

# Heaven

**1** Heaven and Hell. The concepts of the opposing eternal destinies that await man. The final states of everlasting bliss for the righteous, those that have been saved, and everlasting torment, for the wicked, those that are lost or damned. The traditional Christian doctrines of heaven and hell, while formally accepted by most North American religions, are increasingly being skewed or reinterpreted, or both, sometimes even among so-called fundamentalists or other conservatives.

What we see when we look at religion, in the whole, but even at congregations of the Church, it seems that Christians of today, unlike their forebears, rarely write hymns about the sweet by and by or preach hellfire-and-brimstone sermons. There is even a distinct drop-off in what is called missionary evangelism, the sending out of people to preach to those in the world, except for certain religions such as the Mormons or Jehovah Witnesses, who still practice the sending out on mission their people. But in every case of those doing missionary work, it is to convert people to their religion and not to the Word of God, the Gospel. Remember what Christ told the disciples in...

**Mark 16:15**

**2**

**15** And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.

People are first converted to the Gospel, to Christ, then, upon their acceptance of and obedience to, that Gospel, they are baptized and then the Lord adds them to His Church.

There is a distressing dynamic that is occurring in the world today and especially here in the United States. We are seeing loyalty and commitment, patriotism, if you will, becoming something to be sneered at, those that gave their lives for the freedoms we enjoy, disrespected. We see the concept of country, of loyalty to it and what it represents, as becoming a joke, something to be scorned. The laws of this country, once respected as well as feared are being viewed as nothing more than suggestions to be ignored. Why do you think that is? I believe it is because the common belief in retributive justice is declining, not only in penology; such as the decline of capital punishment or just consequence for crimes, but also in theology; the decline of the doctrine of hell.

This is not intended to be some sort of dooms-day prophecy, but rather a realistic assessment of what is occurring in the world. The idea of a heavenly hope seems to continue as a common theme at funerals, but the teaching of the danger of condemnation is rapidly disappearing. It's good to tell people of the love of God and the reward He promises, but, because God is love, things such as wrath, anger, retribution, condemnation, hell can't be taught or discussed? I guess it's a good thing Paul didn't know that...

**Eph 5:6**

**3**

**6** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

The wrath of God is real and will come upon all that choose disobedience and unfaithfulness, unless they present themselves to God through Christ and receive forgiveness for their sin.

**1 Thess 1:9-10**

**4**

**9** For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, **10** and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

It is through Jesus and His sacrifice that man can be rescued from the penalty of sin, which must be paid, and which is what condemns man to eternal death.

**Rom 6:23**

**5**

23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

God , through Paul, makes the contrast we have been talking about...

6

### *Death vs Life*

Modern day Christian scholars often stress as a substitute for the old hope of heaven (and fear of hell), the Biblical promise of **Rev. 21:1**...

7

### *"A new heaven and a new earth"*

This is sometimes linked with an even more convoluted teaching that focuses on that new earth being another physical earth, as we know it now and that being the new heaven. Think of it this way; **This**-worldliness is rapidly eclipsing **Other**-worldliness. Let's look at what John says in that passage in Revelation...

**Rev 21:1-4**

8

**1** And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, **4** and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

In man's relationship with God there is the promise of eternal salvation, a home in heaven with God. That is the hope and confidence of all the faithful. That is the joy and blessing of the future that God promises. But there are also aspects of rejoicing and blessing that come from being a Christian, in this life, of having a relationship with God through Christ. I want to build on that idea and where those blessings lead us as we look at the idea of being in that relationship. We are going to be looking at...

9

## *Heaven*

The idea of heaven is used in three primary ways in the scriptures;

10

- 1) The firmament, as "fowls of the heaven" (**Gen. 2:19; 7:3,23; Ps 8:8**)
- 2) The starry heavens (**Deut. 17:3; Jer. 8:2; Matt 24:29**).
- 3) "The heaven of heavens," or "the third heaven" (**Deut. 10:14; Ps 115:16; 148:4; 2 Cor. 12:2**).

There is also evidence supporting a fourth way that heaven is used and this may surprise you, but in a symbolic way it is also used to speak of...

11

- 4) The Church

When we consider the beauty and wonder that Heaven will be, we can see many of the same qualities in the Church. In this lesson, that is what we are going to be looking at, Heaven, or at least the concept of the characteristics of Heaven as being related to the Church, the Kingdom of God Christ came to establish.

**12** A) Christ calls Heaven His "Father's house".

*John 14:1-2*

**13**

2 "In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.

The House of God, implying that this is where God lives, His abode, reminiscent of how the Tabernacle of the Jews was viewed under the Mosaical Law.

**14** B) It is called "paradise" (**Luke 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4; Rev 2:7**).

*Rev 2:6-7*

**15**

7 'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.'

Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, at least in part, to prevent them from eating of the tree of life in the Garden.

*Gen 3:22*

**16**

22 Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever"

**17** C) "The heavenly Jerusalem" (**Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22; Rev 3:12**).

*Heb 12:22*

**18**

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels,

The writer in Hebrews is not writing to those who have already passed on, but to those who have restored their relationship with God through a faithful obedience and response to Christ and the Word. He says that their response has brought them to the city of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Church.

This concept is reinforced in Matt...

**19** D) The "kingdom of heaven" (**Matt 25:1; James 2:5**).

*Matt 25:1*

**20**

1 "Then the kingdom of heaven will be comparable to ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went out to meet the bridegroom.

This "Kingdom" is defined in 2 Peter as....

**21** E) The "eternal kingdom" (**2 Peter 1:11**).

*2 Peter 1:10-11*

**22**

10 Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble; **11** for in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

Along this same line, this eternal kingdom is also expressed as...

**23** F) The "eternal inheritance" (**1 Peter 1:4; Heb 9:15**).

*Heb 9:15*

**24**

**15** And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, in order that since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Peter talks about Christians as being “Sojourners”, these are those that have an ulterior purpose, a goal, in...

**25** G) The "better country" (**Heb 11:14,16**).

**Heb 11:13-16**

**26**

**14** For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

**15** And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. **16** But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

And as we saw in **Hebrews 12**, the Church is described as “The City of God”.

The Church is shown to be God’s house...

**Heb 10:19-22**

**27**

**19** Since therefore, brethren, we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way which He inaugurated for us through the veil, that is, His flesh, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

The Church is the avenue that the Christian, through faith, travels to to have the opportunity to partake of the tree of life, which is said to be in the abode of God, the Paradise of God, Mount Zion, the Heavenly Jerusalem, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Eternal Kingdom.

This is not to say that the Church is the Eternal Inheritance promised by God, as seen in **2 Peter 1**, rather it does illustrate the essentially close relationship of the Church to the eternal abode in heaven.

When a man comes to God through Christ, he is added to the “Kingdom”, the Church. There he begins to partake of those things, the Word, that will, through the grace and mercy of God, ultimately give him the opportunity to partake of the Tree of Life. The man of God is truly seeking a better country, that home eternal, by living in a different country while here on earth. A part of this world yet separated from it by faith, actions, and love for God.

That really is the point in **Heb. 10**. When we come to God through faith, we enter the Holy Place that before Christ was off limits to all but the most High Priest, but now through the sacrifice of Christ has been opened to all who will come. Christ has afforded man the opportunity to have that eternal inheritance by opening the door to the Holy Place with the sanctification of man with His blood and breaking down of the barriers between man and God with His flesh. Christ, God, the Holy Spirit have done their part. The avenue has been opened in the Church, but it is man’s burden to draw near in faith, allowing our hearts to be cleansed from evil through the washing of water, baptism.

This brings us back to...

**Rev 21:1-4**

**28**

**1** And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. **2** And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. **3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men,

and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, **4** and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.

We all understand that Heaven, that spiritual final reward, is a place of joy, exultation, rejoicing, a place without pain, sorrow, or tears. But I would point out brethren, that from what we have seen in the scriptures, the Church is as much a part of Heaven as Heaven is of the Church.

A while back, a tragedy happened in Fresno. A family of four were out for a walk and bike ride. The father had the 18 month old in a seat on his bike, the 7 year old was on his bike, and the mother was walking a little behind. They were on a popular bike path crossing a busy street in the cross walk when a guy I have known for a number of years, a basketball coach at a local high school, driving drunk, hit the father with the baby and the 7 year old. The 7 year old was drug a couple hundred yards as the driver left the scene of the accident and later died at the hospital. The father was injured and the baby is in intensive care. The mother watched in horror as their quiet afternoon journey turned into a nightmare that almost completely destroyed her family.

When we think about the difficulties we have going on in our lives, how do we equate them to watching your family get decimated in front of your eyes? Or , what about Loren, who did come back to the scene of the accident, failing the sobriety test at the scene, a father in his own right, now facing felony drunk driving charges, not to mention man slaughter, seeing his horrific indiscretion not only ruining the family he hit but his own?

In the face of tragedy, personal loss, financial difficulties, is it possible to have no tears or sorrow. I believe that the answer is no. We are human and we are affected by the cares of this world. I think that what we are seeing in the scriptures is that when we draw near with a sincere heart to God, He will draw near to us.

Brethren, the strength, the emotional stability of the Christian comes not from being unaffected by the cares that beset us, but rather by looking forward to the time when there will be no cares or trials. A time when, through a faithful obedience and diligent working in the Church, we will stand before Christ and be welcomed, because of the Grace and Mercy of God, into our eternal home forever.

The idea of no tears has no reference to this world but speaks entirely to the fact that there need be no tears for us in this world when we consider the hope of eternal life with the knowledge and confidence that we are safe in the arms of Jesus because...

**Rom 8:31-35**

**29**

**31** What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? **32** He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? **33** Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; **34** who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us. **35** Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

**30**

So, I'm curious, just exactly when is it time to take a stand? When does Heaven become real for us?