Made for Heaven

*“For our* ***citizenship is in heaven****, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”* Philippians 3:20-21

I begin this sermon with two statements I believe to be almost universally true: Everyone wants to know about heaven and everyone wants to go there. Recent polls suggest that 80% of all Americans believe there is a place called Heaven. This statistic is encouraging to me because it tells me that even in this age of disbelief and skepticism, there is something deep inside the human heart that cries out, “There’s got to be something more.” While our brief time on earth is filled with many blessings, it is also filled with much heartache and suffering. We desire something more than the pain and suffering this life can bring, something more than 70 or 80 years on planet earth, something more than being born, living, dying and then being buried in the ground. I believe we were all created with a “God shaped vacuum” inside the human heart. This also means we were created with a “heaven shaped vacuum”, because we desire to be in perfect union with our Creator, not separated from Him by our sin. We were made to live forever somewhere. I believe we struggle in this life with sin and the world in which we live, because we weren’t created to live in this fallen world. 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. (TELL THE REAGAN JOKE ABOUT CHARLIE NOT WANTING TO GO TO HEAVEN WITH “THAT BUNCH”) Ever been to a funeral where the minister doesn’t mention heaven? If you took a microphone to the streets of Memphis 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. Doesn’t it make sense for us to know everything we can about the place we are going to spend eternity?

This morning we are going to look at some frequently asked questions about Heaven. But before we dive in to that, I would like to 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.

Books detailing near death experiences and even some claiming death experiences have been very prevalent over the last several years. It’s a bad idea to base our theology about Heaven on these accounts. Let’s build our theology around the one source we know to be true, The Word of God.

1. **Is Heaven a real place?**

Heaven is a real place, **prepared** for us.

John 14:1-3

*“Heaven is a real place, just as much place as is New York or Chicago.”* Rev. Charles Ferguson Ball

Twice in three verses Jesus calls heaven a place. He means that Heaven is a real place, as real as New York 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 house with many dwelling places.

Jesus also tells us that He has prepared our place in Heaven for us. Imagine having a holiday meal prepared for you by a relative. When you arrive, the aroma from the kitchen is so wonderful, the table is set with the finest china, all the bells and whistles have been pulled out to make that particular holiday special. Makes you feel very special doesn’t it. Tonight at Home Group, we will be welcomed into the Mosier’s home. They will have prepared to have us over for dinner and bible study tonight. How much does Jesus love you? He died an excruciating death so that you could live eternally in a place that He began preparing the moment He ascended into Heaven. I CAN ONLY IMAGINE WHAT IT WILL BE LIKE WHEN WE SEE HIM FACE TO FACE.

Heaven is the **dwelling** place of God.

Acts 1:11, Psalm 33:13

His throne is there, the angels are there, and the Lord Jesus Christ is in Heaven. Jesus told the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43)

Heaven is **closer** than you might think.

Hebrews 12:22-24

Third, (and I find this fact fascinating), 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 Bible teaches that we pass immediately from this life into the presence of Christ in Heaven. (2 Cor. 5:8) 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:

READ HEBREWS 12:22-24

The writer here is 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 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.**

1. **What is Heaven like?**

Here are some biblical facts about heaven. It is…

* 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)

Images from Rev. 21-22.

* Streets paved with gold.
* Gates made of pearl.
* Walls made of precious stones.
* No tears, no sorrow, no regret, no remorse, no sin, no funerals

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, much greater!

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 of the suitcase before you pass.” He took the suitcase, opened it, saw the gold bars and asked quizzically, “You brought PAVEMENT???”

When John writes in Revelation about a street paved with gold, I believe him. He simply is reporting what he saw in his vision. I think God is also teaching us that things we value so highly in this life will be used to pave the roads in heaven.

As I’ve said before, Heaven is a real place with real people. Hebrews tells us that it is a city built by God. 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
* No potholes
* No power outages

It would be 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.

In the city that God builds, there are no tears, there is no sorrow, no regret, no remorse. Bitterness is gone forever, failure left far behind, suffering redeemed and rewarded. There are no eyeglasses, no braces, no wheelchairs, no false teeth, 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. No Obamacare, no aspirin, accidents over, cancer disappeared, heart attacks banished. In heaven no one grows old and feeble.

There is one thing you won’t find in heaven. No cemeteries. Why? Because, there are no funerals.

If you make 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 come finally come true.

1. **Who is in Heaven right now?**

The Father, The Lamb, The Heavenly Host, and the Saints

The Saints includes OT 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. Children who died before the “age of accountability” will be there and those born mental limitations preventing them from understanding the gospel.

Heaven is where we **belong.**

Phil. 3:20

Heaven is our strong **desire.**

2 Cor. 5:1-9

Sadly, not everyone who had died is there right now. The Bible speaks of the saved and the lost. The saved are those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior. The saved are those who have recognized that their sins have caused a separation between them and their God. (Isaiah 59:2). They have recognized their need for and accepted the gift of grace available to all men. (2 Peter 3:9). The lost are those who have not accepted those truths and are blinded by their disobedience and rejection of Jesus Christ. They live in their sins and have been deceived by the god of this world (Satan) that their sins are really no big deal. They compare themselves to mankind instead of the Holy God.

There is a 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 hell.

I simply want you to know what God has said about Heaven and who will go there. The saved of all ages will be there and that will undoubtedly include many people who would surprise us if we knew it now. (BETHLEHEM SHOP OWNER STORY) Certainly Heaven will be more wonderful than our imagination and it’s 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.

1. **Do you have the hope of Heaven?**

God has made it easy for you. He did the hard part.

2 Cor. 5:21

Thankfully, there is only one way.

John 14:6, John 10:9

This is the most important question of all.

Several years ago, Dr. D. James Kennedy 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 tonight 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 you 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?

Ok, back to the White House. The President paused, thought for a moment, then replied, “Well, I’d have to answer with John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” That’s a great 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 think so” or “I hope so” or “I believe I’m good enough” are answers that mean you’re not certain. If you’re wrong, you’re going to be wrong for eternity!

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 is 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?

What is your hope for heaven? Mine is Jesus. I’ve staked everything on Him. If he can’t take me to Heaven, then I’m not going. 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 your salvation.

One final word and I’m done. No one goes to Heaven by accident. If you think you might be standing on sinking sand or leaning on your own name, you can change course right now. God loves you and wants to rescue you from the grip of the devil. He wants you to spend eternity with Him. Jesus has your place ready. Eternity with Him can start right now. With every head bowed and every eye closed, would you pray with me?

Dear Jesus,

Thank you for making me and loving me, even when I’ve ignored you and gone my own way. I realize I need you in my life and I’m sorry for my sins. I ask you to forgive me. Thank you for dying on the cross for me. Please help me to understand it more. As much as I know now, I want to follow You from now on. Please come into my life and make me a new person inside. I accept your gift of salvation. Please help me grow as a Christian.