there will be 8 times as much land available for farming. Imagine a whole new world to explore! If you think this world is beautiful and fascinating, wait till you see the new one the curse on sin has never touched! This one is reeling under the load of man's waste. Our climate is getting out of balance, the ozone is disappearing, and the ice caps are melting. The curse of sin has everything in creation groaning to be delivered. It will all be made new! No scars in it or in you! The only scars in heaven will be on our Savior!

Rev 21:2 (NIV) *2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*

This is the presentation of the bride of Christ to the world. She is the heavenly city, New Jerusalem. It is the people that make up the city. Why are we so beautiful? I'm sure you have been to weddings. Recall how radiant and beautiful your wife or your daughter was. That was the way John sees the church returning as a city. He calls her

Commented [Q1]: 9 However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--10 but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. 1 Cor 2:9-10 (NIV)

Commented [Q2]: 5 *Who* laid the foundations of the earth, *that* it should not be removed for ever. Psalms 104:5 (KJV)

'prepared'. In his Gospel he recorded that Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you..." (John 14:1,2) What He is doing is preparing us to be the city. It only took Him 6 days to create this world, but for the last two thousand years He has been preparing the saints to be the city of God.

In this passage and the John 14 passage there is a wonderful analogy of a groom and his bride. When the bride-price was agreed upon by the fathers, the groom would offer his future bride a cup of wine that represented his life. If she took it and drank it all she was accepting the proposal. Then the groom would say the words Jesus spoke in John 14. In my Father's house are many rooms. I am going to go and add room for you so that we might live together. The Jewish communities were built in family groups around and open courtyard. When someone was to marry, they first had to add another room around the courtyard of their father. When the father says the room was complete, the groom would go to the bride's home with his friends and family. He alone would go into the home of the bride, where she was born, and consummate the marriage. Then they would come out to the courtyard together, where all the guests waited, and he would present his bride. Revelation 21:2 is the presentation of the bride to the world after the marriage feast in heaven!

Notice that he says it is a holy city. We have been made holy because the bride price was His blood that washes white as snow. Our old guardian Satan was not willing to sell you for a small price because he knew how much Christ values you. He asked for the very blood of the groom. He did not know he was sealing his own fate and suggesting the most sacrificial display of love ever to be witnessed.

We will be a prepared city for we will have seen Him as He is and made like Him, transformed into His image. (1John 3:2) His blood has washed us white as snow and the unhindered vision of His glory has transformed our very being into His likeness. That is part of the difficulty of the church here on this earth. We are not yet prepared for we have not seen Him as He is. We see but a poor reflection as in a mirror. Then we will see face to face. (1 Corinthians 13:12) Hearts have been washed but the body is not transformed and our incompleteness offends and mistreats. That is the hardest thing about church in this age – people. We need patience with one another, realizing we are all works in progress. Heaven is nothing like the present church. Heaven is full of saints prepared for eternity. He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it! (Philippians 1:6) That is one of my favorite promises. I will be like Him! You will be like Him! Imagine a world in which everyone is as loving and understanding as Jesus. Imagine everyone having all the fruits of the Spirit, love, joy peace, patience, kindness, and gentleness, to the full! What a place! Heaven is a prepared place because the people that make it up have been prepared. I long to be in a setting like that. All God's saints have longed for such a place. The author of Hebrews wrote in 11:16 "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." If we were satisfied sinners that loved this world, then God would be ashamed to be called our God. The more we mature in Christ, demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit, the more our fellowship is like heaven and less like the world.

Commented [Q3]: 2 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.
3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. John 14:2-3 (NIV)

Commented [Q4]: 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 1 John 3:2 (NIV)

Commented [Q5]: 1 Cor 13:12 (NIV) 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.

Commented [Q6]: 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. Phil 1:6 (NIV)

Rev 21:3 (NIV) *3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."*

That word 'dwelling' is the same word in [John 1:14](#) referring to Jesus' physical body. The body of Jesus was His dwelling place while incarnated. *"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."* Through all eternity Jesus will be physically with us in His glorified body. This is the fulfillment of Jesus' prayer in John 17:24 (NIV), *"Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."*

Commented [Q7]: 14 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14 (NIV)

Have you ever wished you could just look in His eyes? We walk by faith and not by sight, but in that day we will also see Him in His glory continually. Need His counsel? Speak and He will clearly and lovingly speak with you, face to face. We don't realize what an awesome thing it is to stand before Him, but we get a glimpse in Scripture. Isaiah became unraveled, Job put his hand on His mouth and had no more questions, and Daniel and John both fell prostrate. But in that day we will have a body that can stand in His presence beholding His glory and receive His wonderful words of life.

We will be home! Home is where our family is. He will be our God and we will be His people. We will be so honored to be His people! Most of us love our home! It is a place we can relax, let our burdens down, and the best thing for me about home is the companionship of someone who understands and cares. But the very best home on this earth is a miserably poor comparison to how our Father's house will meet those needs. We will never have to leave home, nor will we ever want to.

Jesus told us we aren't given in marriage there. Some people are saddened by the thought because they so value their mate. Jesus will live with us! When you see Him, count on it, when you see Him and are enveloped by His all encompassing love, you won't be worried about spending time with your mate. I know it is hard for some of us to imagine, but that is because we haven't moved more deeply into the realization of His love for us or seen the splendor of His glory.

Rev 21:4 (NIV) *4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."* I've got some scars. Most of you do too. Some of them are in my memory. I've asked God to take them away, because they are painful reminders and sometimes distract me. I'm sure most of you can relate. The Spirit seems to have said, "Not yet." But what we're reading here is when it will happen. This world is so sin sick and our old nature is so vile that tears, pain, crying and death are ever with us. Imagine never having to face those things again – NEVER! You won't fear because there will be no more things to be afraid of! The only One who could wipe away all the pain of this earthly life will approach you individually, personally, and wipe all that pain away. Just the hope of it makes my heart sing!

Rev 21:5 (NIV) *5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."* Just in case you have any doubts God said for John to be sure and write it down so you

could have this hope. It will ALL be made new. No scars. No damaged twisted sick lives. No disease or pain! ALL! The world, the universe, and our bodies. Count on it because these words are trustworthy!

Rev 21:6 (NIV) *6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. God lives outside of time. In His realm it is done! He started all and ends all. He Himself is the beginning and He is the end. From Him and to Him and through Him are all things. Anyone who will recognize their thirst and come and drink will be given freely of the water of life. We are surrounded by thirsty souls. They are drinking from every polluted pond and water hole that dot the landscape of Sedona. Jesus says, "Bring them to me and they can drink their fill of the water of life." Are you drinking freely or just sipping? When there is such an abundance in Him you can drink up! People will come to get directions to the water of life if they see your thirst has been quenched. It doesn't cost us anything because it cost Him everything!*

Rev 21:7 (NIV) *7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. Are you in the will? Will you inherit all this? John told us in one of his letters who overcomes. 1 John 5:4-5 (NIV) 4 for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*
If you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and have been born again to a new life in Him you are an overcomer. You will know God as your Father, your perfect loving Father, throughout eternity. The world has no hold on you because you see with eyes of faith a city that has foundations whose Builder and Maker is God. Your hope is there and your treasures are there. You are an overcomer on your way home to our Father's house. "Knowing our final destination should make our daily life more vigorous, our problems on earth less troublesome." Billy Graham 2 Cor 4:17 (KJV) *17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;...*

This isn't death – it's glory! It isn't dark – it's light! It isn't stumbling groping,
Or even faith – it's sight! This isn't grief – it's having My last tear wiped away;
It's sunrise – it's morning Of my eternal day!

This isn't even praying - It's speaking face to face; Listening and glimpsing
The wonders of His grace. This is the end of pleading
For strength to bear my pain; Not even pain's dark memory
Will ever live again.

How did I bear the earth-life Before I knew this rapture Of meeting face to face
The One who sought me, saved me, And kept me by His grace! MSN

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we've no less
days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.

Benediction: Hebrews 12:28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot
be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe.

Commented [Q8]: Nicholson, Martha Snell, *Christian Medical Society Journal*, Vol. X, Number 1, Winter, 1979