

GLIMPSES OF GLORY



*A look at what the Bible has
to say about heaven...*

with Pastor David Legge

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Glimpses Of Glory - Chapter 1

"Why Study Heaven?"

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Well now, let's turn in our Bibles - we've got two portions of Scripture that I want us to consider first of all. Let me say that there won't be an in depth exposition this evening of any particular portion of God's word, but we'll be looking at various selected Scriptures as we look generally at an introduction to this great theme that we'll spend more time in detail looking at the specifics of in the weeks that lie ahead, as we consider the title 'Why Study Heaven?'.

The first Scripture I want you to turn to is Colossians chapter 3, Paul's epistle to the Colossians chapter 3; and then the second portion, if you want to turn to it as well to have it ready, is Matthew chapter 6 - the Sermon on the Mount. But first of all Colossians chapter 3, and Paul writing to these believers says in verse 1: *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory"*.

Then turning over to Matthew's gospel, as I said, and chapter 6 this time, verse 19 - Jesus speaking, as much to us as He was to those in the multitude on the Mount, as He delivered this great sermon says: *"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"*.

What the Bible has to say about heaven will inevitably, over these weeks, give us a glimpse, many glimpses hopefully, into glory. Tonight we want to look, generally speaking, at why we should embark upon a study of heaven. Now 'heaven' as a word is found 582 times within the Bible. It has different senses and meanings, and we'll not be considering them all throughout this Bible study series. Of course, 'heaven' can refer to the atmospheric heaven, the place where the clouds are and the birds fly - that's not the heaven we'll be considering. Then there is the planetary heaven, outer space, and that is not what we will consider. Rather we will be considering God's dwelling place, which is also called 'heaven'.

Now I'm very rarely personal when I preach, and I hope you'll forgive me for being such just now, but I want you to understand a little bit of the process of how I felt led to preach a series of studies on the subject of heaven. As I was considering taking up the Bible Readings again on a Monday evening, I had no real guidance regarding what theme, or what book, or what subject to take. Then my grandfather died, passed into the presence of the Lord as a saved man, prepared for eternity - and, in fact, both my grandfathers died in the space of about 20 months. As often is the case when we experience the death of a loved one who has fallen asleep in Jesus, it causes us to think in greater depth about heaven. After both these deaths, I found myself at times lying in bed thinking about what heaven must be like. One evening, as I was lying in bed, I had, I can only say, a flash of inspiration, and I felt that I should take a series on heaven and call it 'Glimpses of Glory'. Now that was before the funeral service of my grandfather that had died most recently, and when it came to that day I knew the hymns that were picked, but they didn't seem too significant, or to relate to this subject

at that time - but as soon as we started singing, the first hymn was 'Sing The Wondrous Love of Jesus', that we have already sung, and the third verse confirmed to me the reason why I was to preach on the subject of heaven, and it goes like this - at least the two lines that were relevant:

'Just one glimpse of Him in glory
Will the toils of life repay'.

Just one glimpse, or more than one glimpse, of Him in glory will the toils of life repay! Dr Steven J. Lawson wrote a book recently on the subject of heaven, and he entitled it 'Heaven Help Us' - very insightful, because whatever our lot in life is as one of God's children, I believe, and I think you'll find in your own experience, that as we contemplate and meditate and study in depth over these weeks heaven, you will find that heaven will help us. Now, we're tempted to think, especially those who are perhaps younger, that heaven is really for the old folk, those in the waiting room of Glory, those who are sick and want rid of all these diseases and ailments in their body, those who are dying perhaps with terminal illnesses. Heaven is something that you want to think about if you're in those circumstances, but what relevance has it to me in my twenties or my thirties or forties, or in midlife? Well, the aim that I have in preaching this series on heaven is that I want all of us, whoever we, whatever age we may be, whatever health we might have, I want us to become more heavenly minded!

Now that is not escapism, as some would say, trying to artificially get away from the harsh realities of life around us. It is a fallacy to claim that someone, as many say, can be too heavenly minded for any earthly use. The opposite of that statement is in fact the truth: the more a person has heaven on their mind, the more use they will be on earth and to heaven. If a person is useless on earth, I assure you it's not because they think too much about heaven, it's because they think too little of it. The reasons for and the benefits of studying heaven become self-evident, and will do in the weeks that lie ahead. But let me, this evening, in our introductory night, summarise some of these reasons why we should study heaven and take much time in doing it, that we might be clear as we go through more specific subjects each night why we're doing it. Now this will not be an exhaustive answer as to why we ought to study heaven, but I'm trying to get as much into the time that is afforded to us tonight to help us to understand why it's important, and why it will benefit us immensely.

Now there are five reasons that I have tonight, and here is the first - why is it important to study heaven? First of all: because Christians are going there. Christians are going there! Now the staggering truth is that there is a deafening silence among Christians, and in the church at large, when it comes to this great subject of heaven. Apart from a brief mention in the odd sermon, particularly at funeral services, or in a paperback book, or in the hymns that we sing, or the prayers that we pray - yes, it is mentioned, and we give a wink and a nod toward the reality of the belief and the doctrine of heaven, but very little in-depth study actually occurs regarding this subject. Let me challenge you: many Christians, I think, who have attended church all their lives, especially those in middle age, around 50 and under, can't recall hardly ever hearing a sermon on the subject of heaven - and if it is even mentioned in passing, seldom is the subject developed and explained.

I'm always encouraging you to study Christian history, and it's only recently that the doctrine of heaven seems less important to Christians and the church. For centuries, almost 2000 years of our Christian history, heaven was an important, vital focal point to every believer and to the Church militant as a body. But for some reason today, as one author has very perceptively said, heaven has fallen off our radar screens. It's remarkable when you think

about it for a moment, when we consider that there could be no more important subject for the child of God than where we will spend life, eternal life, forever, for all eternity - yet Christians pay little attention to the details concerning their eternal destiny. It was J. C. Ryle, that great Anglican evangelical Bishop of Liverpool, who said these words, listen very carefully: 'The man who is about to sail for Australia or New Zealand as a settler is naturally anxious to know something about his future home. Its climate, its employments, its inhabitants, its ways, its customs, all these are subjects of deep interest to him. You're leaving the land of your nativity, you're going to spend the rest of your life in a new hemisphere, it would be strange indeed if you did not desire information about your new abode. Now surely, if we hope to dwell forever in a better country, even a heavenly one, we ought to seek all the knowledge we can about it, before we go to our eternal home we should try to become acquainted with it'.

That makes sense, doesn't it? But the great question is, and there is much instruction in the answer to it: why is it that we are not more heavenly minded? Now let me give you at least four suggestions why that might be. First of all, I think the reason why we don't study and think about heaven much is because we are too earthly minded. For some, even Christians, heaven has been eclipsed by earth, earth is bigger, earth is brighter, it is more attractive, it is more intoxicating, it has more of a magnetic draw. Someone has said: 'As the world goes, so goes the church', just as many unbelievers around us in our world are thinking less and less about God and eternal truths and realities, it has infiltrated the church, filtered down into our hearts as we become more materialistic and affluent - the thought of heaven doesn't draw us, and woo us, and win us as it used to other Christians of bygone days. I don't know whether you've ever tried holding a tiny penny to your eye and then look at the sun, but what happens is that massive ball of fire is completely blotted out. What happens is that even believers hold the world so close to their hearts and to their vision that they stop seeing heaven.

One of the main reasons why we don't think about it is because we are too earthly minded. But a second reason may be because we are so occupied with the means, the manner, the timeframe of how we are going to get to heaven - that is, the study of eschatology, that is the study of the end times and the last things. Now let me say categorically that that is a very important study, because it's based on God's word, but so much has been written about prophecy, and preached about the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, yet comparatively little has been said and written about our final destination that we will be in forever - heaven! In fact, if you go to your local Christian bookshop, or if you have copies of them in your own library - systematic theologies - take them down from your shelf and flick through the chapters on the second coming of the Lord Jesus, and the last judgement, and you'll find them going through all the views of the Lord's return - amillennialism, post-millennialism, pre-millennialism, and whatever else there might be out there. They take so much time going over all those different theories about the second coming of Christ that the eternal state, the new heavens and the new earth, the place we will be forever is only given a couple of pages. It's as if they have to write something on it, because that's how the Bible ends, but they don't really want to spend the time studying it in depth.

The third reason, perhaps, why we don't think about heaven much is because we don't want to think about our own death. It's often something that we level at the unbeliever, but could it be as true for some of us? I'll leave that one with you. The fourth reason I think we don't think much and study much about heaven, perhaps worst of all, it's because some of us aren't going there. Pardon? Yes! Some of us may not be going there. Let me say, before we go into any more of our introduction this evening, and indeed subsequent studies: if you find that you have a lack of desire even to be willing to think about heaven, and you have a lack of desire

even to be willing to want to be with Christ forever, which is far better, that should make you concerned to make your calling and election sure in Christ. That's what the Bible teaches, that if you love this world more than you love God, more than you love Christ, more than you love heaven, the love of the Father does not dwell in you.

I remember being greatly impressed many years ago by reading one of the great Puritans, John Owen, in his book 'The Glory of Christ', he says these profound words that relate to us regarding heaven, this is what he says: 'No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight in heaven who does not in some measure behold it by faith in this world'. Is there a lack of holiness in your life? You know God's process is very clear in Romans chapter 8, that those elect, predestined, are then called, those that are called are justified, those that are justified are sanctified, and those that are sanctified will be glorified. Maybe the reason why you are not sanctified - and I know it is a process, and I know that we all have struggles with sin, and we've all got grey areas in our lives that we are trying to overcome - but the whole point is this: if there is no semblance of holiness in our lives, it is questionable whether we are travelling on our way to heaven, and that might betray the reason why you haven't a desire for it. Listen to God's word in Hebrews 12 and verse 14: 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord'. Could it be that some in the church even do not think, or study, or want to go to heaven because they aren't going there?

The first reason I've given to you tonight of why we should study heaven is because Christians are going there. The second reason I want to give you why we should study heaven is simply because we can. That might seem an obvious statement, but let me ask you tonight: what do you know about heaven? What do you know about it? I'm not talking about statements that you say: 'Well, I think... I imagine...', I'm not talking about that. What do you know definitely, categorically, that you can prove from the scriptures about heaven? Let me ask the question another way: where does your knowledge that you have, whatever it is, about heaven come from? Where is it derived? I fear that some of our understandings of heaven are based simply on sentimentalism, it's maybe coming from the songs, the hymns, or the choruses that we sing - many of them, regarding heaven, are distinctly un-Biblical. Perish the thought, perhaps our understanding of Glory comes from some of the near death experiences that we read about in cheap Christian paperbacks, or even in popular magazines, and we think that this is what it's going to be like - looking down a tunnel at a light, and floating out of our body and all sorts of things, being carried and taken on a tour of heaven or hell. Maybe your understanding of heaven is wispy and vague, we think heaven is a non-physical, an ethereal place like the eastern religions teach about. Maybe we have been indoctrinated by some of the new-age philosophies that are very prevalent around us.

I'll tell you this: you would be surprised what a lot of people think about heaven. You might even get surprised as you go through this series what you think about heaven, and how wrong it may be! Now maybe I'm wrong on this one, but I suspect that for the most part most Christians, apart from saying 'Well, I know I'm going there, and I know it is a place where there's no more sin or pain, and Jesus and God are there', they can't give you any idea what heaven is going to be like. They can't articulate what historical Christianity down through the years has thought and taught and reasoned about heaven. Now if that's the case for you and me, we've only got ourselves to blame. The reason why there is a dearth in the understanding and in the contemplation of heaven is because we have failed to explore and explain the Scriptures that deal with this teaching about heaven.

Let me say that I will endeavour in this series to base everything that I say upon the Scriptures. That must be our starting point, we must think biblically, of course, about

everything; but as the case in matter tonight and these weeks is heaven, we must make sure that our understanding of heaven comes from nowhere else but God's word. Now, often we explain our ignorance of heaven by this remark, and I must say I have made it myself in the past: 'Heaven is unimaginable'. Maybe some of you have been thinking that, even hearing that I'm taking up this theme: 'What are you going to really say? We don't know that much about it, and the Bible is full of what heaven won't be like but says very little about what heaven is actually like' - that is a common perception which I believe is wrong. 'Heaven is unimaginable!' - let me say to you tonight: heaven is not unimaginable, it is not! Now I'm not a mind reader, but I know where you're going - 'Ah, but what about what Paul said?'. Was it not the apostle who said in 1 Corinthians 2:9 that it has not entered into our minds, or into the heart of a human being, what heaven will be like? Now I admit to you that the half has not been told, and it would be wrong to say that we can know everything that we can about heaven - but in no sense is heaven unimaginable. This is why that statement is important, as Randy Alcorn, who has written a superb book on heaven, has said: 'We cannot anticipate or desire what we cannot imagine'. We cannot anticipate or desire what we cannot imagine!

Now let me deal with, perhaps, your objection to the fact that heaven is imaginable. Turn with me to that portion of Scripture that I mentioned briefly, 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 9, and it is important that you turn to it with me tonight. Many sermons that you will hear, and books that you will read about heaven will quote this verse: 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him'. There you are, case closed, heaven is unimaginable! We cannot know things about it, it is inconceivable. Now let me say that many of the false doctrines and misunderstandings in every subject that come are because people either do not take a verse in its context, or they ignore completely the context that it is found in and don't even read the verses that come before it or after it. Read the next verse with me please, verse 10: 'But God hath revealed them unto us' - what? Those things that cannot be known through mere human wisdom, God has revealed them to us as believers 'by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God'. Verse 13 actually shows us how God reveals these things to us by His Spirit: 'Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual' - the word of God! So don't use that verse in the wrong way. These things can be conceived, dare I say imagined, when we take what God's Spirit has revealed in the word, the analogies, the figures, the pictures, the literal things that God describes about heaven, and we allow the Spirit to reveal them to our minds and to our hearts. The reason why we should study heaven is because we can! It's not the case that we say that it's a closed book, and we'll not know until we get there and our eyes are opened and our ears. Yes, we'll not know the full extent of it all until then, but God, by His Spirit, Paul says, has revealed these things to us.

'Ah', you say, 'but what about Paul in 2 Corinthians 12?'. He was taken up, wasn't he, to the third heaven himself, the dwelling place of God. God revealed things to him, and Paul even admits there that he was unable to speak of his visit - does that not mean that it was an indescribable experience? Well, I'm not sure it was, I tell you what it does mean - and you might fault me for, you think, saying things that are not found in Scripture, but I could fault you for the same if you're pointing to Paul in 2 Corinthians 12, because it doesn't say that he wasn't allowed to share his experience because heaven was indescribable. Does it say that there? No, it does not. It only tells us that he could not say what he had seen, for whatever reason, but I'll tell you this much: John the apostle, on the Isle of Patmos, was told expressly to write down the things that he saw, and his last number of chapters are specifically about heaven. So you can't use 2 Corinthians 12 to say that heaven is unimaginable. Once more, Ezekiel describes, in his opening chapters, right throughout his book, visions of heaven; as

does Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6: 'I saw the LORD high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple'. They are describing what they are seeing for our understanding.

Here's another objection: 'Deuteronomy 29:29 says the secret things belong unto our God, and you're delving into matters here that are secret things that we can't know. We can't see into heaven, we can't hear what's going on in heaven, therefore we should just keep the book closed regarding it. It's a secret mystery of God'. Well, again, the folly comes from not finishing Deuteronomy 29 verse 29: 'The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children' - and God has revealed a great deal of material regarding heaven. It is incumbent upon us that we study it, we grapple with it. I agree with you, we cannot have exhaustive knowledge about this great subject, but I'll tell you this: we can have accurate knowledge about it when we study the scriptures that God has given.

Now I hope that's a revelation to you, because it certainly is to me. The reason why we should study heaven, first of all, is because we Christians are going there - whether or not we feel like going just now. The second reason is simply because we can, the material is there and God has provided it for us. The third reason why we should study heaven is because of the misconceptions, the unanswered questions concerning heaven. Now what am I talking about? Well, let me be very specific, questions like this: where do the dead go now? Have you ever thought about that? When the last couple of chapters of the book of the Revelation talk about an eternal state which is not yet created, where do the dead go now? That is heaven, but can we call the place where the dead go 'heaven' now? Well, we'll see this in weeks to come. Another question: is heaven a physical place, or is it a state of mind where we just float about like disembodied spirits, and have no consciousness but just happy to be out of our bodies and in the presence of God? Another: what will our bodies be like? Will we have a body when we die and go to the heaven that is there now, or will we have to wait for our resurrection body - and when we get it, what will it be like? An obvious question is: will we look like ourselves? Now, I know some of you are praying that you won't! But that is a question: will we look like how we are just now, here on the earth? What comes out of that question, probably as a motivation for it, is: will we know one another in heaven? Will we know that loved one who has gone on to Glory before us? Flowing out of that question is another question: how will we relate to those loved ones, whether a husband or a wife, a son or a daughter, a mother or father, a brother or sister, a best friend?

These are real questions, and let me say: it is not enough just to say: 'Ah, we'll find out well and good when the time comes!' - that's not good enough, because God has revealed many things that instruct us regarding these truths. What about this one: what will we do in heaven? Will we all be bored, singing every day? Although some of the Pentecostals will enjoy that - and I'll enjoy it too! Do you think that's what we're going to do? String a harp, sit on a cloud and sing praise unto God: 'Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia' over and over again, 'Worthy is the Lamb'? Or will we work? Work? I know some of you are wanting to cash in your ticket already! Will we play? Will there be art? Will there be music? Will there be learning? Will we eat and drink? These are questions - here's one that will interest you to find the answer: will there be animals? I'm not suggesting your wee pet poodle has gone to Glory or anything like that, but the Bible talks about a new heaven and a new earth, the Bible talks about a creation that is being redeemed and one-day will be burned up and a new earth will be formed, a new creation! Will there be animals? Will there be time and space? I think I have said on occasion that, well, yes, God is outside of time, and that may be, but will we be?

Perhaps the greatest question of all is: will we see God? Does the Bible say anything about that? You might have your misconceptions, or even just have these as questions, and we must be very careful over the next number of weeks not to speculate in our answers, but it is profound that the Bible has something to say on many of those things. We ought to study heaven because Christians are going, because we can, because of misconceptions and unanswered questions, but fourthly: because it ought to be our focus on the earth. We read about that in our introductory reading from Colossians chapter 3 and verse 2, Paul said: 'Set your affection on things above'. The Lord Jesus said the same in Matthew 6, and Philippians 3 verse 20 tells us that if we are converted our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. We ought to be focusing on heaven down here, and how can we focus on it if we don't know a lot about it and we never consider a study of it? That's why we must, because through life we need the help of heaven. Our eyes should be heavenward constantly, we should be receiving grace from the Throne of Grace where there is mercy and grace to help in time of need. Heaven should be helping us in keeping us from sin, in keeping us secure, guiding us, directing us, drawing us day by day to live and breathe close to her shores. Then, when we have finished this life, our focus ought to be heaven, for in death heaven is our hope. It is our hope for the loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus, it is our own hope when it comes our day to travel through the valley of the shadow of death.

But here's the point: we ought to, as believers, focus on heaven on earth because everything essentially that is precious to us as Christians is in heaven! Our Father who art in heaven, our citizenship is in heaven, from which we await a Saviour, our Saviour is in heaven. Hebrews 11 tells us about a great cloud of witnesses urging us on, the dead in Christ who have gone before, brothers and sisters in heaven. Jesus said to His own disciples: 'Rejoice not that the devils are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven' - our names are in heaven. Our inheritance, the Bible says, is in heaven, incorruptible and undefiled, that fades not away. Our citizenship is there, our eternal reward - if we have much of it - will be there, and our treasure - if we are building it up in heaven - will be there waiting for us. That's why we should focus on heaven on earth!

Jonathan Edwards, that great American theologian and man of God, often spoke about heaven. This is what he said concerning heaven as the focus of our earthly existence: 'It becomes us to spend this life only as a journey toward heaven, to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labour for, or set our hearts on, anything else but that which is our proper end and true happiness?'. Do we subordinate all other concerns of life to focus on heaven, to live for heaven, to strive for heaven? In his early twenties Jonathan Edwards made a set of resolutions to live a more godly life, and here was one of them: 'I am resolved to endeavour to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can'. What do we do? We seek after as much happiness in this world - but that means that some day, if we're trying to save our lives down here, we're going to lose it up there, we're going to be desperately, bitterly disappointed. It makes a difference, that's why we need to study heaven in great detail, because it makes a difference to our lives if we focus on heaven on earth - and one thing it definitely does is that it motivates us to live for Christ, and to live for heaven.

In Matthew 6 Jesus said: 'Build up treasures in heaven' - not on earth. C. S. Lewis said regarding this, listen, this is profound: 'If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will

get neither'. What do you focus on in your life here on earth as a believer? That's why we need to study heaven, it ought to be our focus on earth.

Fifthly and finally, we ought to study heaven because Jesus is there. Now, I am not in favour of ecumenism, and I am far from ecumenical - you only need to get my tape on Roman Catholicism and our series on the cults to find that out - but an old Roman Catholic missionary to China in the 16th century, 1579, by the name of Matthew Ricci said a profound thing. Even though he was a Roman Catholic missionary, it doesn't mean he didn't ever say anything that was true, this is what he said, and listen carefully to it, it is warning to all of us as we embark upon a study on heaven: 'Those that adore heaven instead of the Lord of heaven, are like a man who, desiring to pay the emperor homage, prostrates himself before the Imperial Palace at Peking and venerates its beauty'. There is a danger that we get so taken up with heaven, that we forget that the reason for being taken up with heaven is that Christ is there, our Lord, our Saviour, that's why we sing: 'Just one glimpse of Him in Glory'.

We must never think of heaven apart from God, apart from Christ, and I think people often think of prophecy in that way. They think about all the different systems and what's going to happen, and the scrolls and the bowls and this and that, when the greatest book in the Bible on prophecy is the revelation of Jesus Christ! This study 'Glimpses of Glory' will only truly benefit us if it gives us glimpses of His glory. Well, I hope you see tonight why it is so important to study heaven. I hope, perhaps, I've whet your appetite to come back and learn more about it. Maybe it has exposed this evening the neglect of heaven in your own life. Well, come with us these weeks, study with us, and see the difference that heaven will make in your life.

Let me share this story with you as I close: in 1952 there was a young girl called Florence Chadwick who stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island determined to swim from it to the shore of the state of California. She had already been the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways, and on that day she decided to swim from California to that Catalina Island the weather was very foggy, it was freezing cold, she could hardly see even the boats that were around her accompanying her on that journey. She swam and she swam and she swam for 15 hours, and eventually she had had enough, she couldn't take it any more and she begged to be taken out of the water along the way. Her mother was in the boat right beside her, and she said: 'Mother, get me out!', and her mother told her that she was very, very close to the shore, and that she could make it if she just kept going. Finally she was physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausted, and she stopped swimming, and she had to be winched out of the water. It wasn't until she got onto that boat that she discovered that the shore was less than half a mile away. At the news conference the next day, this is what she said: 'All I could see was the fog, I think if I could have seen the shore I would have made it'.

Do you see the shore, believer? Have you a glimpse of glory? I'll tell you, listen: just one glimpse of Him in Glory will the toils of life repay, it'll get you through the fog, it will keep you on the road, it will take you to the end of the journey. That is my prayer, that it will be that experience that you will have these weeks.

Can I ask you: will that be glory for you? Are you sure you're on your way to heaven? Make your calling and election sure tonight, repent of any known sin, and believe alone in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the One who bled and died for sinners and rose again to give them eternal life in heaven. Believe in Him, and you can be sure. What about the spiritual state of your life, believer tonight? Will it be glory? Don't forget that before we get into heaven there

will be a Judgement Seat. Someone has said it will be hard to look Jesus in the eyes on that day, will that be glory for you?

Oh, our Father, we thank You tonight for Your word. This is only dipping a toe, if we could say it, at the edge of the shore of this great subject of heaven tonight. Lord, lead us by Your Spirit into these weeks that lie ahead, and give us such a Scripture-induced vision of Glory that we will actually want to be there. Bless our hearts, and apply Your word to our need, whatever it may be - to the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Glimpses Of Glory - Chapter 2

"Is Heaven A Physical Place?"

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by Pastor David Legge

We're turning first of all - we've two portions of Scripture tonight, but the first is John chapter 14 and the second is Revelation 21, if you wish to turn to it as well. John 14, and of course these are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to His disciples just before He was to leave them to go to the cross to die for their sins and ours, to be buried, three days later rise again, forty days later ascend to heaven. These are the words He spoke to them, troubled as they were at this prospect of His leaving.

Verse 1: *"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me".*

Then over to John's writing of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, and this chapter, along with chapter 22, gives us a glimpse of heaven as it will be forever. In verse 1 John sees - this is a vision, remember - and he accounts what he saw. Verse 1: *"And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful". Amen.*

Now last week - I would encourage you if you weren't with us in our introductory evening to get the recording of it - but we considered why it is important to study the subject of heaven. The reasons we gave were these: first of all, it's important to study heaven because Christians are going there. Secondly, it is important to study heaven because we can study heaven, and we'll find out that we can this evening by our present consideration. The third thing we said was that it's important to study heaven because it ought to be our focus down here on Earth, and we as children of God, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, are not primarily citizens of this earth system, but we belong to an other world - that is, the world of the kingdom of God. Another reason we gave for the importance of studying heaven is the fact that Jesus is there, and our Saviour, our Lord Jesus is in heaven at present in His resurrection body, and it is from heaven that we expect Him to return for us, His people.

Now one that I left out, and I'm not going to ask you if you can remember what it was, was that we are to study heaven because there are many misconceptions and unanswered questions concerning the subject. I related some of those to you that hopefully we'll touch on in the weeks that lie ahead. But one of the questions that has remained unanswered for many

Christians and non-Christians alike is: 'Is Heaven a physical place?' - our subject for this evening. There is, I believe, much misconception regarding that question. Most people, I have to say perhaps most Christian people, have an un-biblical conception about heaven. The common view is that heaven is some kind of ethereal, wispy, intangible existence that is purely spiritual, non-material, non-physical, that it is a spiritual existence - a bit like a state of mind, rather than a real physical place.

Now let me say right at the outset that I believe from studying God's word that such views on heaven have derived more from Eastern mysticism, Eastern religions like Buddhism and Hinduism, or from Platonism, rather than what the Bible has to teach. Plato, the philosopher, supposed that we all as human beings are merely spiritual entities that temporarily are encased in bodies, that we should be desiring to get out of the body - that's why the Greeks couldn't understand the Christian doctrine of the resurrection, that we should believe that our physical bodies one day will be raised from the grave, it seemed foolish to them, pointless, they wanted to get out of their bodies. That is not what Scripture teaches, and many Christians have adopted a type of Platonism in their understanding of heaven. I have to say that many of our hymns and choruses don't help us in this regard, neither do many authors that we read, even Christian authors and Christian theologians.

In fact, recently some Evangelical scholars have cast doubt on the fact of whether or not heaven is a place. Wayne Grudem, in his systematic theology, which I can highly recommend to you, quotes Donald Guthrie who is a New Testament scholar. He says of the New Testament, I quote: 'We shall not expect, however, to find a description of a place', that is, heaven, 'so much as the presence of a Person'. He goes on: 'Paul does not think of heaven as a place, but thinks of it in terms of the presence of God'. Now Wayne Grudem comments on that and says, I quote him: 'But does such a distinction make any sense? If a person is present, then by definition there is a place, because to be present means to be located in a place'.

We believe that the Bible teaches - or maybe I should qualify that, I believe that the Bible teaches - that heaven is a physical place rather than a state of mind. Sometimes after a meeting like this we are questioned on what we say from the pulpit, and asked for a verse to prove a certain thing - and it's not always possible to turn to one or two verses as proof texts for some of the things that I will say tonight. That's why systematic theology is an important discipline in Christian learning - what is that? Well, that is taking together all the truths of God's word on a particular subject, and correlating in the balance the weight of what the Bible has to say in regard to it. If I could illustrate it like this: it's like the many pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, all scattered from Genesis to Revelation, and in order to get a picture of what God is saying in His revealed truth regarding a subject, we put them all together and hopefully the picture becomes clear. That's what we want to do this evening in answering the question 'Is heaven a physical place?'.

Where is the evidence to prove it? Well, I'm going to give you five initial pieces of evidence. Follow with me - let me say, someone said to me yesterday that they take notes, and they weren't looking for a prize, but they were just wanting me to know that all the effort I was putting into the studies was being put to good use by their pen and paper or their wide margin Bible. Now, it is utterly impossible for you to remember what you're going to hear tonight unless you get a CD or a tape, let me encourage you in weeks to come that these words do not fall to the ground - take notes, go home and think about these things and they will be an encouragement to your heart. The first piece of evidence that I want to give to you this evening on why heaven is a physical place is: location. Location.

Now if you were to turn - you don't have to - to Genesis 1 verse 1, you probably could quote it, the very first declaration of God in His word is: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth'. Now, in the Hebrew that word for 'heaven' is in the plural, He created the heavens and the earth. In Genesis 2 verse 1 we read: 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them'. Now we outlined last week just very much in passing that there are different uses of this word 'heaven' in the Bible. If you look at the slide above my head, you will see that first of all there is the atmospheric heaven where the clouds and the creatures of the sky, the fowl of the air, fly. Then there is the second heaven, which is the stellar heaven, which is space, the solar systems, the planets. But the word of God talks about there being a third heaven, and that third heaven is the dwelling place of God. Now, of course, God is everywhere, omnipresent - but there is a special place where His government and His rule resides and His presence is, in a sense, special, and that is that place called heaven. Paul referred to it in 2 Corinthians 12 and verse 2. You could think of this as three layers of the cake.

Now we cannot be dogmatic when it comes to the location of heaven. My view is that, just as the first and the second heaven are beside one another in this perpendicular fashion, so is the third - like, as I said, three layers of a cake. That fits in with a lot of what Scripture has to say. Some people have tried to spiritualise the directional language concerning heaven used in the scriptures. What am I talking about? Well, if you turn with me to 2 Corinthians 12:2 where Paul mentions the fact that he 'knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven'. Scholars at times spiritualise that word 'up' to mean, 'Well, when Bible writers talk about looking up, or praying up, or going up to heaven, it is simply a spiritual allegory to help us to not be earthly but be heavenly - but we ought not to take it too literally to think that God is up there somewhere'.

In Matthew chapter 14 and verse 19, I think the Lord Jesus here gives us another example of this directional language regarding heaven when He was feeding the 5000. The Bible says: 'He commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude'. There are other occasions we find our Lord Jesus looking up to heaven for divine aid from His heavenly Father. Then, perhaps even more specific in John 3 and verse 13, the Lord Jesus said: 'No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven'. Very graphic and specific directional language regarding heaven's location. I believe we ought to take those terms literally. Heaven is a real location, and whilst we cannot be dogmatic on where exactly its location is, I think it is reasonable to view it in the light of Scripture as we see it on this screen.

Now let me say, as I contemplated that fact - and I believe it is a fact - it was thrilling to me, thrilling! Because sometimes we have adopted this notion that there is some kind of spiritual entity out there, not even out there, some other existence beyond our imagination - when really, what the Bible seems to indicate, I believe, is that when we pass through the first heaven of our atmosphere, and enter into the second stellar, planetary heaven, so there is another dimension, though it may not be enterable - I would say it is not enterable, by man at present - but yet it is there, and it is real, and God is there, the throne of God is there, the risen Christ is there, the angelic hosts are there, and we can interrelate with that dimension in a way that we cannot with the first and the second. Now, is that not thrilling to you, that

heaven has a location, it is there, and it's as real - could I say, more real than this place? It's there.

Could I perhaps encourage you tonight, before you put your head on the pillow, to go out the back door and put your eyes to the sky and think of the light years away in our galaxy, but also imagine, by faith, that beyond all of it is heaven. It's there, my friend, and it is real, and it has a location. Secondly, as evidence to prove that it is a physical place, not just location but the truth of resurrection. Jesus rose from the grave the third day after His crucifixion, and Jesus now lives in a physical resurrection body in heaven. He is awaiting His return to Earth. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15 and various other passages that we, after the Lord Jesus comes again, will be given resurrection bodies like His. Now His resurrection body and our subsequent resurrection bodies all indicate that heaven is a place. In the beginning God created us not just as spiritual beings but as physical beings, and God breathed His breath into a body and we became a living soul. Man, in the beginning, was not designed to live in a non-physical realm. It was not God's intention ever.

This is important as we lay a foundation tonight: earth was made for people, but people were made for earth. Christ's resurrection, His body now and our body in the future prove that fact: that we will have a physical body, though it may be animated by the spirit rather than the flesh, it will nevertheless be physical just as Christ's resurrection body is. So we assume, reasonably, that it will inhabit a physical place. The third piece of evidence, the first being location, the second being resurrection, the third is ascension - again, speaking of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus. When Jesus was resurrected He lived 40 days with His disciples, and then He ascended up into heaven. Now the fact that He went up into heaven in His resurrection body, and went into a place from a place is the entire point of the account of the Ascension of Christ in Acts chapter 1.

Now just listen to what the angelic annunciation was at that particular moment: 'Ye men of Galilee ', the angel said to the disciples, 'why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven'. I think that, perhaps, is the most watertight example of how heaven is a location that is there, above us, beyond us - but it is real, and Christ, as a real human being, moved from the real earth into the real heaven - and the angelic language illustrates that, I think, clearly for us.

Location, resurrection, ascension, and fourthly - and we'll take more time over this one - description. There is great detailed description of heaven in the Bible. Now right away, I must say before we look at any of it, it is a mistake to assume - as many Christians do - that all the language that is used in the Bible to describe heaven is figurative, it's allegory, or it's metaphor. Whenever we read about a garden, or a city, or a kingdom, it is often interpreted that it is not literal but it has a spiritual meaning. These things, it is said, are mere analogies that do not correspond to the reality of what heaven is like. Now that position regarding the description of heaven in the Bible is very problematic, and here's the reason why: if these are only analogies that do not correspond to the reality of what heaven is, we have to conclude that they are very poor analogies. Why do I say that? Well, if they are analogies that don't correspond to reality, they have defeated the purpose of what an analogy is. An analogy is meant to bring some understanding to us of a truth.

The fact of the matter is, whilst we don't want to subscribe to a ridiculously wooden literalism when interpreting scripture, particularly apocalyptic scripture, on many occasions there's no need to spiritualise the descriptions of heaven that are given to us in the word of God. In fact,

at times these descriptions are not analogies, but can be understood as literal realities that we can take at face value.

Let us start with the first we read this evening in John 14, if you care to turn to it. In verse 2 and verse 3 Jesus referred to the place where He was going, heaven, as a place. It's very easy to read over that quickly and miss that point. He spoke of Himself moving from Earth, going to that place, and coming from the Father again to take His people home to be with Himself. Let me emphasise these words of the Saviour in John chapter 14: 'If it were not so, I would have told you'. That's significant, it implies that if it were not a place I was going to, why would I be telling you that I am going to a place? Now maybe that doesn't make sense to you, but it makes sense to me.

Then when we turn to Revelation 21 and 22, in verse 2 of Revelation 21 heaven is described as a holy city, or having a holy city. Then again it is described in verse 2 as being a place that is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. When we look at verse 4 we see that in that place death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more. Then in verse 6 we read that there the children of God will drink from the fountain of the water of life without payment. As we travel into verse 16 there is a graphic description of the immense size and measurements - whether they're literal or symbolic, I'll leave you to debate, but they're there. The length is 12,000 stadia, in verse 16 we read that - or to interpret it into our measurements, 1400 miles. Its length and breadth and height are equal, verse 6 tells us. Then as we go into verses 18 to 21 of chapter 21, parts of the city are constructed, the description says, of precious jewels of varying colours - a wonderful spectrum of a myriad of gems.

Now what I'm encouraging you to do is to take these descriptions more literally than perhaps you have done in the past. When you begin to take them literally, it may strike you that the biblical descriptions of heaven actually are very earthly. What am I talking about? Well, the Bible speaks of a city. You know what a city is, don't you? You're sitting in one. A country, we are familiar with that. River, trees, bodies - are not these very earthly symbols? But they're more than symbols we believe. You see, the problem in many people's understanding of heaven is that they don't understand that heaven is not as other-worldly as we have thought. In fact, biblical teaching is far richer than just that heaven is 'pie-in-the-sky when you die', and you're just a disembodied spirit floating about somewhere, even if it's only a state of mind. The Bible teaches that God's plan - and chapter 21, chapter 22 of Revelation are the concrete proof of this - God's plan is to have a new heavens and a new earth. God's ultimate goal in heaven is to have, ultimately, an entirely renewed creation, a new universe.

So the next slide shows you that God's word taken as a whole tells us that there will be new heavens, even different than the heavens that exist now. There will be a new Jerusalem, and there will be a new Earth. Now we have to prove this, I think we've done it already from Revelation, but this has always been God's promise through the prophets, the apostles. Isaiah 65 and verse 17, Isaiah prophesied the word of God: 'For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind'. I believe that's where John the apostle is quoting from. We read of it in 66 of Isaiah, verse 22 as well - and then, as we come into the New Testament, in 2 Peter 3:13 Peter says: 'Nevertheless we, according to his promise', God's promise, 'look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness'. Then of course, as we read, Revelation 21:1: 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea'.

Now, John goes on to tell us in the book of the Revelation that there will also be a new kind of unification between heaven and earth that there never has been before, for he sees a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven from God - verse 2 of chapter 21. Then in verse 3 of the same chapter he hears a voice, and it is God's voice: 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God'. So there will be this joining, this unification of heaven and earth in a completely new creation. Now what we're talking about is yet to be, it's not the heaven that exists now that we'll speak of in more detail next week. We're talking about something that will happen after the Lord Jesus Christ comes again. It is called the 'eternal state', but let me say: what heaven will be as an eternal dwelling place is more earthly than we think.

Are you confused? 'He's saying heaven's like earth?'. Well, often we are confused because of many of the things we sing. You've heard the song: 'This world is not my home, I'm only travelling through'. Now I know what it means, and I suppose in a sense it is true in the manner that this world system and worldly age is not our home. But you know, I believe it's wrong, and such type of hymns and teaching like them have caused great confusion, and have caused people never really to get to grips and understand the full extent of God's redemptive plan.

What am I talking about? Well, this is the fifth and essentially final piece of evidence to prove that heaven is a physical place. We've looked at its location, we've looked at Christ's and our subsequent resurrection, we looked at Christ's ascension from earth into heaven, we looked very very briefly at the descriptions that are given in the Bible - but I want you now to look at how all this fits into redemption. This entire physical universe, Genesis tells us, did not evolve but was created by God. It was created for God, for His glory. What happened, we read in chapters 2, 3 and thereafter, is that man and woman disobeyed God, and because of that sin came into the world, and the consequence of sin was death. Man, the world, the universe became a fallen, depraved existence. Now God had a plan, and I believe His plan was in place, to redeem man, to glorify Himself - but we fall into a mistake if we think that God's redemptive plan was only to redeem mankind, for it was not. It was to redeem the whole of creation, and just as God promises to make men and women new creations in Christ Jesus, He also promised eventually to renew the whole earth and universe.

Now think about it, for it is reasonable and logical: if all God wanted to do was save your spirit, He doesn't need to create a new heaven and a new earth, does He? You can just go to be with Him now. But because God's plan in redemption is not just for a spirit, it's for the body, soul and spirit, it is for the whole man - the whole man fell, and the whole man must be redeemed - everything, as God pronounced in the beginning when it was created before the fall, He said it was good, yes, very good. God's plan of redemption is to restore everything that was good before sin came into the world, so that it will all be good again. That is God's redemptive plan.

Randy Alcorn puts it very well in his book on heaven, concerning God's redemptive plan he says: 'We won't go to heaven and leave earth behind, rather God will bring heaven and earth together into the same dimension with no wall of separation, no armed angels to guard heaven's perfection from sinful mankind as it was in the Garden of Eden after sin. As Ephesians 1:10 says, God's perfect plan is to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ'. This is profound what he says: 'Christ died not merely to make the best of a bad situation, He died so that mankind, earth, and the universe itself would be renewed to forever proclaim His glory'. God has never given up on His original creation. His redemptive plan is not just to redeem men and women, but to redeem this whole fallen

universe. As Alcorn goes on: 'Yet somehow we've managed to overlook an entire biblical vocabulary that makes this point clear'. Think of these words: 'reconcile', 'redeem', 'restore', 'return', 'renew', 'regenerate', 'resurrect'. That little prefix 're-' suggests a return to an original condition that was ruined or lost. God could have consigned us to hell, started over again, but He is, he says, the ultimate salvage artist - 'ruined sinners to reclaim'. Hallelujah! What a Saviour! He could have wiped the slate clean, but He didn't and He won't.

Now this is evident, I believe, in the life of our Lord Jesus here on the earth. First in His incarnation: He came in a body, and a perfect body at that - but His ministry as he walked among men was to the whole man. Albert Volter (sp?) has put it like this: 'It is particularly striking that all of Jesus' miracles, with the exception of the cursing of the fig tree, are miracles of restoration - restoration to health, restoration to life, restoration to freedom from demonic possession. Jesus' miracles provide us with a sample of the meaning of redemption. It is a freeing of creation from the shackles of sin and evil, and a reinstatement of creaturely living as intended by God'. It is God's redemptive plan not just to save our souls, but to save our body, to save our world, to save our universe - and what we are yearning for, the Bible says, is heaven that is like Eden, a paradise in the very beginning.

Are you homesick for Eden? The first book of the Bible, Genesis, tells the story of paradise lost; but when we go to Revelation it tells us of paradise regained. The similarities, we haven't time to look at them, but it would be a good exercise for you to go down and make a list of the similarities between Eden and the eternal state. We long for a perfect world, a world without corruption of sin where God walks with us as He walked with Adam and Eve, and talks with us in the cool of the day. We desire something tangible, something physical that will not fade away - and that is exactly what God promises mankind! A home that will never be destroyed, a kingdom that will not fade, a city with unshakable foundations, an incorruptible inheritance. God's redemptive plan is to give us a new heaven, and a physical heaven, and a physical earth that will never fade.

Now let me say that there are two - there are many implications, but two that I want to highlight this evening concerning the redemption of the physical creation. They answer two of the questions that we asked last week, as we anticipated this study. The first is in relation to animals: will there be animals in heaven? I know you're going to like this one! Well, I don't want to go into too much detail because I mightn't survive it! If you think about it for a moment, ask yourself the question: why God led animals into the ark? Now, of course, you could say: 'Well, He wanted to replenish the earth', and that is true. But could he not have done that by recreating animals? Of course He could, but He chose to save the animals along with man, because the animals originally with man's creation were good. Now, when Noah came out of the ark in Genesis chapter 9, God made a covenant with Noah - we don't have time to read it, it's found in Genesis 9:9-17, and the covenant included animals. God was making a covenant, an agreement with all of creation, mankind, but all the rest of it. God's plan in the ark, I believe, is a picture of His desire to redeem all of creation.

Now in Romans 8 - and it would be good, perhaps, for you to turn to this one - in Romans 8 we read of the yearning that we have, physically and spiritually, for new bodies, and for creation to be redeemed. In Romans 8:22 and 23 we read these words: 'For we know that the whole creation', now notice that all-encompassing term, 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also' - not only they, who is that? The whole of creation waiting, as it says later on in verse 23, 'waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body'. The redemption of our body is collectively

assumed in this whole regeneration of all of creation. God's plan is for a renewed earth after the flood, and I believe that God's plan involves animals.

It's helpful to point out that, as one has said, Christ's emphasis is not on making new things but on making old things new - that's the point. He could have made a new race of men, He could have made a whole new creation, but He has chosen not to. He has chosen to redeem the old, and make the old new. It's not about inventing the unfamiliar, but restoring and enhancing the familiar. That's why heaven has an earthly feel to it in the descriptions that we are given in Scripture, because it's more like earth than we imagine, because it is the redeemed universe - a rejuvenated existence! John Wesley, who spent most of his life on horseback, said these words in a sermon about creation: 'Something remains after death for these poor creatures, that these likewise shall one day be delivered from this bondage of corruption, and shall then receive an ample amends for all their present sufferings'. The whole creation is groaning, I believe the Bible teaches that the whole creation will be redeemed - animals and all.

You mightn't agree with me on that, but a second implication is: is there time and space in heaven? Now again we are misled, I believe, by hymnology: 'When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound, and time shall be no more' - wrong! Time shall not be no more - excuse the grammar! The Bible teaches us not what Buddhism teaches, that there is no resurrection, therefore they assume time will be extinguished - but the weight of the body of evidence in the word of God shows us that our eternal existence will be an unending succession of moments. It is described in such language. All the pictures of heavenly worship that we are given in the book of Revelation, such as for instance falling down before God's throne, casting crowns before His throne - all of those involve the sequence of events. It's not a suspension of time, but things are described to us in such a way as we understand time and space and physicality.

More correct was John Newton when he said: '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'. There won't be a sun in the sense that we have a sun here, because the Lamb shall light - but that does not mean that there will be no time, that there will be no space. You might say: 'Well, if that's the case, what am I going to do with my time in heaven?'. Well, that's a study for another day that we'll not look into this evening.

Let me sum up everything that we have said concerning the physical nature of heaven. We have looked at the proof being the location, the resurrection, the ascension, the description and redemption, and I want to finish off with an application. Maybe you're sitting here thinking: 'Well, so what? What does it matter whether heaven is a physical place or a spiritual place? Does it matter?'. Yes! Why does it matter in application? It matters because of our anticipation of that place. It is possible, indeed I believe probable, that much of our Christian spiritualising of heaven has robbed us of the anticipation of it. Remember what I said last week, again quoting Randy Alcorn: 'We cannot anticipate or desire what we cannot imagine'. God has used these descriptions in the word of God in order to cause us to imagine what heaven is like. I know it cannot give us the full extent of it all, but these are descriptions in order to cause us to understand, in order to anticipate. They are hints of heaven. They are a wonderful jigsaw that we put together. Whilst it may not correspond exactly to the reality, it does give us an idea, a picture of it.

The clues are scattered right throughout the word of God, but here is my main point this evening: the earth is our point of reference. What do I mean? I mean that when we see these

earthly descriptions of heaven, we ought to look around us at the corresponding realities on earth and try to imagine what this place would be like, what this creation would be if it was not for sin, if it was not for depravity, if it was not for fallenness. This earth is our point of reference to imagine, through the Bible's descriptions, a new heaven and a new earth. Now we shouldn't read into the new earth anything that is wrong with this old earth, but have you ever looked around you and imagined that all is perfect? Abraham did it, for the Bible says he was looking forward to the city with foundations whose architect and builder is God. He was thinking on spiritual terms? No! Physical and spiritual. Again it tells us in Hebrews that he imagined it, and his descendants too, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. We as Christ's followers are meant to anticipate this heaven as well. Second Peter says we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come. Hebrews: we are looking forward to the new heavens and the new earth that He has promised.

The problem is not that the Bible doesn't tell us much about heaven, it is that we don't pay attention to what it does say about heaven. Let me finish by quoting Randy Alcorn again, who has so much insight on this subject, this is profound, listen carefully to it. He says, having studied heaven for over 20 years in his life, 'Some of the best portrayals I've seen of the eternal heaven are in children's books. Why? Because they depict earthly scenes with animals, people playing, joyful activities - but the books for adults, on the other hand, often try to be philosophical, profound, ethereal and otherworldly; but that kind of heaven is precisely what the Bible doesn't portray as the place where we shall live forever. Our problem is that we are too clever for our own good. Jesus taught us that we need the faith of a little child, why? Because God has not revealed great things to the wise and prudent, but to the babes, the children'.

Heaven is a physical place - are you going there? Jesus said to Thomas: 'I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me'. Are you sure? Are you on your way? If you are, surely you can say tonight: 'Ruined sinners to reclaim, hallelujah!' - you're allowed to say 'Hallelujah' by the way, you're allowed to shout it if you want! Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Next week, in the will of the Lord, 'Where are the saved dead now?'.

Father, no more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found. Thank You, Lord, that You have redeemed not only a people for Yourself with the blood of Jesus, but You have redeemed this whole universe for Your glory. What a thrill it is to think in anticipation of a new heaven and a new earth. We are not ignorant enough to think that we can know all there is to know about it, far from it - but what has been revealed to us for our benefit and our children's children, may we take it, believe it, rest on it, and live unto it to the glory of God, and Your Son the Lord Jesus Christ who has made it possible, in whose name we pray, Amen.

Glimpses Of Glory - Chapter 3

"Where Are The Saved Dead Now?"

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Well, we're turning first of all to two texts - the first is 2 Corinthians chapter 5, and then the second is found in Philippians chapter 1. First of all, 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 1, and then Philippians 1, you might care to turn to it as well. Note please the certain language that Paul uses: *"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle", or tent, "were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this", tent, "we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad".*

You may want to keep a marker in that passage of Scripture, and now turn to Philippians chapter 1, and we are beginning to read at verse 21. Paul again, the apostle, is the writer to a different church - in Philippi, not Corinth - and he says in chapter 1 verse 21: *"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I know not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you".*

Our title of consideration tonight is: 'Where Are The Saved Dead Now?'. Perhaps you'll allow me to make a few preliminary remarks before we launch into our study. The first is: many of you will not agree with what I have to share with you tonight. 'What's new?', you might say. Well, I'm just warning you before I launch into it. There may be others who are sceptical of what I'm saying, and I would urge you to go home and search the scriptures to see whether these things are so. Many even may profoundly feel that you have grounds to challenge what I'm saying on various Scriptures, and I respect that. I don't claim to know everything on the subject, and there is great divergence of opinion upon it - but what I seek to do this evening, as every Monday evening and every time I preach, is to weigh the evidence of Scripture and come to some definite tangible conclusions, and we may also come to some reasonable suppositions - but nevertheless, I want to make you think, from the Scriptures, concerning this great question: 'Where Are The Saved Dead Now?'.

Now, if you were with us last week - two weeks ago, of course, we considered why it's important to study heaven - but last week we asked the question and sought to answer it: 'Is Heaven a Physical Place?'. We took up our time primarily considering what theologians call 'the eternal state', that is: the ultimate heaven that is found written in Revelation 21 and 22. We saw that that is a state, a real physical place, a new heaven and a new earth that is relevant to our condition only after our resurrection. So our study last week considered what

will happen after the Saviour comes, after there is judgement, after there is a millennial reign of Christ for a thousand years, and then the eternal state is instigated - a new heaven and a new earth. Now that is immensely important, as we pointed out, because we will dwell in the new heaven and the new earth, the Bible tells us not just in Revelation but in Peter and in Isaiah and various other portions of Scripture, forever. What could be more important than considering the place where we will be for all eternity?

Now though that is the case, it has to also be said that most of our questions about heaven relate to where we go immediately when we die now. Our interest is heightened in what heaven is like now because we want to know where our dead loved ones are, and we want to know in what condition they exist - if they exist in any condition at all. Now, of course, from last week, I hope, and our contemplations since it on the new heaven and the new earth, we ought to be excited at the prospect of what the eternal state will be. But, if you're like me, the thought of waiting hundreds, even thousands of years, perhaps, to enjoy the new heaven and the new earth does not encourage our anticipation! I am left with the question that I hope you have already asked of yourself: 'Well, what happens until then? What happens before the Lord Jesus comes, and before the eternal state is brought into being?'. We would like, wouldn't we, to have something to look forward to immediately when we die? The great question we are considering tonight is: is there such a place? If there is, what is it? What can we know about it?

Now let me say before going on any further that many so-called Bible students have attempted to give explanations to where the soul goes, or doesn't go, during this period between our death and the resurrection at the coming of Christ. Some have said: 'Well, the answer to that question is the doctrine of soul sleep, that the body, along with the soul, dies, lies unconscious, in an unconscious state until the resurrection'. We will hopefully touch on truths that will answer such a doctrine. Then there are others, particularly the Roman Catholic Church over the years has espoused the doctrine of 'purgatory' - that there is an intermediate state where the soul goes. The name 'purgatory', as it suggests, is a place where the soul will be purged, cleansed of remaining sin in order to prepare us for what they understand as heaven. Does the Bible have anything to say about that? Then there are others who believe that the soul goes to a place called 'hades'. It is commonly understood as the abode of the dead, where the righteous and, for that matter, the unrighteous go until the resurrection. Some Old Testament saints had an understanding of that, and many believe that that carries through into the New Testament.

Now this is a very difficult subject, and you might have thought it was very straightforward to answer the question: where does the Christian go when they die? Well, it is a difficult question to answer at times, because all of these seeming explanations - soul sleep, purgatory, hades - have reasons behind them. Some have used texts of Scripture as proof texts to try and show the reasoning behind these doctrines - but we must answer, tonight: does the Bible have anything to say about those doctrines, and in answer to the question 'Where are the saved dead now?'. What I want us to consider tonight is the place, the place where the saved go now. Next week, in the will of the Lord, we'll consider the people - how the saved dead are when they get there. But let's consider now the place, and I'm going to be asking you to look at a number of Scriptures tonight, so be on the ready!

Let me say first of all: it is important to distinguish between the eternal state, Revelation 21 and 22, and where the dead are now. I have already said that, but much of our misunderstandings, our misconceptions, come from confusing where souls go now, and where we will ultimately be for all eternity. So when we tell our children: 'Granny has died and gone

to heaven', we cannot mean that Granny has gone into the eternal state - for the eternal state does not exist yet, the new heaven and the new earth. So when we make a statement like that, we have to understand what we are saying - what are we meaning? What are we referring to? We must be referring to something else other than the new heaven and the new earth. The big question is: does the Bible support the idea that there is a heaven now where Christians, when they die, go? There is an - if you want to call it - an intermediate heaven between the Christian's death and their resurrection at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I believe Scripture does substantiate proof that there is such an intermediate heaven, but before I show you why I believe this is the case, I must emphasise something very forcibly. It is this: the New Testament focus is always on the resurrection of the child of God. The New Testament hope of the believer is always to anticipate the ultimate heaven, which is, as we saw last week, the new heaven and the new earth - that is to be our ultimate focus and anticipation. Wherever the believer goes now when they die, however wonderful it is or heavenly it is, it is not the believer's final destination. It is not their eternal home. Perhaps this is why, at times, our focus has been wrong. Often our focus, chiefly, is on where we go when we die, whereas the weight of Christian doctrine in the New Testament is that we should be looking forward beyond our death, beyond whatever intermediate heaven we might know - or whatever you want to call that place - to the eternal new heaven and the new earth.

Maybe I'm confusing you a little bit, but let me illustrate for you the difference between the intermediate heaven, where people go when they die now who are saved, and the eternal heaven, like this: suppose, just for the sake of argument, you're a homeless person living in the city of Belfast. You reside in the Salvation Army shelter in the town. One day you get one of these telegrams everybody's wishing for: your great Aunt Marie has died who lived in Paris, and she has left you everything that was hers, and that is a wealthy estate. You've inherited a home, even a job managing the estate, you're going to be near some of your family who moved out to France several years ago. So you make your way to Paris, and on your way from Belfast you have to naturally go - like we all do, wherever we are going from here it seems - through London. You have to travel via Heathrow. Now it happens that you have some family also in London who moved there several years ago too. You haven't seen them in a while, and you have a couple of hours to spare before your flight takes you from Heathrow to Paris, and so you spend some time with them in London. Here's the question: when you got to the Paris ticket agent in Belfast International Airport, and they asked you 'Where are you travelling Sir, or Madam?' - what was your answer? Most likely your answer was: 'I'm travelling to Paris'. Now you may have mentioned the city of London, but it was probably only in the context of saying that 'I'm going to Paris via Heathrow'. Now whilst your family and friends might be residing, some of them at least, in London, your focus is on Paris, your ultimate destination is the place where your inheritance is, the place where your future life lies - that life of promise and prospect.

Now that's my point: that ought to be our focus as believers - being resurrected, in a new man, in a new heaven and in a new earth. Often you hear Christians making a throwaway remark - and I understand what it means, and I make it myself - that you die and then you live in heaven forever. I hope when we make that that our understanding of the truth is not as simplistic as the statement sounds. We only live in heaven forever depending on what heaven we're talking about, because the place where the believer goes when they die now, that heaven is a temporary lodging place, it is only a stop along the way to the final destination of the new heaven and the new earth when we are resurrected.

Now here's a question, perhaps, that some of you're asking tonight: how do you know that place where the believer goes when they die now is heaven? How do you know that? Some would say: 'How do you know it's not hades, the realm of the dead? How do you know it's not paradise?'. Some would say that paradise is a different place than heaven. Well, the word 'hades' is a Greek word, and the Greek god of the underworld was called 'Hades'. This name was adopted as a way of describing the place where the dead are - but essentially the word means, literally, the same as the Hebrew word in the Old Testament 'sheol'. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, called the Septuagint, that word 'sheol' is translated as 'hades'. Now 'sheol' and 'hades' respectively can mean 'the grave', can mean 'the abode of the dead' - but it has to be said that the word is very difficult to pin down in the manner of its definition. What I mean by that is simply that at times in the Old Testament it only means 'the grave', nothing more - and yet there are other times that it seems to insinuate that there is more of a depth in it, that there is something beyond the grave. Then, as we read Jewish theological history, rabbinical Judaism, and then right through into New Testament theology, we see that this word developed to take on a further meaning in people's understanding.

Now it has to be said that there are some difficult passages to understand when we look at this word 'hades' and 'sheol' and so on, and I believe that there are explanations to many of them - of course, there are to all of them if you know them! We don't have time, as you can understand, to consider all of them or indeed many of them this evening. But be that as it may, it is always good practice - and I hope you remember this from several of our other Bible studies - that when we are interpreting scripture and trying to establish truth, it is always good practice to find out what we can know plainly from the Bible, specifically the New Testament, and it is also good practice of interpretation to interpret the difficult passages of the word of God by those that are clear. So we do not erase what we know because of some difficult passages that we don't know about for sure - but we confirm the difficult passages by that which is certain and fundamental.

Now if that is the case, and I believe it is, and can be the only way to come to sound doctrine, there are two things that we have to lay down as factual, wholly reliable, and fundamental to our understanding of where the dead are now. Here is the first: the Bible tells us that Christ ascended into heaven, and He now is seated at the right-hand of the Majesty on high. Now that is absolutely clear, that is not disputed. The second fact that we need to lay down is that souls of believers, the apostle says, when absent from the body are present with the Lord. That is an explicit statement in 2 Corinthians 5:8, and Philippians 1:23.

Now it is reasonable and it is theologically sound to take those two truths, and to conclude that - because Christ is at the right hand of the Father, the right-hand of the Majesty on high in heaven; and the believer when he dies, goes to be with the Lord - that the believer can only go into heaven, for that is where the Lord Jesus Christ is. Now I hope that makes sense to you, I think it makes sense when we look at the word of God. But of course, there are common objections to that, and the first is this: some will say 'Well, God is omnipresent' - you only need to look to Psalm 139 to know that, you can't flee from His presence. So you would be present with the Lord in hades, the realm of the dead. How do you answer that question? Very easily: if the Lord is omnipresent, well then we don't need to go to heaven at all, or go anywhere, for He is with us now - but this is in a special sense of being intimately with the Lord in a bodily sense, not in His omnipresence.

The second objection to this idea that believers go into the heaven which is the presence of God just now, is that some say 'Paradise does not mean heaven as God's dwellingplace'. Often we hear quoted in Gospel messages, even last evening here in the Iron Hall, Luke 23

and verse 43. The dying thief beside the Lord Jesus said: 'Remember me when You come into Your kingdom', and the Lord Jesus replied to him saying, 'Truly I say unto you, today you shall be with me in Paradise'. Some say: 'Well, he was going to that place in Hades, that half of it which is the Paradise part for the righteous dead, it did not mean that he was going to heaven'. Now that word 'paradise', if we're really going to understand what it means, we need to trace its etymology, its origination as a word. It is a Persian word, and it literally means 'a walled garden'. Incidentally, that Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament which I mentioned earlier, the Septuagint, uses this word 'Paradise' for the Garden of Eden. Later, because of Jewish belief that God one day would restore the Garden of Eden, this word became used as a term to describe the eternal state of righteousness, that new heaven and the new earth that will redeem the lost, fallen state that was in Eden at the beginning.

But what does this word mean in the Bible? What is its usage in scripture? It is used in Luke 23:43, as we've already quoted, but it is used in two other places in the Bible. The first is 2 Corinthians 12 and verse 4, maybe you would turn to 2 Corinthians 12, and we'll read from verse 1 to 4 - and again the apostle Paul is speaking in very cloaked terms of his own experience, and he says in verse 1 of 2 Corinthians 12: 'It is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord. I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven', please note that, he says he was caught up to the third heaven. 'And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter'. Now the reasonable conclusion that we make from those verses is that, for Paul, that third heaven was synonymous with paradise.

Just to confirm that, we turn again to Revelation chapter 2 and verse 7, and this is the third and only other reference to paradise in the word of God. Revelation 2 and verse 7, and this is the Lord Jesus Christ speaking to the churches, one in particular, and He says: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God'. Again the 'tree of life', as we shall see in a moment, is in heaven, and John is describing how Christ has said that the one that overcomes will eat of it in paradise. Paul has confirmed to us that paradise is heaven, and we must assume, therefore, that the thief beside Jesus at the cross went directly into heaven. That same tree was in the Garden of Eden, the original paradise, and when man fell he was forbidden to eat of it because, probably, he would have lived eternally in a fallen state - but Revelation 22 verse 2, if you turn to it, tells us that that tree of life will one day be in the New Jerusalem which will come down from heaven and settle on the earth.

Now, let's correlate all this together: paradise is how Eden was described. Eden had a tree of life in it. Paul says that he went to the third heaven, which he described as paradise. Jesus said that that tree now is in the paradise of God, and he that overcomes will eat of it. The New Jerusalem will come down from the present heaven, Revelation 22 verse 2 says, and settle on the earth; and in that New Jerusalem the tree of life will be there. So, I believe that the conclusion is: paradise of Eden is in heaven now, and it will come down from heaven then when, one day, the New Jerusalem will be on the earth.

Now these are difficult things and, whatever is not clear, surely we should rejoice in what is clear? I believe it is clear, taking the whole weight of the body of Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures, that a believing child of God - whether Old or New Testament - enters, at death, into the immediate presence of God. John MacArthur writes like this - and it doesn't

mean it's right because he says it, but nevertheless it's worthy of our attention - 'After many years of study, I believe that the moment any believer dies he goes immediately to heaven. Some mediaeval theologians taught that, when an Old Testament saint died, he entered what was later called 'Limbus patrum' - the limbo of the fathers. According to that teaching he entered a place where he had to wait until Christ died when he could finally enter heaven - but the Bible nowhere verifies such an intermediary state. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that when a believer dies he immediately enters the presence of God', and he begins to cite some evidence.

Now you can follow with me, and you'll need to be quick with your fingers if you're going to do that! The picture of eternal life - that's the wrong term, the picture of where we will be between death and resurrection is not always clear in the Old Testament, because they did not have the fullness of revelation that we have in the New. Yet we do get glimpses of glory throughout the Old Testament Scriptures. One is found in Psalm 16 verses 10 and 11 - you can turn to it or just listen: 'For thou wilt not leave my soul in hades; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore'. Now this verse is often taken in a prophetic sense as speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ talking to God about how, after His crucifixion, God would not leave Him in Hades to rot. But let us first understand it in its original context, and that is as the Psalmist writes it, the Psalmist in the Old Testament context saying that God would not leave his soul in the realm of the dead - He will not suffer his holy one to see corruption, but show him the path of life; and he would know, in the presence of God, fullness of joy, and at God's right-hand pleasures for evermore. That is the Old Testament saint's, in this context, hope - and, of course, it refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, and would imply that He did not go to Hades, but He went directly into the presence of God after He gave up the spirit.

Psalm 23 verse 6, again we know it well, but have we really taken the impact of the truth? 'Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever'. That was his hope, the same hope, I suggest, that Paul gives us in 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 8: 'We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord'. It seems that he's talking about the same thing, the same as Philippians 1:23: 'I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better'. The same as He spoke to the thief beside Him: 'Today thou shalt be with me in paradise'.

Now when the Lord Jesus was dying on the cross, He was going to the Father, having committed His spirit to Him. Therefore, as Psalm 16 tells us, not to Hades, but to heaven - and He was taking that thief to heaven with Him. Now Luke 16 is a passage we'll look at in greater detail next week, and it speaks of the rich man lifting up his eyes in Hades, being in torment; and it also speaks of Lazarus, a pauper, a beggar, ending up in a place called 'Abraham's bosom'. This has led many to believe that this is where the righteous dead go now, not directly into heaven, but to Abraham's bosom - a righteous compartment of the place called Hades. But I believe from studying this that that place described as 'Abraham's bosom' in Luke 16 is a place of blessedness in the presence of God. You see we have got to understand the Eastern ancient imagery that is being used here by our Lord Jesus. When He speaks of 'Abraham's bosom', it is imagery of an eastern banquet. At eastern banquets there would be feasting, music, conversation lasting days, and often guests would usually stay at the host's home. There, day by day, they would recline at the table, not sat at table and chairs like we have, but lying on the ground they leaned on their elbows and reclined with their heads often together, so that they could talk across the table one to another. Now as

they were doing that, if you were to look across the room, at times it would appear that one person had their head resting on another's chest. It wasn't the case that that was literally happening, but because they were all leaning and talking and listening to one another, from a distance that is how it could have been construed - and that explains the position of John in John 13, as the beloved disciple resting his head on Jesus' bosom. It probably wasn't literal, but speaking in the sense of how he was conversing, communing with the Lord in that venue.

Now Abraham's bosom in Luke chapter 16 means that Lazarus was reclining at a banquet table in the celebration of joy with the greatest man in Israelite history, father Abraham. There he is in this celebration, that's the sense of 'Abraham's bosom', reclining there in that joy and that peace. I believe that was the paradise of God, it was heaven, the third heaven, the place of God's dwellingplace where the believer goes now when they die.

Now let us summarise what we're saying here this evening of this place. It is different from the eternal state. There are many questions about it, but it is more than just the realm of the dead, for the weight of Scripture confirms - both Old Testament and New Testament - that the child of God had a hope, which was to be in the immediate presence of God, and New Testament believers in the immediate presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. But to summarise it all, Paul puts it well, to confirm any of our questions, he says: 'It will be better by far' - better by far than this sin-cursed world.

Now we must move on, because we've two more questions, and some of the answers to questions you have in your mind will continue, hopefully, to be answered as we answer these. The first question is: is it physical? The intermediate heaven, the third heaven, the paradise, the place where believers go when they die now - is it a physical place? Well, let's look at the clues that we have in Scripture. The Lord Jesus was resurrected, and Jesus now lives in a physical body, waiting to return to Earth from that place. Take the Lord Jesus' ascension, when He ascended into heaven, the Bible says, the fact is He went to a place - that's the entire point of the passage, as we saw last week - and the angels exclaimed: 'Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven'. He told the disciples before going, John 14 verse 3: 'I go to prepare a place', and even now that third heaven, paradise, is a place.

Now turn with me to Acts chapter 7, just to prove this for you. Acts 7, and this is the account of Stephen's martyrdom - just before his death by stoning in Acts 7:55, we read: 'But Stephen, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God', and in a moment or two he commits his spirit - just as, incidentally, Jesus did to His Father - he commits his spirit to the Saviour. Wayne Grudem, in his systematic theology, says this well: 'Stephen did see more than mere symbols of a state of existence. It seems rather that his eyes were opened to see a spiritual dimension of reality which God has hidden from us in this present age - a dimension which, nonetheless, really does exist in our space-time universe, and within which Jesus now lives in His physical resurrection body, waiting even now for the time when He will return to Earth'.

Stephen saw it, Elisha saw it. In 2 Kings 6 Elisha asked God to give his servant Gehazi a glimpse of this invisible realm. In 2 Kings 6 and verse 17: 'Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about

Elisha'. Now it could be that these horses and angelic figures were always there, or it could be that they were coming and going from heaven to here - but what cannot be the case is that, as some argue, they do not exist at all, and we ought not to take these figures literally. Let me say that Acts chapter 7, the account of the martyrdom of Stephen, and 2 Kings chapter 6 are historical narratives - they are telling us of historical events that took place. They are not parables, they are not apocalyptic books, and so therefore we must conclude that Stephen and Gehazi saw physical and real things that are the heaven of God now.

The clues might indicate that it is possible, indeed, I believe probable, that the third heaven is a physical realm. We ought to ask the question why we are so reluctant to accept that heaven should be a physical place even now? The answer, if we are to be honest, is that we have imbibed the Platonic idea that everything physical is sinful, and everything spiritual is good. That is not Bible doctrine, that is what the church was beginning to believe in 1 Corinthians 15, that caused them to start to reject the doctrine of the resurrection of the body. We need to redress the imbalance in our thinking about heaven: heaven is the substance, it is earth that is the shadow! Do you remember in Hebrews 9 verse 11, the writer says: 'Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building', verse 24 of Hebrews 9, 'For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us'.

He's insinuating that the earthly tabernacle, the Temple, the whole rites and ritual custom, it is only a figure of the true, it is a shadow of the substance! This earth, in other words, is only a copy of the real thing. The earthly sanctuary is a copy of the heavenly temple on high, and that is given clearly in Exodus where Moses was to go up the mount and make everything according to the heavenly pattern that God showed him. Both Exodus and Hebrews suggest that God, now listen to this, created earth in the image of heaven - did you hear that? The suggestion is that God created earth in the image of heaven, just, by the way, as He created mankind in His own image. We get all this upside down, we work from earth up to heaven; but no, that's not the way God worked - He worked from heaven down to earth. C. S. Lewis proposed that, I quote: 'The hills and valleys of heaven will be to those who now experience', that is, the hills and valleys of Earth, 'not as a copy to the original, nor as a substitute is to the genuine article, but as the flower to the root or the diamond to the coal'. This is the root, heaven is the flower. This is the coal, heaven is the diamond.

Let me give you an example, very quickly, of how we take earth as the substance and heaven as the shadow. Have you ever heard the theological debate - and I know these things are deep tonight, but we've got to get deep - where people say: 'Well, you see this term for God as 'Father', and the term for Jesus as 'the Son' - exclusive Brethren and some in evangelicalism have gone down the road saying these are relative terms, earthly terms, human terms that are given to us in order to understand the kind of relationship that Father and Son have, but they're not really father and son as we understand it. Now here's the big question that I ask: why can it not be rather that the father-child relationship on earth is based on the relationship that is in heaven? It doesn't come from here, and God has borrowed it from us to help us understand the godhead, it comes from Him, it's based on His relationship between He as the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ. Let me give you another example of it, not just the tabernacle and the Temple, but what about marriage? God clearly tells us that marriage was given to us to reveal a mystery that is an eternal mystery, the relationship of love between Christ and His bride the church - Ephesians 5:32.

These are not earthly analogies that God borrows to help us understand heaven, these are heavenly truths and facts that God has given to us to illustrate the substance that is heaven. We get it upside down, but the point is this: whether you agree or disagree on heaven as the substance, heaven is real, it is the original, we are the copy. I believe it is physical, and I believe - if I can say it, and I know it's idiotic - it's more real than here.

Secondly, where is its location? Very quickly: well, Genesis 1 verse 1, last week, God created the heavens, plural. There is first of all that first layer of the cake we talked about last week, the atmospheric heaven where the birds are and the clouds. Then there's the second layer, which is the stellar heaven, the planets and solar systems. Then there is the dwelling place of God, 2 Corinthians 12 verse 2, Paul calls it the 'third heaven' and 'paradise'. Now, where is it? Well, none of us really know, but it's real, and it's beyond those other two heavens. It's real, and I'll tell you this: we have trouble imagining it as real, don't we? But scientists are starting to veer towards showing that it is possible - these are unbelieving scientists. Randy Alcorn in his book says: 'For those who have trouble accepting the reality of an unseen realm, consider the perspective of cutting-edge researchers who embrace string theory'. If you're a mathematician to a university level, or a physicist, you may have read on this string theory. 'Scientists at many top universities postulate that there are 7 to 10 unobservable dimensions, and likely an infinite number of imperceptible universes, in addition to the four observable dimensions that we are familiar with'. To put that in layman's terms: there is more out there that we cannot perceive and we do not know. 'If this', he says, 'is what it's leading scientists to believe, why should anyone feel self-conscious about believing in one unobservable dimension, a real dimension containing angels, heaven, hell, Jesus, the apostles, your loved ones and mine?'. The only thing that stops us is our unbelief.

Now let's bring some conclusions to our study tonight. The conclusions are these, I believe, based on scripture: when the believer dies they do not enter the eternal state, the new heaven and the new earth, that is our ultimate focus, our destined hope, to be resurrected and enter into this new universe - however, there is a present heaven, and that is where the believer goes when they die, to be in the presence of the Lord, which Paul says is better by far than everything that is now. It's more than likely a physical place, and our existence here is only a copy of what is true in heaven. Though we cannot know it by our sense or observation, we do not know its location perhaps definitely, we can know that it is there. Christ is there, and the angels are there, and our loved ones who have fallen asleep in Jesus are there, and we are going there if we are in Christ. Are you going there? It makes all the difference in life to know you are, and it makes all the difference in death.

There are many questions I haven't answered tonight, but I want to answer this one for you: you can only know you're going there if you're trusting in Christ and Christ alone for salvation, and have repented of your sins and believed the Gospel - that is your hope if you do. It makes a difference. It made a difference to John Bradford at about 35 years of age. He was a well educated man and a chaplain to Bishop Ridley. Bradford was a committed Protestant Christian, his conversion had been remarkable, his life had been transformed by Christ and he soon earned the reputation of being a powerful preacher. His delight was to proclaim the Gospel of the good news of Jesus Christ by grace in Him and Him alone. However, only four weeks after Queen Mary commenced to reign in England, this young preacher was imprisoned by the Roman Catholic authorities, and early in July 1555 he was burned at the stake in Smithfield, London as a Protestant martyr. He felt honoured to be able to die for Christ, and as the flames of the fire began to scorch his body, Bradford spoke his last word to the other young man dying with him - this is what he said: 'Be of good comfort, brother, we shall have

a merry supper with the Lord this night'. He had no doubt where he was going, he knew he was going to heaven immediately - or, in his words, 'that night'.

Billy Bray was the same, the rugged Cornish tin miner converted to Christ early in the 19th century. As he approached his 74th birthday, at the other end of the scale, in 1868, Billy began to feel very ill, and told some friends: 'I think I shall be in the Father's house soon'. A doctor examined him, and announced to Billy: 'You're going to die', and the patient immediately shouted out with joy: 'Glory! Glory be to God! I shall soon be in heaven!'. For Bray there was no doubt about it, as a Christian he knew that dying meant going to be in heaven - and soon, not just in the distant future, he would be there. It wasn't wishful thinking, it was based on the promise, and what we know from scripture that cannot be shaken: that to die is to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

Do you have that assurance? This week we have looked at the place where the saved dead are now: it is physical, where its location is. God willing, next week we will look at 'How Are The Dead Now?' - we're going to look at the people who are there now, we're going to ask the question: are they conscious? What do they know? And if so, do we know from the Bible if they remember this earth? Do they remember anything? Do they remember everything? Do they see earth from heaven, as many people suppose? We're even going to consider, again quite controversial, are they floating disembodied spirits, or do they have bodies in that place that is heaven now?

I urge you tonight that there is an alternative to heaven, and that is hell. It is a place separated from God's immediate presence, where there is torment forever for those who are unrepentant and unbelieving. My friend, if it's not heaven for you, it's hell. I pray tonight that through Jesus, who died for sinners, you will be sure of the promise of heaven tonight. Speak with me, speak with a friend, but don't leave this evening without that certainty in your heart.

Father, we thank You that the precious blood of Jesus has bought us more than purgatory. The precious blood of Jesus has cleansed us from every stain, so that we need not endure hellfire ever, for He took it all on the cross for us. Because of that, as the apostle has taught us, as the word of God from cover to cover indicates, the child of God who is saved by grace through faith enters into the immediate presence of God and His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. Lord, there are many great questions and issues concerning heaven and eternity - but Lord, help us to take to heart those things that we can know and be sure of; and as Paul could say, that he was certain of this very thing: to be absent from the body was present with the Lord, which is better by far. Give someone that assurance tonight, Lord, and bolster it in all our hearts tonight. For those who have loved ones who have gone before, encourage them tonight to know that they are with Christ in that place, and we are going there too. Bless us now as we go our homeward way, for Christ's sake, Amen.

Glimpses Of Glory - Chapter 4

"How Are The Dead Now?"

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Now, we've two portions of Scripture to read tonight. The first is Luke's gospel chapter 16, and the second is Revelation chapter 6. We will be revisiting these portions to look at them in a little more detail. I am sold on expository preaching, that is the exegesis of verse by verse, even word by word truth from the Bible - but a series such as this doesn't really lend itself to that, so we'll not be looking at individual passages, but various Scriptures. There is no other way to do it, really, than that. We're looking this evening at the subject: 'How Are The Dead Now?'.

Luke 16 verse 19, the Lord Jesus is speaking and giving this account: *"There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead".*

Now put a marker in that portion of Scripture, and turn with me now to Revelation chapter 6 and beginning to read John's account of visions that he saw, in verse 9 we begin - Revelation 6:9: *"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled".*

Now last week, if you were with us, we sought to answer from the scriptures the question: 'Where Are the Saved Dead Now?'. To remind you if you were here, if not to inform you, we came to the conclusion, I hope successfully upon a biblical foundation, that there is a place where the saved dead go now. We came to the conclusion that there is a heaven, the third heaven, paradise as it's described in various portions of Scripture, also Abraham's bosom, which could be termed an 'intermediate heaven'. It is not the eternal state that we read of given account in Revelation 21 and 22, that is yet to be, but it seems to be a temporary place

where the redeemed dead wait between their death and bodily resurrection for the final consummation of all things.

Now we made the point - it's very important that we remind ourselves of this - that as believers, our focus ought always to be the hope of the resurrection from the dead and that eternal state that is the true, eternal heaven recorded in Revelation 21 and 22. That is what we yearn for, that is what our bodies and the whole of creation groans for: the new heaven and the new earth, and that ought to be the focus of our spiritual sight in the future - not so much the place where we go now when we die, but the place that will be our eternal and everlasting destination. That being said, it is therefore reasonable to say that the heaven that is now, that place where we go when we die as saved individuals, is not eternal. You might sit back and say: 'Well, that's strange, to say that the heaven that there is now is not eternal' - but that's the truth. Heaven, as it is now, will change. Only God can be said to be eternal, and only God is self-existent, all else in this whole universe is created. We know that from Genesis 1 verse 1: 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'. Even heaven was created, and so heaven has a past, and heaven has a present, and heaven will have a future. In subsequent weeks we will spend time looking at heaven's future, and we have done already when we considered several weeks ago the question: 'Is Heaven A Physical Place?'. We looked specifically at the new heavens and the new earth, but tonight we're going to look at the present heaven - how heaven is now.

We saw last week that heaven is a place, it is physical now, and it has a location - whilst we are uncertain exactly where the location is, nevertheless it is somewhere. Now we sought to answer in part last week some attempted explanations for where the dead are now, such as soul sleep, purgatory, limbo, hades. We didn't take too much time looking into all of those individually, but we found that there are two texts in particular in Scripture that give us a categorical answer to know that these explanations that cults and false religions give us of where the soul goes now between death and the resurrection, they are false. Those two texts were 2 Corinthians 5 verse 8, where the apostle says: 'We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord'; and then again, Paul once more in Philippians 1 and verse 23, 'For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better'.

Now this week, indirectly, we will further answer why some of these alternative explanations of where the soul goes in between death and resurrection, why they cannot be. But we established last week that though there are many questions concerning where the saved soul goes now, there are things we can be absolutely sure and certain of - that is: we are with the Lord when we die, and it is better by far. You can dispute and debate what you might call the place where the saved dead go now, I believe it's correct to call it 'heaven' - but these things are certain. We are with the Lord, and it is better by far.

Now, this week we're not so much looking at the place, but the people that inhabit that place - how are the dead now? Can we know more than simply that the dead are with the Lord, and it is better by far for them? Is there anything else that the Bible says concerning their condition of existence? For instance, as we compare what we know as heaven in the present with what heaven will be in the future, are there differences between what people are like now in heaven, in the present heaven, and what people will be like in the eternal heaven? Well, we have to say, obviously there are differences - for in the eternal state we will have resurrection bodies, after the resurrection when Christ comes. We are told that we will eat and we will drink in our resurrection bodies. Now just because that is true of the new heaven and the new earth, it doesn't mean that when people die and go to heaven now they will eat

and drink. That is just one example of how there is a difference between the condition of the saved dead now, and that which will be the eternal state of the redeemed in their new resurrection bodies.

Yet there are many other questions that, for many, remain unanswered concerning the condition of dead people now. For instance, do they have bodies? In the third heaven, or even in hell, do people have bodies or are they disembodied spirits floating around, non-physical spiritual entities? Another question that we have hinted at: are they conscious? Or is it the case, like some believe, that when you die you just enter a constant state of ignorant bliss, you don't know anything bad or good that is going on? Now if we come to the conclusion that the dead are conscious, we then need to ask the question: what are they conscious of? For instance, are they conscious of their previous life here on earth? Do they have memory, in other words? If that is the case, is it only the good things that they remember and not the bad? If they remember the bad, would that not have an adverse effect on their experience of what heaven is for them? Or, are they conscious of present circumstances on the earth at this moment? Do the dead in heaven, or hell, know anything of what is going on in our realm of existence?

So, we want to seek, as far as we can, to answer some of these questions, or at least go some of the way: does the Bible have anything to say about how the dead are now? Before I go on any further, you're probably going to disagree with some, at least, of what I'm going to say tonight. I want to emphasise that I am not being dogmatic in what I bring to you this evening. I think many of these things that we'll touch on, you cannot be dogmatic about - but I do believe that there are clues that help us to answer some of these questions. I spoke to you a few weeks ago about how it is like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle that are scattered from Genesis to Revelation concerning the subject of heaven, and what we are doing is seeking to systematically collect them all, put them together and see if we can get a picture of what heaven is like - a glimpse of heaven now.

Now some people, perhaps, will immediately say: 'What's the point of considering these things?'. Well, let me say first of all that the source of our information tonight is holy Scripture, not speculation. Therefore the things that are revealed to us are revealed for our understanding, and it is wrong for us just to say: 'Well, let's ignore those difficult Scriptures', because God has given them to us that we might grapple and compare spiritual with spiritual. Secondly, the point of seeking to answer these questions is to help us imagine what heaven is like now, that we might have a greater anticipation of it and, I believe, through these studies and these weeks of series, that if we can get a glimpse of glory it will be life changing! So that's why it's important: we're looking at holy Scripture, and this subject has the potential of changing our lives!

So let's look tonight at the people: how the dead are now. Let's seek to answer this first question, at least as I have it here: are the dead conscious? Are the dead conscious? Now some people will say right away: 'No! They are not', particularly those who believe in the doctrine of soul sleep. The doctrine of soul sleep is simply the belief that between your death and the resurrection at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, you are unconscious - both body and soul. The Jehovah's Witnesses espouse to this doctrine, as do the Seventh Day Adventists and the Oneness Pentecostal movement. Now there are others, and they don't believe in soul sleep, but even among the ranks of what we would consider Orthodox Christianity, they believe in what is called the doctrine of conditional immortality. That simply is that they believe that God gives immortal life as His gift only to those who believe the gospel - so you only are given immortality when you believe the good news of Jesus Christ,

and therefore anybody that doesn't believe it doesn't have it, and when they die physically they cease to exist completely, body and soul.

Now, annihilationism is another doctrine that is quite similar to conditional immortality, except there is one salient difference and it is this: those who espouse annihilationism believe that everybody is immortal, and immortality is taken from the impenitent so that they are destroyed in hell forever and cease to exist. So you see the difference: conditional immortality, immortality is a gift of God in salvation; annihilationism, everybody has it and God takes it away from those who do not believe the gospel. So these are attempts to explain whether or not the dead are conscious for all eternity.

Now, as William Shakespeare asked, we must ask: 'To be or not to be, that is the question'. Are we conscious or not? Well, before we seek to answer that categorically, we need to ask: does the phrase 'fallen asleep' that we find in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and other places in the Bible, does that prove or even imply that the soul sleeps after death? This is what Paul says: 'I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope'. Now I believe that if you study the word of God you will find out clearly that this phrase 'to fall sleep' is a euphemism describing the body's death. It specifically points to the outward appearance of what happens, it describes what takes place when the body dies - it's as if the body falls asleep until the resurrection at the second advent of the Lord Jesus.

Now it has to be said that sometimes Old Testament passages seem to be confusing in regard to what happens when we die. For instance, listen to Ecclesiastes 9:5 - incidentally, cults often latch onto verses, obscure verses in books like Ecclesiastes - this is what Solomon says: 'For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know nothing', the living know they are going to die, but the dead know nothing. Therefore people who believe in soul sleep will say that 'There it is, the dead are unconscious, they know nothing'. Now what Solomon, in the limited knowledge that he has at this particular time in redemptive history, is describing is the outward appearance - that the body dies and goes into the grave, and as far as humanity is concerned, conscious humanity, the dead don't know anything that the living know. But that does not reflect on any of the New Testament revelation that we have been given more of from Matthew to Revelation that tells us about the immediate relocation of the soul of man with God after death.

There is so much more in the New Testament that tells us that the dead are conscious after death, and would indicate to us that this phrase 'fallen asleep' is specifically related to the condition of the body. Take Matthew 27 for instance, and verse 52: 'The graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose'. What slept? The bodies of the saints! In Acts 13:36, again this falling asleep is linked to the body: 'For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption', speaking of his body being laid in the grave, and of his body seeing corruption. So there is this link with falling asleep and the body in the Bible - but some who believe in soul sleep say that 'To be conscious of heaven now when you die, well does that not rob you of something of the glorious anticipation of what the eternal heaven will be like?'. In other words, they're saying: 'How can we look forward to the new heaven and the new earth if dead people just go straight to heaven now and have a glorious existence there?'. That might seem feasible at first, but if such reasoning were valid then that would mean it would be true to say that all of the blessings God has given to us now, even here on the earth, including the assurance of our salvation, the assurance of eternal life, and even a bit of heaven in our hearts that God says we have as a deposit of the Holy Spirit, all those blessings that God has

given us in heavenly places in Christ Jesus would rob us of the glorious anticipation of the eternal state - but it doesn't, does it? It only helps us to anticipate it even more.

So 'fallen asleep' is linked with the body, and it does not prove one iota that the soul, when the body dies, ceases to exist. In fact, one writer said: 'Nearly everyone who believes in soul sleep believes that souls are disembodied at death. It is not clear how disembodied beings could sleep, because sleeping involves the physical body'. Does that not make sense? Sleeping involves a body. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said: 'It is a term', that is, falling asleep, 'which is used to describe an incomplete condition, an intermediate state. The body at death, as it were, falls on sleep, it is not yet revived and alive and active, so I take it that sleep refers mainly to the condition of the body'.

Now, to further prove that the soul does not sleep, you need to look at the evidence that the soul exists consciously after death. There is much of that, take Luke 16 that we read together tonight. In verses 22 to 31 we read of Lazarus, a pauper, a beggar; and a rich man, we don't know his name - but both of them, Jesus says, are conscious in heaven and in hell. Lazarus in heaven is conscious, the rich man in hell is conscious. In Luke chapter 23:43 the Lord Jesus told a dying thief that: 'Verily I say unto you, today thou shalt be with me in paradise'. Now, being with Christ implies that he would be conscious to know that he was there in the presence of the Lord Jesus. Paul also said, as we've already quoted, that to die was to be with Christ, Philippians 1:23 - to be absent from the body was to be present with the Lord, 2 Corinthians 5 and verse 8.

Let me turn you to another verse, Hebrews 12, quickly let's turn to it just now. This also proves again a little that believers, when they die, enter heaven - but it also shows us the consciousness that that is where they are. Hebrews 12 verses 22 to 24, and I'm reading a slightly different translation to make it clear: 'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God', that is our inheritance, 'the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel'. That is the great congregation in heaven, angels, Jesus, God, the righteous made perfect, the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled - where? In heaven!

Now, we also read Revelation 6, and in verses 9 to 11 John sees a vision of martyrs, and these martyrs are pictured after death, I believe, in heaven, crying out to God to bring justice on earth. Now every reference in Revelation to human beings: they are talking, they are worshipping, and they are in heaven prior to the resurrection of the dead - that is the first chapters of the book of Revelation, right through before we come to the resurrection. Now what does that demonstrate? It demonstrates that these dead people in heaven are conscious after their death. These passages and others make it clear that there is no such a thing as soul sleep, there is no such a thing as a long period of unconsciousness between this life on earth and life in heaven. It's clear.

Now if people are conscious after death, we have to ask the question: what are they conscious of? Let us consider first of all: do they remember the earth? Dead people in heaven now, do they remember this earth? Well, Revelation 6 and verse 10 that we read says that these martyrs, who were now dead: 'Cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'. Now the martyrs clearly remembered that they had been murdered for the faith of Jesus Christ! So they remembered that much, didn't they? They are calling for vengeance on those who

persecuted them. Now, the Bible also indicates, even in Revelation if you turn to chapter 14, that our righteous deeds as Christians on the earth will not be forgotten, but will follow us into heaven after death. Revelation 14 and 13: 'I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them'.

So the martyrs remember a bad thing that happened to them, they were killed for the faith; and those saints of God who have gone into glory, their works follow them, the righteous deeds that they committed on the earth. Now, that means that there is a measure of consciousness concerning remembrance of what happened on the earth before they died. Alternatively, when we look at hell, and those who are there are now, we find from the account of Jesus in Luke 16 that people who are dead and gone to hell also are conscious of the earth and have a memory of it. In Luke 16 we read in verse 25 that the rich man was told by Abraham to remember his lifetime, the good things that he received, and that Lazarus received evil. Then, when we look at verse 27, this rich man prayed to Abraham that he would send him to his father's house. So he remembered the good blessing that he had in life, he could remember his father's house, and then in verse 28 we read that he remembered that he had five brothers who as yet were unrepentant, and therefore as a consequence would be on their way to that awful place of torment. So the same is the case for the righteous dead as the unrighteous dead: they remember some things concerning the earth.

Now here is the intrinsic point that we must grasp: memory, the ability to remember things in the past, is a basic element to our human personality. Now if we are truly ourselves in heaven, there must be, there must be an element of continuity of memory from earth to heaven. That has many implications, and I'll leave you to think about it. We will remember the fact, if we are martyred for Christ, that that happened. We will remember the righteous deeds that we committed, for we will carry them into heaven, they will follow us. People in hell will remember the opportunities that they had, remember their family and friends that are behind them. The implication is that many of the things that we learn, even in this life, as Christians, the maturity that we glean, in a measure will be carried into heaven. If we had time to apply all of those things, this particular message would run on for weeks! Yes, we will be changed in heaven, we will be transformed, but we will remain the same people - though changed and transformed - the same people we are today.

Now if the dead are conscious of the past on earth, at least some things in the past, what of the present circumstances on the earth? What I mean by that is, not do they remember the earth in the past, but do they know what is going on on the earth now? Or, do they see what is happening on the earth? Many believe that everybody is looking down on us here, knowing what's going on because of their observation of it visually. Now let me say right away, I think Scripture is clear that: yes, yes the dead do know something of what is going on here on the earth. To some extent they have a knowledge and awareness - take these martyrs in Revelation 6, they are clearly praying for justice, for judgement on their persecutors. In theory they are acting in solidarity with all those who are still on the earth who are suffering saints. The suggestion is that these saints in heaven are praying for the saints on the earth - which is quite different to the saints on the earth praying to the saints in heaven! In verse 11 of Revelation 6 we see that God answers their question. They're asking: 'When will You avenge our blood?', and God says to them, 'Wait a little season, rest a little season until your fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as you were, should be fulfilled'.

Now what is that telling us? Well, it's telling us first of all that God is indicating that the dead in heaven don't know everything. Some people have this idea that when you die and go to

heaven that you'll know everything - far from it! That's even more of a reason for us to learn as much as we can about God and eternal things now, because we will carry it into heaven - and there is much learning that we have still to do even when we get to glory. They asked a question, they don't know everything. Then it also shows us that there is time in heaven, because they ask: 'How long, Lord, until You avenge our blood?'. The Lord Himself indicates that there is time in heaven, for He says: 'Wait, rest a little while longer'. Now, what have they to wait for? They had to wait until the death of their fellow servants, brothers and sisters yet to be martyred, and they have also to wait until the resurrection of the dead, the consummation of all things, and the judgement of the persecutors of Christians.

Incidentally, this verse 11 seems to indicate that these dead martyrs still retain connections with those who are on earth, their fellow servants and brothers. The same is indicated in Luke 16 by the rich man in hell - he still retained the consciousness of the connection that he had with his father's house and with his five brothers. So the dead know something of what is going on on the earth now, not everything, maybe to a very limited extent, but they know something. Now, what about the question: they may know, but can they see? Well, I'm convinced that they certainly cannot see everything, we are not as a goldfish bowl to people in another dimension - whether it's heaven or hell. But do they see some things? Well, let me turn you for a moment to 1 Samuel 28 - now this might be an exception, but it's important that we note it. First Samuel 28, you remember that Saul came to the witch at Endor, the medium, and asked her to summon up Samuel. We believe that God permitted that Samuel appear before Saul for his own judgement and rebuke. Now look at this account, it's interesting, verse 16 of 1 Samuel 28: 'Then said Samuel', after being summonsed, 'Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David: Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day'.

Now please note these things: from this account we know that Samuel remembered what Saul had done before Samuel died, so he had a memory of what happened before his death - that is Samuel - what Saul had done on the earth. But here's something more: he seems to be aware of what had happened since he himself died. He was aware of Saul's further backsliding from the ways of God. Now, how was he aware? Well, perhaps God imparted that knowledge to him, just as he was a prophet on the earth maybe God gave him that knowledge in heaven - or perhaps he had that knowledge. Now here's another example, in Luke 9 verses 30-31 we read the account of the Transfiguration, and we read there that: 'Behold, there talked', with the Lord Jesus on the mount, 'two men, which were Moses and Elijah: Who appeared in glory, and spake of Christ's decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem'. So here we have in Luke 9 Moses and Elijah, and they seem fully aware of the drama that they had just stepped into. They didn't need to be introduced to Jesus Christ, and they talked to Him about what was currently transpiring on the earth: God's redemptive plan was about to be accomplished, and they are talking to Christ about it. Now you can't tell me that when they returned to heaven, that God pressed the 'delete' button, and they never remembered anything that they had discussed with the Lord Jesus! They seemed to be aware of what God was doing in the plan of salvation.

Now, when we turn to Hebrews 12 we read a well-known verse, verse 1 tells us: 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us'. Now, right away, often we assume that that verse is talking about those in Christian and

Jewish history who encourage us by their lives to go on with God. Now that is what it means, but let us not ignore the picture that is given to us here: it is of athletics, and this great cloud of witnesses are the people who are the spectators. While the events, the game is taking place down below, they are above - and notice that it says that not merely these witnesses precede us, but these witnesses surround us. They are witnesses of God's unfolding plan of redemption, the drama of salvation. I'm not suggesting that the dead knew what you had for your dinner tonight. I'm not suggesting that they look down and see everything that is happening among our friends and families. No, no, no! What I am saying is that they know something, and perhaps they can even see something of God's unfolding plan of redemption as it transpires. We see them in the book of Revelation singing and praising God after certain events take place on the earth. However they got the knowledge, it indicates that they have knowledge nonetheless.

What about Luke 15 and verse 7? Jesus in the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son, says first of all, in the first parable: 'I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance'. Then in verse 10 of the same chapter we read that there was rejoicing in the presence of angels over one sinner that repents. Now notice that it doesn't say rejoicing among the angels, 'in the presence of angels [there was] rejoicing in heaven'. So there is some awareness of what God is accomplishing on the earth through the salvation of lost souls! To what extent, we don't know, but there is some knowledge, some consciousness.

Now someone will probably ask: how could it be that people in heaven are aware of bad things on the earth, for there's going to be bad things that transpire in God's plan of redemption? Well, perhaps we have imbibed a false premise, and that is the idea that the knowledge of suffering and evil will make heaven an unhappy experience for us. Let's think about this for a moment: is God ignorant of everything that happens that's bad on the earth? No, He's not - but it doesn't diminish heaven for Him. You say, 'Well, He's God', well, the same is the case for Christ, the same is the case for the angels who came down to look at what was happening in Sodom and Gomorrah. When they went back to glory, it didn't diminish the experience of heaven for them. Abraham and Lazarus in Luke 16 had an awareness of what was going on in hell, but it was still paradise for Abraham and for Lazarus. We have indications to believe that at times even our Lord Jesus Christ in heaven is grieved, even in heaven He is sad - wasn't He sad for His saints on the earth? He wept at Lazarus' tomb. He wept over Jerusalem because they would not repent and come to Him. We know that He feels, as our Great High Priest, what we go through down here on the earth. When Paul was on the road to Damascus, going to persecute Christians, the Christ of God who was in heaven said: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?'.

We get all these ideas that come from songs and hymns, and maybe aren't so biblical. I know Revelation 21:4 says that God will wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there'll be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither any more pain, the former things are passed away - that's the eternal state. Though when we die now, let me say categorically, we're with the Lord and it's far better than anything you'll ever know down here, it doesn't mean that it's just the epitome of the consummation of everything that you've ever hoped for - it's not yet! It's close to it, but it doesn't have to be a condition of ignorance of bad things that go on. I'm not talking about bad things in your family or anything like that. Randy Alcorn put it well when he said: 'Happiness in heaven is not based on ignorance but on perspective'. We'll start to see things from heaven's perspective - that will make all the difference. You see, those in the present heaven, they are not completely fulfilled yet - they are a million times better off than you and I are, but they're still looking forward to something: to the resurrection of the

body. Only then, when they enter into the new heaven and the new earth, will they experience the fullness of joy that God has intended for them, purchased by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's sum up here about consciousness, because we have to move on: though we are here on earth, and we are ignorant of what is going on presently in heaven, they are not as ignorant, perhaps as we think, of what is going on here on earth. They, perhaps, see it through heaven's eyes - but whatever they don't know, it is unthinkable to imagine that they are ignorant of the consummation of human history according to God's will. As you read Revelation, you will see that they are far from ignorant, they are praising God and bringing hallelujahs to Him when He accomplishes His sovereign purposes on the earth.

So they are conscious, they remember the earth - whether in heaven or hell - they know a measure of what is happening on the earth, at least in relation to God's plan of redemption, and maybe at times God even lets them see. The last question that we want to look at: are these people conscious? We say yes, but what about the question: do they have bodies? Now, instinctively we say: 'No, they can't have bodies because they are waiting for the resurrection body, and they haven't got that yet, Christ hasn't come'. Yes, that's correct in measure, but I want you to consider for a moment: given the consistent physical descriptions of heaven that we have looked at over these weeks, and now realising that those who dwell there are conscious - is it possible, though debatable, that between our earthly life here in this body and receiving our resurrection body at the second coming of the Lord Jesus, that God may grant the dead some apparent form that will allow us to function as human beings in an unnatural state?

Now before you write me off - maybe you've already done that! - are there any indications of this in Scripture? Well, I think there are. Revelation 6:9-11 that we read speaks of these martyrs - what are they wearing? They're wearing clothes! That's right! Now I know there's a symbolic element of justification in the clothes that they're wearing, and the white of the righteous acts and so on, but that doesn't mean that they aren't real clothes. John saw them as real, and then when we see how John behaves in this heavenly vision, it seems that John understood that he had a body in this vision. He is said in chapter 10 of Revelation, verses 9 and 10, to have grasped something, to have held something, to have eaten something, and to have tasted something. Now this is before the eternal state. In 2 Corinthians 12 and verse 3 we read that Paul said that he was taken up into the third heaven, and whether in the body or out of the body he could not tell. Now he expresses doubt whether he was in or out of the body, I admit that, but that indicates that he felt that it was a possibility that he could have been in his body, does it not? You're not sure!

Well, what about Enoch, Genesis 5:24, Hebrews 11:5 says God took him up to heaven without dying. In 2 Kings 2 we read the same of Elijah - both taken to heaven without dying and without leaving a body behind them. Now, do you know what that means? That means in heaven now there are at least three who have bodies: Enoch, Elijah, and Jesus Christ our Lord. When we look again at the Transfiguration mentioned previously, Luke chapter 9:28-36, we read that who appeared with the Lord Jesus? It was Elijah and Moses. Now I ask you: where did Moses get his body? For he did die, and he left his body - where did it come from? I can't answer that, but certainly it shows, I believe, that beyond question at least at some time God has created the appearance of a body for people who have died and have not yet been resurrected after the coming of Christ. We have got examples of this, how God gave angels the appearance of having human bodies, even though they were not human.

Now many ask the question: does God do this for everyone in heaven now? Well, we cannot tell, but in Luke 16 Jesus ascribes, in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, physical properties to the people who have died before resurrection. Look at it: they are reasoning, they are communicating, they have the appearance of physical forms, they have tongues, thirst, memory, sight, concern, consciousness - they even have fingers to dip into real water! Now maybe you'll say: 'Well, these are entirely figurative terms'. Well, perhaps some of them are, but what is the point that Christ is getting across? It is His intention to show us that these people after death were real human beings with thoughts, identity, memories, and awareness of their past lives, present existence, and even relationships with people on the earth at that moment. Is that not His point? You see, we think too much in otherworldly terms of the existence of the dead.

So, do they have bodies? Well, some would say they are intermediate bodies that are given to the dead - I don't know so much about that, there are many hard questions concerning that suggestion. Others have suggested that our souls take on the characteristics of a body, appear to be like a body. I can't give categorical answers on these things, but I'll tell you this: the scriptures have certain indications that most of us have ignored - but there is one certainty, and let us rejoice in all of this series, as we try to answer some questions, in the certainties that we know and are sure of and convinced of. There is this one sure thing: that there is conscious existence, real identity after death.

Chris Bitterman had a son who went to the mission field, and like the souls under the altar in Revelation 6, his son was martyred as a missionary for Jesus. Do you know what Chris Bitterman used to say to people? He says: 'We have eight children, several are on the earth and one is in heaven'. Is that the way we think of people when they die? Have you got a loved one in heaven just now? Do you know that they are real, they are conscious, they are in existence? D. L. Moody, the great evangelist, before he died said: 'Soon you will read in the newspaper that D. L. Moody has died, do not believe it! For in that moment I shall be more alive than I have ever been!'.

After death, where will you be more alive than you have ever been? This is real, friends: Will you be in a real conscious existence in hell? Or will you be in a real conscious existence with Jesus and the saints in heaven? There are many questions we cannot answer for sure, but this much is sure: because Jesus died and rose again, Jesus has said: 'I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live'. You can know for sure, you must know for sure - I challenge you tonight: do you know for sure? If you don't, for your sake, for your eternal sake, make sure.

Glimpses Of Glory - Chapter 5

"Will We Know One Another In Heaven?"

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Two portions of Scripture this evening, and we've got a lot to get through tonight, and I want to achieve my goal so that by the end of this evening we'll be able to say that we've covered substantial ground to show - as I hope to prove from the Scriptures - that we will know one another in heaven. But we're turning first of all to Matthew's gospel chapter 22, and let's grapple with the difficult passages right away and not avoid them. Of course, this is probably the text of Scripture that is most to the forefront of people's minds when we think of this particular subject - Matthew 22, and we are beginning to read at verse 23. Our second passage will be from 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

"The same day came to him", that is to the Lord Jesus, "the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitude heard this, they were astonished at his doctrine".

Then to Paul's first epistle to the church at Thessalonica, 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, beginning to read at verse 13, and Paul says: *"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words".*

'Will We Know One Another in Heaven?'. You're here tonight, and you're either anxious to know the answer to that question, or perhaps you're anxious not to know the answer! Those who are wanting to know an answer probably want to know because they have loved ones in heaven, and you're hoping that you one day will meet them, will recognize them, and enjoy something of the relationship that you cherished with them here on earth. As for those who, perhaps, don't want to know the answer, that may be because you are afraid that when you get to heaven you won't know your loved ones - and you're afraid at the possibility, perhaps, at least, that you will not relate to them as you once did when you were here on the earth.

Now this question, 'Will we know one another in heaven?', has caused both great curiosity to many, but also, it has to be said, has caused fearful apprehension to others - the prospect of, perhaps, not recognizing, or not being able to relate to those who we love who have fallen asleep in Christ.

Now let me say that I believe that uncertainty about the answer to this question, 'Will we know one another in heaven?', has robbed many a believer of the joy of anticipation of meeting our loved ones in heaven, and what heaven really will be for us. I hope you agree with me that the thought of heaven without our loved ones doesn't seem all, at least, that it could be, if we were with them, we recognize them, and relate to them. Perhaps some damage has been done by some over-pious souls who often, and I've heard it said myself, infer that it's unspiritual to want to meet our loved ones in heaven, or to look forward to meeting them and relating to them once again. These people often reason that we should be so taken up with the Lord Jesus Christ, and being in the presence of God, that we ought really not to need to look forward to this. Christ will be everything, and He will be enough, and we should be satisfied with that. Now that sounds very good, and very spiritual, but we need to consider the question: what if God Himself intends that we should have the joyful anticipation of reunion with our loved ones? Surely that should make a difference?

I believe that that is the sentiment of 1 Thessalonians 4 that we'll look at in a little bit more detail later on. It is, I believe, God's declared intention within the revelation of Scripture that we will know one another in heaven, and we will relate to one another. After all, we are relational beings. God created us as social creatures. You will recall that before the fall of man - and that, incidentally, is important - before man fell into sin in Genesis 2 and verse 18, God said: 'It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him a helper fit for him'. Indeed, God not only made woman, but he made mankind in His own image - that is, again, in the Genesis record, this time chapter 1 verse 26: 'Then God said', and note the plurality of God, speaking of Himself, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'. Could I suggest that, as we are made in the image of God, and God Himself in His Godhead is a plurality - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - that God's intention in making us after His image is to be sociable, to be relational to others - that was God's original intention in the book of Genesis, in the original creation. From widely studying scripture on this subject, I have no indication for you tonight that God has had a change of plan, that somehow we should cease to be relational to other human beings, other spiritual entities, and only relate to God and His Christ.

Therefore, in implication, as J. H. Bavink (sp?) has said: 'The hope to see one another in heaven is entirely natural, genuinely human, and in harmony with Scripture. That ought to enhance our anticipation of heaven, because we know we will meet others who have gone before us'. Richard Baxter, one of the great puritans who some believe wrote the greatest treatise on the subject of heaven entitled 'The Saint's Everlasting Rest', said this: 'I know that Christ is all in all, and that it is the presence of God that makes heaven to be heaven, but yet it much sweetens the thought of that place to me that there are there such a multitude of my most dear and precious friends in Christ'.

My desire tonight, my duty of course is to present scriptural truth to you, however it sits with you, but I want to tell you tonight that my goal is to help you and not to distress you. If that is to happen, and be the end result, you're going to have to listen very carefully to what I'm expounding from the word of God so that you will not misunderstand. I fear that in previous weeks people have not listened correctly, not sought, perhaps, clarification; and have gone away distressed, being confused because they have misheard what I have said. Does the

Bible answer the question 'Will we know one another in heaven?'. I have said that it does, but we've got to prove it, so we want to first of all consider this issue of recognition - will we know one another in heaven? Will we recognize one another?

This statement that I'm about to make has been attributed to several people, one George MacDonald, one the father of G. Campbell Morgan, and one another Scottish preacher - I don't know who said it, but it is worthy to be said. Being asked the question 'Shall we know one another in heaven?', this preacher, whoever he was, said: 'Shall we be greater fools in paradise than we are here?'. Now that might be a rational assumption, but the question that we must consider tonight is: is it a biblical, reasonable conclusion? Can we prove this from Scripture, that we will recognize one another in heaven? Let me say that I believe that ignorance about heaven in general comes because there is a great ignorance concerning the Scripture, and it is the same in relation to this question 'Will we know one another in heaven?' - many people are ignorant of the texts that relate to this subject, and of the rational and reasonable biblical conclusions that we take from them.

Now, as with any disputed case, we want to call, this evening, some biblical witnesses into the stand, as it were, to submit their testimonial evidence relating to whether or not we will know one another in heaven. The first we will call tonight from the pages of Scripture is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. I don't need you to turn to all these passages, you can if you wish but there's a lot of them to go through. The first I want you to recollect at least is Matthew's account in chapter 17 of the Transfiguration of the Lord Jesus Christ. He Himself was transfigured before Peter, James and John on the Mount of Transfiguration, and the record states that Moses and Elijah appeared beside the Lord Jesus. We saw last week that Moses and Elijah, or at least Moses, died centuries before, and Elijah was translated to heaven without death in his physical body. But the thing I want to emphasise tonight in relation to whether or not we will recognize each other in heaven is that both Moses and Elijah maintained their physical, human identity - to such an extent that the disciples who were with Jesus on the Mount recognized who they were.

Now the obvious question is: how did they recognize them, because they had never seen them in the flesh before? Well, I don't think it's unreasonable to think that it was possible for them to recognize them without seeing them - after all, Elijah was the foremost prophet in the history of Israel, he wore distinctive garb like John the Baptist, and Moses himself was the lawgiver, that great patriarch of Judaism. So to a Jew, these two characters were from their history, religiously and culturally, and it was obvious to them who they were right away. But the thing that we need to note is: they recognized them.

Then there is the teaching of the Lord Jesus, and we don't have time to go into all of it, but we looked in a little detail at Luke chapter 16 - which is, incidentally, not a parable, because in Jesus' parables He never names people as He does in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the poor beggar who went to heaven. Just to look at that for a moment, what that account tells us is simply that the rich man looked up and saw Lazarus in heaven, in paradise with the patriarch Abraham. Now that necessitates that the rich man in hell recognized Lazarus, the beggar who used to lie at his gate, and Abraham, the father of Judaism. That's the only point I want to emphasise: there was recognition.

Then when we look at the Lord Jesus personally in His resurrection, we see that He was also recognizable as who He was. For instance, Luke 24 verse 39, He said after His resurrection: 'It is I myself', implying that they ought to recognize that it was the Jesus that walked with them for three years. Indeed, we go on to read in the gospel account that Christ's disciples

recognized Him countless times after resurrection: on the shore as He cooked breakfast for them in John 21; when He appeared to a sceptical, doubting Thomas in John 20; and then as 1 Corinthians 15 records, when He appeared to over 500 disciples at one time. Now sometimes people throw up objections to why the disciples may not have recognized Christ after the resurrection. Sometimes they cite John chapter 20, where Mary in the garden where the tomb was immediately did not realise that the One who spoke to her in the garden was Jesus, and not the gardener as she presupposed, and so people say: 'Well, Mary didn't recognize Him, therefore He was unrecognizable' - but I believe there are reasonable explanations why, at first, in a tearful traumatic state, realising that Jesus had actually died and gone from them, why she didn't assume immediately that this was Jesus who spoke to her. One thing is certain: when the One she thought was the gardener spoke her name, she replied to Him in Aramaic: 'Rabboni', realising in the tone of His voice, and the way He spoke her name, that it was her Lord Jesus.

Similarly, people often quote the two on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24 as not recognizing the Lord Jesus, and assuming, therefore, that He was unrecognizable. But if you look for a moment at Luke chapter 24, you will see there that Luke actually tells us why they did not recognize the Lord. In verse 15 of Luke 24 it reads that while they were talking and discussing together: 'Jesus himself drew near and went with them', but their eyes were kept from recognizing Him, 'their eyes were holden'. There was a purpose in them not understanding that this was the Lord, and if you look down at verse 31 we see that Luke records: 'their eyes were opened', and then they recognized Him, and He vanished from their sight. Something supernatural was going on for divine purposes, but when their eyes were opened to see, they recognized who He was because He was recognizable. So we believe, clearly, that Jesus was recognized in His resurrection body. If we are going to ever conclude that we will not recognize one another in heaven, we're going to also I believe, by inference, have to conclude that, therefore, if that's the case, we'll not recognize Christ either. That is absolutely unthinkable, that the Christian should enter heaven and not recognize Jesus Christ his Lord!

Now we want to bring Paul to the witness stand for a moment or two, and ask him: 'Will we know one another in heaven?'. I believe he gives us the answer in many places, but we'll look first of all at 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 19. So if you turn with me, not the passage we read but two chapters before it, Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 2:19: 'For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy'. Paul also, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, speaks in the same sentiment, and says: 'Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand'. He speaks of our gathering together unto Christ, and in 1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 surely Paul is inferring, meaning that he hoped to recognize his converts from Thessalonica? That was his hope, his joy, his rejoicing: that he would be gathered with those he had led to Christ, with Christ, in glory.

Now 1 Thessalonians 4, that we read together from verse 13, also speaks of a gathering together in verse 17: 'Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord' - to be caught up together, for us to be ever with the Lord, it implies the knowledge of being with one another in heaven. Let me remind you of the context of 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. The background to it is the perplexity and distress of these believers. They were concerned about their dead loved ones, and what would happen to them if they died before Christ came again - is that the end? Paul is saying: 'No, it's not the end, for when Christ comes the dead shall rise

first, and then we that are alive and remain will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air'. Now let me ask you: what comfort would that truth be if these words didn't mean that these troubled believers would recognize their loved ones who had died in Christ? I mean: how would they know if they were OK if they are unrecognizable at the second coming of Jesus?

Of course, it makes a nonsense of the passage to infer such a thing. Paul's point is not: 'Do not sorrow hopelessly as others because your loved ones are at rest', or, 'Your loved ones are free from pain', or, 'Your loved ones are in glory with Christ' - no, that's not his point! His point is: 'Do not sorrow hopelessly because you're not parted forever, you will see them again when Christ brings them with Him at His return'. That's his point! That's why he says in verse 18: 'Wherefore comfort one another with these words', and comfort comes from the prospect of reunion. The comfort of reunion is nonsensical without mutual recognition! So here is the truth, it's found in Christ, it's found in Paul: that the moment we meet our loved ones who have gone to glory before, we shall at once know them, and they at once will know us.

Now that ought to increase our anticipation of heaven! Let me say tonight - and I want to release you, in a spiritual sense, from any feeling of guilt, or that it's wrong to look forward to meeting your loved ones in glory, that is pious nonsense! For God has made us relational creatures, to love each other, and God has given us in His word this hope of meeting, a reunion, a recognition in glory that would put heaven in our hearts because our loved ones are already there. Don't despise that, it's a gift from God.

Graham Scroggie put it well when he said: 'If I knew that never again would I recognize that beloved one with whom I spent more than 39 years on the earth, my anticipation of heaven would much abate. To say that we shall be with Christ and that that will be enough is to claim that there we shall be without social instincts and affections which mean so much to us here. Life beyond cannot mean impoverishment, but the enhancement and enrichment of life as we have known it here at its best'.

Now that leads on well to our second question that evolves out of the first. In the answering of this second question we'll find more evidence, I believe, for why we will know one another in heaven as we consider 'How will we know one another in heaven?'. Now the first question was the issue of recognition, the second of 'How we will know one another' is the issue of relation - how will we relate? What relationship will we have with those we recognize from this earth? Now is Graham Scroggie correct in what he said? Let me remind you of his last statement, he says: 'Life beyond cannot mean impoverishment, but the enhancement and enrichment of life as we have known it here at its best'. I believe he is right, this is the reason why - let me remind you of something very important that we learned in previous weeks. We learnt that God has prepared for us a new heaven and a new earth that will not be realised until the Lord Jesus comes, it's accounted in Revelation 21 and 22. But we saw that God, in bringing the new heaven and the new earth to reality, does not erase history as we have known it. He doesn't wipe the slate clean and destroy His old creation, but we found that it's important to realise that God is redeeming the old, it has all been bought in the shed blood of Christ. But this is my point: the old is not destroyed, but the word of God says the old is made new, it is redeemed.

I think I said in previous weeks that heaven is not a place of unfamiliar things, but heaven is a place of familiar things made new. We saw the physical description of heaven, and how God has given us some clues around in our own creation as to what heaven will be like. Now here is the big issue: does this apply to our friends and our family who have gone before us? Is

history erased as far as it is concerned with how we knew them down here on earth? Now let me say that we're going to seek to answer, biblically, some of these questions, and as we answer each one we will find that a new question arises, or questions arise, out of each answer, and we'll seek to answer them as we go along.

The first question is: what happens to marriage and the marriage relationship that we have known on the earth? If we say that we will recognize our loved ones in heaven, then we will recognize those who we were in marriage partnership with on the earth. Now, that may cause problems in many folks' minds, and it certainly did in the minds of the Sadducees. If you turn with me back to Matthew 22, in verse 23 and following they cite a principle that Moses spoke of in Deuteronomy 25, which was the Levirate marriage: that was that if your brother died and was married, you had to marry your brother's wife - this is Old Testament law - and raise up a seed to his name, a family. That was the Levirate marriage, and the Sadducees presented this hypothetical scenario to the Lord Jesus of a woman who had been married many, many times. They asked: 'In the resurrection, whose wife shall she be, for they all had her?'.

Now let's see what Christ does teach in this passage. First of all, He does teach that men here, in gender sense, those who were men on the earth will still be men in heaven. He also teaches that women who were women here on the earth will be women in heaven. What He definitely does teach, without any dispute, in a negative sense is: there will be no marrying nor giving in marriage in heaven. He says that in that way we will be like the angels, as they were from the creation, they did not procreate, and they did not give and take in marriage. Now we must answer the question: if there is continuity between the old earth and the new earth, the old heaven and the new heaven, and God does not erase history, and God does not bring unfamiliar things to bear in heaven that we have not known on earth, and He doesn't do away with the old but renews the old to make all things new, why is there no marriage in heaven? Now let me answer it very simply, and then I will explain my answer. The reason why there will be no marriage in heaven is: there is no need for it. There's no need for it!

Now bear with me tonight: remember that in previous weeks we pointed out that earth is the shadow of heaven, not vice versa, earth is the shadow of heaven. So the Tabernacle and the Temple that God gave to mankind, the plans were based on heaven - OK? That's where the idea came from and was given to earth, the same with the family relationship of father and son - it's not given to the Godhead after creation so that we can understand something of how they relate to one another, but they're not really a Father and a Son; no, we found that the fact of the matter is this: they were Father and Son first, and we derive our family relationship from that image that is the Godhead. We saw it tonight again in how we are made in God's image: our understanding of God does not come from how we are here.

So that is a principle we have laid down: many of the things around us like trees and rivers and meadows, we read about the fact that these will be in heaven - but the real thing is not so much here, this is only the shadow, but the real, the truth is in glory and will be in the new heaven and the new earth. Now that's important - why? Turn with me to Ephesians 5, we find that marriage falls into the same category as these things - what am I talking about? Shadows, figures of the true. Paul tells us in Ephesians 5 and verse 31 and 32: 'For this cause', speaking of marriage, 'shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church'. So right away Paul is telling us that God's purpose in instituting the marriage relationship at the very beginning of creation was that we would understand the relationship between Christ and His redeemed church. In other words, marriage was a

shadow, or if you like a signpost, relating to a greater relationship which is the relationship of the Christian, the church, with their Bridegroom, Christ Jesus.

Now a signpost becomes unnecessary when we reach our destination. You see, marriage, as we have known it down here on earth is a copy, it is an echo of the true, ultimate marriage that will take place at the marriage supper of the Lamb when Christ, the Bridegroom, is wed to His bride, the church. The purpose of earthly human marriage for us down here is in order to point us to that day, and even prepare us for that day in heaven. Now, listen carefully to what I'm saying tonight, because perhaps that truth bothers you? I can understand why that might be the case, but perhaps the reason why it bothers you is that from this fact that marriage won't be needed any more, a lot of Christians make wrong conclusions from that fact. You must listen to this if you're not going to misunderstand what I'm saying tonight. You're sitting here saying: 'I love my wife', and, 'I love my husband' - maybe they are deceased and gone to heaven. When people hear and read Matthew 22, they get distressed, and they make the false assumption that this must mean that we will be more distant in heaven than we were on earth with our loved ones, husband and wife. Now listen to me: there is nothing in Scripture that infers such a thing, in fact the opposite is taught - that we will be closer to one another in glory! There is nothing that takes away from the fact that in this lifetime, in this earth, you and your spouse were married, and you invested so much of your lives in each other. Just because Jesus says the institution of marriage will end, having served its purpose, it does not mean that you will lose that deep relationship in glory. Far from it: Christ, nor the Apostles, nor any New Testament Scripture hints that the deep relationships between married people on the earth would end. Marriage might end, but the deep relationships do not, I believe.

Now let me illustrate this for you, and it was illustrated for me in a book - not that this relationship will end, but rather think of it like this: you will gain a fuller, more meaningful relationship in heaven. Here's how this chap illustrates it: in our lives here on earth two people can be business partners, or perhaps golf partners, or any kind of partner you like. But perhaps the day comes when they're no longer business partners, they go their separate ways, or they join different golf clubs, or move house and can no longer meet together on a regular basis. Just because those two individuals are no longer business or sporting partners, does that mean the friendship ends? Does it? Far from it, indeed the relationship that was built on that partnership might even develop, and may even carry into a permanent friendship and partnership that goes on and on into a deeper sense, more than they could have imagined. Now I do admit that it is unusual for God to replace what was His original creation, but there's one thing from Scripture I believe that is absolutely certain: when God does replace something from His original creation, He always replaces it with something far better! Always!

Listen, there are a lot of questions, and I mightn't answer them all for you tonight, but there's one thing that I want you always to keep in your mind when you are seeking to find answers from the scriptures regarding heaven, and it's enshrined in Psalm 17 verse 15 where David says: 'As for me, I shall behold your face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake in your likeness'. You will be satisfied - listen now - with how you relate to your husband or your wife in heaven, even though marriage as an institution, as we have known it, will be dissolved. In other words, listen: there is nothing to worry about, nothing. Don't let the devil hammer you, or stupid Christians who don't know any scripture related to it cast doubt on your mind. Hang on to that verse: 'We will be satisfied'.

What about someone who has had several spouses - let's not avoid the question from Matthew chapter 22. Now listen: you won't have several spouses in heaven, though the relationship that we have had with one another it continues, the marriage does not. That means that that relationship will be retained in eternity, but what we always have to keep in our mind is that we will be perfect, all of us will be perfect in how we relate to one another - whether they were a spouse, or spouses, how they relate to each other - indeed the implication of heaven is we will relate with an ever deepening relationship to everybody in heaven. Now listen to what I'm saying: that doesn't erase everything that you have known in your lifetime with your loved one - far from it, it makes it deeper, it makes it more meaningful. Indeed, it is more fulfilled, it is going to be fuller than ever! Those words of Paul should help anyone here tonight: it will be very much 'far better'. So if you're worried you'll lose anything that you knew when down here on earth with your loved one, forget it! You ain't seen nothing yet! What you will know with them and enjoy with them through all eternity in ever deepening relationship, that's ahead of you.

Now, what about difficult relationships on earth? I'm not so naive, and I hope you're not either, to think that everybody wants to relate as they did on earth to those who are in heaven. We laugh, but there are many broken hearts, lifetimes of twisted family relationships even in Christian marriages. Now listen to this, this is wonderful: for in heaven, neither we nor our family members will ever cause us any pain again! Our relationship will be harmonious! What we've longed for, as Jonathan Edwards put it: 'No inhabitant of that blessed world will ever be grieved with the thought that they are slighted by those they love, or that their love is not fully and fondly returned' - better by far! Isn't that wonderful?

What about family then? Will it continue? Well, let me turn you to Ephesians 3 - and I may have to go over time here tonight, I hope you'll not mind - Ephesians 3:14, Paul says: 'For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named', another version puts it like this, 'From whom every family in heaven and on earth is named'. Now, Christians here in this verse are called a family, the reason being that God is their Father, and they relate to one another as brothers and sisters, and true believers in Christ, by faith alone, are the children of God - that's why we pray: 'Our Father, who art in heaven'. Now we have already learned, and I want you to carry this with you in everything we look at: earth is the shadow, heaven is the substance, and the family that we know down here is a shadow of the great family of God that we are going to know up in glory. We will know our families, and we will relate to them as we've related to them down here, but it will be in fulfilment that is far greater - not so much separate families dotted all over the place, but one great family of God! So we are not losing anything, but we are gaining everything!

Now, in saying that, when we die, one of the few things that we can carry into heaven is our friendships and our relationships with people down here on the earth. Randy Alcorn puts it like this: 'Nothing will negate or minimise the fact that we were members of families on the old earth'. I don't know whether it's good news or bad news for you, but your relatives are always going to be there - but the blessing is: we're all going to be one family. We're all going to be perfect, and we're going to be satisfied, and it's going to be better by far - now hold on a minute! You're missing something. What about the loved ones who won't be there? I haven't got time to go into that one, but one thing is sure - and I want you to hold on to this if you have loved ones without Christ - hell will never have power over heaven. None of hell's miseries will ever veto any of heaven's joys. Whatever we can know, or will know, or will remember, that will not happen!

So often we focus on unanswered questions, and they are often the ones that are negative in nature, but if we only started to think about the immensely positive implications of the fact that we will recognize one another in heaven, and we will relate to the whole family of the redeemed in heaven! It's mind blowing, because part of the enjoyment of heaven is having company to enjoy it with! That's why nobody ever goes to Disney World on their own - having said that, I do know one person who went on their own! - most people want to go and see the smile on the kid's faces, and to say: 'Did you see that? Did you hear that? Did you experience that?'. Why? Why do we want company when we have a wonderful experience? Because it enhances it when it is shared with another! That's what heaven will be like! Jesus said it, listen to Matthew 8:11: 'I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven'.

Now that's implying that they'll sit down to dinner together. Why do people sit down at dinner tables? Well, in the Middle East culture dinner was not only about good food and good drink, but it was also a time to build relationships, it was a time to talk together, to tell stories with one another. Who will we be talking with and relating with? Imagine this! Abraham! Isaac! Jacob! The great patriarchs, the prophets, the apostles, the great saints of the ages, the martyrs, the reformers - we will relate to them! Who's your favourite read? Is it Spurgeon or Tozer? I'm looking forward to striking up a bit of a friendship, maybe, with old C.H. or A. W. - this is what heaven will be like! Developing friendships with them, asking them questions: 'Paul, see that verse, I've spent a lifetime over that, what do you mean?'. We will relate, but it's something more precious than this: who else will we relate to? We will develop old relationships that were underdeveloped. Did you hear that? Old relationships that were underdeveloped, and even undeveloped, maybe in family - remember David, his child that he conceived with Bathsheba in adultery was very ill. David went to prayer and fasting, and then it died, and we read that David said in 2 Samuel 12:23: 'Now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me'. Now some people say he was talking about the grave, but I beg to differ because whatever this hope was that David had of going to this child, it cheered him! It dried his tears! It caused him to stop fasting! Because he knew he would meet him again!

Some of you have had infants who have died, and young children, and I believe the Bible indicates that they are in glory - not because they are innocent, they were sinners, but because of the mercy and grace towards children that we find in the Bible and in the ministry and life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps what it will be, I don't know what age they will be now, but what will it be perhaps to get to glory, and children you have never known will take you by the hand and show you round the premises? Old relationships that were undeveloped, or maybe you will develop new relationships in heaven that you never had. What am I talking about? Imagine how glorious it will be for grandchildren and grandparents, or great-grandchildren and great-grandparents, who never knew each other to enjoy the youth of heaven around the cities, and the fields, and the hillsides, and the waters of the new heaven and the new earth. This is what it's going to be!

Maybe you're here tonight and you were robbed of a parent early in your childhood. Listen to me: if you are saved, and they have gone asleep in Jesus, you will have all eternity to catch up! That's what it will be! The tragedy of a father dying before a daughter's wedding - how often has that happened - but there he is in glory, if he's saved and washed in the blood, and he'll have another wedding with you, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb - and he'll not miss it! What it will be to walk together, to marvel together, to praise the Lord together with those who have been close by flesh, but who we have never really known.

What if you weren't able to have children on the earth? This is a taboo subject that we fear to mention, but it's the heartache of many a soul. Do you know what I believe the Bible indicates, because we will be satisfied? The relationships that we have not had on this earth to meet needs that we have had on this earth, whether it's children or whether it is someone to share love with us, we will have an opportunity to invest those emotions and sentiments in a perfect way in heaven with that great family of God's people. I don't know exactly how God is going to do it, but whatever cravings are in your breast for parental care, to fulfil that aching pain, it will be healed - that's what the Bible says - however it will be solved, we shall be satisfied. By-and-by the deepest heartache, the deepest pain will be mended.

Maybe you have never had a parent that you could trust on the earth, well there'll be plenty of trustworthy parents all around heaven that you can look up to. Then there are others who have been separated from children or parents because of the call of the Lord on their life, they've gone to serve the Lord somewhere. A young visiting missionary in Eastern Europe was asked the question: 'Isn't it hard being so far away from your children?', they were grown up at the time, 'You're missing important events in their life, and your grandchildren'. The missionary said: 'Sure, but in heaven we'll have all the time we want together'. Is that how we think? Do you know what heaven is? It is many things, but one thing it is: it's a big wad of eternal compensation, it is time for things to be made up, lost time restored, lost relationships restored, lost desires and fulfilments and satisfactions restored. That's why Jesus said: 'Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets'.

Compensation is ahead, child of God. That's what Paul meant in Romans 8:18: 'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us'. This is how Martin Luther put this compensation: 'I have held many things in my hands and I have lost them all, but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess'. So it is not true that there'll be no family in heaven, it's not true that we won't recognize them in heaven. It's not true that we won't relate to them in heaven with the same depth of relationship, though marriage will not be there. On the contrary, there will be one great family, and the blessing of it is this: none of us will ever be left out, every one of us will feel at home, and every time we see someone in heaven it will be a great family reunion. Never again should we wonder if we'll see those saved loved ones again in heaven.

Can I finish by quoting to you an excerpt of a sermon J. C. Ryle gave to his own flock on this very subject, and this is what he said: 'Those whom you laid in the grave with many tears are in good keeping. You will yet see them again with joy. Believe it! Think it! Rest on it! It is all true! There is something unspeakably comforting, moreover as well as glorious, in this prospect. It lights up the valley of the shadow of death. It strips the sickbed and the grave of half their terrors. Our beloved friends who have fallen asleep in Christ are not lost, but only gone before. These eyes of ours shall once more look upon their faces. These ears of ours shall once more hear them speak. Blessed and happy indeed will that meeting be, better a thousand times than the parting. We parted in sorrow, and we shall meet in joy. We parted in stormy weather, and we shall meet in a calm harbour. We parted amidst pain and aches and groans and infirmities, we shall meet with glorious bodies, able to serve our Lord forever without distraction - and best of all, we shall meet never to be parted, never to shed one more tear, never to put on mourning, never to say goodbye and farewell again. Oh, it is a blessed thought that the saints will know one another in heaven!'.

Remember, child of God, whatever your question is: we shall be satisfied by-and-by.

Let's bow our heads. Will you be there by-and-by? There are people not saved in our meeting tonight - you won't be there without Christ's righteousness. It comes alone by faith in His blood. It's time you were saved, that you might have this confidence.

Lord, bless us on our homeward way. Thank You for everything that we have in Christ Jesus, and may it put a leap in our step and a smile on our face, even though we sorrow, to know that there is a comfort that one day there will be reunion, recognition and relationship because of Him whom, having not seen, we love. Amen.

Glimpses Of Glory - Chapter 6

"What Will We Do In Heaven? – Part 1"

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Now we are considering tonight this question: 'What Will We Do In Heaven?'. I hope you've got a pen and notepad with you, because there's a lot of ground to cover this evening - so much ground, that I have to say to you again that I'm splitting this study over two weeks. I don't have an introductory Scripture reading tonight, simply because we'll be looking at so many Scriptures I didn't know which one to take out as pre-eminent, for there weren't any. So we are using our Bibles more than ever tonight, but we don't have an introductory reading this evening.

Cliff Barrows and Billy Graham were in conversation on one occasion concerning what they would do in heaven. Now if you don't know who Cliff Barrows is, he is the song leader for the Billy Graham Crusades. He said to Billy: 'I'll have a job in heaven, but what will you do?'. He was inferring that because Billy is an evangelist, and everyone will be a Christian in heaven, there will be no one to win for the Lord, but there'll be plenty of praising of God to get on with through the aeons of eternity. But even that little story raises a number of questions for us concerning how we imagine what we will do in heaven. I wonder will we feel like singing all the time, as the song says? That's sometimes what people think we will be doing: sitting on a cloud with a harp, singing praise to God constantly throughout all eternity. Or, will we be resting all the time? We'll find out in the next two studies, at least, that rest is a part of what heaven will be - but is that what we will be constantly doing throughout eternity? Will we be lying prostrate before God's throne all the time: 'Worthy, worthy is the Lamb!', crying in praise and adoration of our Lord Jesus?

Now all these things are wonderful, and I don't mean to belittle them at all, but I do not doubt either that if we were to do them all the time for an eternity they would lose much of their attraction for us. Now, again, the problem with our deficient understanding concerning what we will do in heaven is simply due to a general ignorance concerning the scripture's teaching on the subject of heaven. We have pinpointed the fact, I think, adequately over recent weeks that it is ignorance of what the Bible teaches about heaven that has eaten away and hindered our anticipation of what heaven will be like, and our looking forward to it. The very same problem concerns the subject of what we will do in heaven: often we have such a limited, or even ludicrous concept of what we will be doing in heaven, that we are naturally led to the conclusion that there seems to be little of interest to do in heaven.

If popular understanding of heaven is anything to go on, one would be forgiven in thinking that heaven must be a pretty boring place. We'd be left wondering how we're ever going to put the time in or, if you like, the eternity in. Can I say to you this evening, whatever your understanding of what we will do in heaven is or is not, one thing is sure: no one will be bored in heaven, according to the Bible, as I'll show you tonight and over two weeks - there is plenty to do! I don't know who coined the idiom: 'Variety is the spice of life', but they didn't realise the extent of the wisdom and truth in that statement because, from heaven's perspective, if I could re-coin the idiom: 'Variety is the spice of eternal life'. Though the Bible

does not specify what individual responsibilities will be in heaven, it does provide general descriptions of roles that we will be engaged in. I have for you, over these next two weeks, eight different occupations that we will engage in throughout eternity. Now I don't suggest to any extent that these are exhaustive, but they'll give us an idea of what we will do in heaven - and I've only four to give you this evening.

Before I give you the first four, let me first of all deal with very quickly what we won't do in heaven. The words of the hymn are very true:

'Our pain shall then be over,
We'll sin and sigh no more;
Behind us all of sorrow
And naught but joy before'.

Now turn with me to our first portion of Scripture, and we'll spend a lot of time in Revelation, and we want to look first of all at Revelation 21 as we consider what we won't do in heaven. In Revelation 21 and verse 27 we read these words, speaking of the eternal state and the holy city of New Jerusalem: 'And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life'. Now there is the first thing that won't be there: sin will not be found in heaven. Now just think for a moment, and we could spend all night contemplating this and taking the implications out of it, but imagine for a moment what it would be like never ever to have temptation before you again. Never to struggle with the flesh, the world, the devil. Never to fall into sin, to be taken unawares. Never to have that sense of guilt, having committed sin. Never having ever again to confess our sins to God. No need to have a conscience!

It's hard to imagine, but it is a fact that there will be no more sin in heaven. As far as we relate not only to God but one another, there will be no more apologies. Now that mightn't be any different than for some of you down here on earth - it's hard to get people to apologise these days, even believers! There will be no need for apologies in glory, for there'll not be any offence taken, no more misunderstandings. You'll not need to repair anything or replace anything, because there'll be no brokenness - literally, in a physical sense, or in a mental, emotional, or spiritual capacity. There'll be no more persecution of the child of God, because there'll be no more devil or demons, no more sin! Can you muster a 'Hallelujah' at that?

Secondly, there'll be no more sighing, as the hymn writer says. In Revelation 21 and verse 4 we read: 'And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away' - no more sighing. I'm sure you sighed today at some time - if not in actuality, maybe mentally or in your heart. Listen: there will never be the sigh of loneliness in heaven, there will never be the sigh of sadness, there will be no more hurt, no more illness. You'll not need to be cured of anything because you won't have anything. There'll be no more need of counselling. You'll not need to be protected, because God there will be your shield and your reward.

Now we could spend, as I've said, even a couple of nights on what won't be in heaven - but our consideration tonight is: what will we do in heaven? The first thing that I want to bring to your attention that I believe is very clear from Scripture is: we will be engaged in service in heaven. That's the first thing, at least in the order that I have here, that we will do in heaven. One of the most significant testimonies regarding the activity of the redeemed in heaven is a

short but meaningful statement that is found in Revelation 22 verse 3, look at it, it says: 'His servants shall serve him'. Now, isn't that interesting? Those who lovingly serve the Lord Jesus on the earth, they will be the ones who will feel at home in heaven, as in heaven we will serve the Lord forever.

Now, right away I have a concern: I'm concerned because many who call themselves Christians, even in our own church here, don't do anything in the service of the Lord. Now I know we all do our bit day by day in our own testimony, but I'm talking about in the life of the church. Now, we will see in our next study, next week, that heaven is a place of rest, and that will be part of our eternal reward - but we never should make the conclusion that heaven will be an existence of exclusive rest. Heaven is not an eternity free from work. If you're wanting to be free from work forever, don't be going to heaven! This comes from a misunderstanding: some people think that work is something that came from the fall and the curse after man fell into sin - that is not the case at all. Toil in work, the sweat of their brow and the indignity of work came from the fall - but God created work as something good in His original creation. We will be engaged in it - all the more reason why you should be engaged in it down here as a believer, because it could be and would be part of your preparation for your existence of service in heaven.

Now, what type of work will we be engaged in in heaven? Well, I'm sure there will be many types, even practical types, but the imagery that is given to us here, particularly in the book of the Revelation, is an imagery of priestly service. We will be engaged in the service of a heavenly priesthood. In chapter 1 of Revelation and verse 5 we read: '[Jesus Christ is the one who] loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen'. We all, now, are priests; we all, now, through the Mediator, the one and only Jesus Christ, can come to God - but it will be the same in heaven when we are in God's immediate presence. The defining characteristic of the Old Testament priesthood was intimacy of service with God. The Old Testament priests had a unique relationship to God - no common, ordinary Israelite could go near anything that symbolised the presence of God, and it was only the priest who could enter into that presence. You remember that because of Calvary, and our Saviour's glorious atonement and redemption, that we read in Matthew chapter 27:51 that the veil of the Temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom, showing that we now could come and be priests ourselves, through the Lord Jesus Christ, into the very holiest of all, the immediate presence of God Himself.

It will be such in heaven. First Peter 2 and verse 9 says: 'Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. Hebrews 4 encourages us to come boldly, and we do that in spirit now, but we will do it in reality when we get to heaven around the throne of God. Look at Revelation 21 verse 3: 'I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God'. We will serve in God's immediate presence - that's the first thing that we will do in heaven.

The Rev Kenneth MacRae was the minister of the Free Church of Scotland in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis from 1931 to 1964. He had a long ministry in what was one of the largest Presbyterian churches in the world. He saw great power through his preaching and great fruit borne in that land of revival. About five months before his death in early May 1964 he dictated the following testimony, listen to what he said: 'I have been long in His service here, but I have never tired of it. All my grief was that it was so poor, so listless, so forgetful and so

lacking in holiness - but soon I shall serve Him with a perfect service, without failure or flaw'. Isn't that wonderful? 'Soon I shall serve Him with a perfect service, without failure or flaw'. I can only speak for myself, but I imagine that all those who serve the Lord have this constant burden of failure, sense of inadequacy in meeting the mark - but one day, when we get to heaven, that's all going to go for ever! We will have the eternal joy of serving the Lord, knowing that we are serving Him doing a job well done. One of the greatest experiences, even in this life, is the satisfaction of a job well done - but imagine the pleasure in heaven of smiling in the presence of God, being able to look into Christ's eyes knowing that you have done a job perfectly for Him.

Other people, sadly, tragically have been disqualified from some forms of public service due to misdemeanours in their life, backsliding, sins that are of such a public nature that they have been prohibited perhaps in public testimony as they once were. Isn't it wonderful to know that one day, if those people are repentant of their sins, one day service will be perfectly restored for them publicly in the presence of God. It's wonderful, isn't it? Perfect service. Imagine a service in which you will never grow weary. There are many exhortations in the New Testament for us now not to grow weary, Galatians 6:9, not to be weary in well doing; Hebrews 12:12, 'Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees' - but it's hard! But imagine that, even if in heaven we do expend our energies serving the Lord - and that's debatable even in itself - those energies will be perfectly replaced. As soon as we do something for the Lord, it will not be long until we have that energy that we expended replaced to do more to the glory of His name. No wonder Cooper could write:

'Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood,
Shall never lose its power,
'Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more'.

There we will serve the Master in a sinless perfection of service, untiringly and with no blemish. It's wonderful, isn't it? That's the first thing we do in heaven: we will serve. Here's the second thing, and this might surprise you: we will be served. Now I want you to turn with me to Luke chapter 12, and here we have a parable of the Lord Jesus. In verse 35 we read: 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them'. Now the imagery that the Lord Jesus gives us here is of a great lord returning to his palace where his slaves are waiting for him, and because they have been faithful to their lord, when he arrives he calls them altogether - and rather than resting from his long journey, or retiring for the night, the lord tells the slaves to sit down. He makes the slaves kings, and he prepares for them a feast - and then, astoundingly, he doesn't order other servants to serve them, but he serves them himself!

Now friends this evening, grasp the import of this truth. Christ is saying: 'When I come again, and if you're watching, I will come and serve you for all eternity'. To Peter it seemed strange that the Lord should wash his feet, didn't it? Maybe the suggestion that the Lord should serve you is equally difficult to take in, but let's face it: where would any of us be tonight if the Lord had not washed our feet, if the Lord had not washed us all in regeneration? Where would we be now if He wasn't serving us at this very moment at the right hand of God as our Great

High Priest and Mediator? The Bible teaches in this parable in particular that Jesus is going to go on serving us in heaven. What a reward it will be for us to be served by the Lord forever!

John Nelson Darby once gave an address on Luke 12:35-41 that we read, and somebody kindly lent it to me recently, and it's entitled: 'The Lord Jesus, A Servant Forever' - very true. This is what Darby says: 'He comes', that is Christ, 'in His second advent, and brings us to heaven to His Father's house; that where He is, there we may be also. 'While you were in that wicked world', He says to us, 'I was obliged to keep you on the watch, in a state of tension, with diligent earnestness to keep the heart waiting, but I bring you to a place where you are to sit down, and it will be My delight to minister to you'. Isn't that precious? That the Lord Jesus, as He has served us on this earth coming in His incarnation, through His crucifixion, His resurrection, through His ascension, His intercession at the right hand of God, His coming again and glory - He is going to, when He gets us home to the Father's house, serve us forever and ever and ever. That is grace, is it not?

What will we do in heaven? We will serve and we will be served. Thirdly, and quite substantially for our consideration tonight, we will worship. We will worship in heaven. Now the most informative insights concerning heaven's worship are unveiled for us in the book of the Revelation. The first magnificent heavenly scene that is described for us is found in chapter 4, and if you turn to it you will see at a casual glance, without reading any of it just at the moment, that it involves a combined worship of 24 elders and four living creatures. Then, as you move through the account in Revelation, you see that the scene is extended when the Lamb, who is also the Lion of Judah, steps out into the centre of the apocalyptic prophetic stage. We read then in Revelation 7 and verse 9 a great scene of worship: 'After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen'. This is the great multitude coming out of tribulation and joining in praise to God.

Then, when we turn to chapter 14, we see a heavenly orchestra, if you like, and 144,000 saints taking up a great song of praise again to God, striking up what is described as a new triumphant anthem. Verse 1: 'And I looked', John says, 'and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth'. Then we find in chapter 15 and verses 1-4 another song is found, and this time the song is extolling Moses and the Lamb for redemption's story, and in verse 1 we read that the worship is like this: 'And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify

thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest'.

Then finally in Revelation 19, we'll not read it, verses 1-10, all of heaven appears to pick up the song of triumph. But this whole weight of evidence concerning worship in heaven, in the book of Revelation in particular, shows us that there is this constant atmosphere of worship there. Now, like the New Testament, worship in heaven is not related to a time or to a place. In other words, there is not a prescribed moment to worship, or a vicinity in which to worship - rather, just as we are to worship now in heaven in the spirit, in heaven our worship will be our constant disposition at all times and in all places. One reason why you'll not need a particular place to worship in heaven is because heaven is described as a temple. Wherever we are in it we'll be able to worship the Lord. We will worship in heaven, and we have to remember that God's original plan in redemption was to purchase, by the blood of Christ, an eternal people, a priesthood who would worship Him forever - a group of eternal worshippers.

That is why Jesus said in John 4:23: 'But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him'. Isn't it thrilling that when we get to heaven we will worship the Lord forever in a constant disposition of adoration to our God - but this is the magnificent thing to my heart, and I hope to yours: our worship will be perfect, and our worship will be eternally unhindered! I imagine you're no different than I am, and when you try to worship, whether it's in prayer, in praise, or whatever way you can describe worship in its different features, you struggle with distractions of all sorts. Some people, in a pastoral way, have confided in me some of the awful thoughts that spring to mind at times when they're trying to have holy thoughts and meditations upon God and His person, His character, and His work. These thoughts come, and interests that are apart from interests of spiritual things, sins even are committed in the moments when we are trying to worship God - we can be enthralled with temptation! But the day is coming when we will worship perfectly without any distractions.

John Newton's hymns are wonderful, and in one of them he describes this great stress between worship down here, how pitiful it is even in its best form, and what it will be in glory when he says:

'Weak is the effort of my heart,
And cold my warmest thought,
But when I see Thee as Thou art,
I'll praise Thee as I ought'.

What a thrill that in heaven our worship will always be pure, from pure hearts, with pure motives, and with no distractions at all. That's how we'll worship. Some people ask: 'Well, will there be singing in heaven?'. Well, I think I've covered enough ground tonight to show you that there will be. In Revelation 15, just to remind you, and verse 3 we read: 'And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb', and there it's envisaged for us, 'Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints'. Now Revelation, incidentally, contains more songs than any other book in the Bible with the exception of the Psalter. There are 14 of these sung by groups appearing in heaven in the book of Revelation, and what they are actually saying in chapter 15, if you look at it, verses 3 and 4: 'Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest' - those are portions out of the book of Psalms that have distinctly been given here a Christian interpretation for praise of the Lamb in heaven. That should encourage us to still

sing the Psalms, and I would that we sang more of them in the New Testament age. There will be singing in heaven, and we'll be singing psalms! The Presbyterians should be shouting 'Amen'!

Not only will we be singing in heaven, but there will be music in heaven - you mightn't get any 'Amen' out of the Brethren there! - but nevertheless, music has been called by many 'the universal language' of this existence of creation. If you think about it, music is in every culture. Whilst it has been perverted and depraved of course, misused and abused, music will clearly have a prominent place in heaven. Now I know some of you can sing without music - and I don't mean without accompaniment, but without melody - but there will be music melody in heaven, it is given a place as it was given in the Tabernacle of the Old Testament and in the Temple. It was more than just melody, it was instrumentalism. I would encourage you to count, there are at least 288 musicians engaged in services in Solomon's Temple found in 1 Chronicles 25:1-7. In that Old Testament scene of the Temple there was vocal, choral and instrumental music that was there to add to the congregational worship. We saw in past weeks that the Tabernacle and the Temple were given a blueprint in plans from what was seen on the Mount by Moses and what was the Temple of God in heaven.

I believe that the Bible indicates that heaven is the birthplace of music. The devil didn't create music. I believe there will be music in heaven, and I know this causes a problem for some of you - because I know of people who wouldn't even come into a meeting...we once had an elder from another church who came to this church and saw someone strumming a stringed instrument. He was over on a visit from London, and he left because he was appalled at this piece of wood with strings on it! Well, he's going to have to leave heaven, because Revelation says that there are harps and the sound of harps - whether it's imagery or not, it's instrumental music. There will be music in heaven. J. Oswald Saunders comments: 'What glorious music will enhance the felicity of heaven! No one will be tone deaf or lacking musical appreciation. If choirs and orchestras can elevate us to such heights of aesthetic enjoyment here on earth, what will it be when we hear the celestial choirs accompanied by heaven-trained orchestras? The apostle John had a foretaste of heaven's majestic music, and he actually struggles to convey the impression it made on him'.

Now look at Revelation 14 verse 2 till we see what Saunders is talking about. He says: 'I heard a voice', now that word 'voice' there could be translated 'sound', 'I heard a sound from heaven, as the sound of many waters, and as the sound of a great thunder: and I heard the sound of harpers harping with their harps'. This was a musical sound that was so wonderful that it could not be described with words, so much so that John says it was like many waters, like great thunder! The poet W. M. Semanski:

'There was music in the heavens
At the dawning of the days,
When the morning stars together
Sang their great Redeemer's praise;
But the music that surpasses
All this earth has heard and known
Will ring out when all ransomed
Gather round the Saviour's throne'.

There was music in the beginning, and there will be surpassing music in the end. John MacArthur speaks of our worship and praise well in summary, and says: 'Perfect praise will be the highest, noblest expression of our perfected being. We will recognize the splendour of

God, we will see clearly His Majesty, we will see His glory and perfection; and gazing on God's perfectness eternally, we will be compelled to offer uninterrupted, unrestrained, adoring, loving worship. It will be our delight!'. I love F. W. Faber's poetry. One of his verses of a poem, which is also a hymn, goes like this:

'Only to sit and think of God,
Oh what a joy it is!
To think the thought,
To breathe the Name
Earth has no higher bliss' - nor does heaven!

In heaven we will worship. Now, here's the big challenge: have you, have I learned to worship down here? Do we know what it is to worship, because worship down here is preparation for worship in glory - and if we have no desire to worship on the earth, what makes you think that you'll want to worship in eternity, and spend all eternity doing it? Can I remind you of the statement that the great puritan theologian John Owen made, that I quoted in our beginning introductory message, week one? He said this in his book 'The Glory of Christ': 'No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight in heaven, who does not in some measure behold it by faith in this world'. In other words, if you have no desire for Christ here, to commune with Christ, to be in the presence of Christ, to gaze upon God in the image of Christ here; my friend, you need to make your calling and election sure, because in all likelihood you don't have the adoption of the Spirit which cries out from the heart: 'Abba, Father'.

When we consider the prospect, as Faber put it, of gazing on God's perfections; well, there naturally arises a question, and it's one I have been asked in recent weeks, and it is: will we see God? What will we do in heaven? Well, we've said we will serve, we'll be involved in service; we will be served; we will worship; but out of this reality of worshipping and gazing on the perfections and glories of God that inspire us to adoration and praise - will we see God? Fourthly, I want to say to you tonight: we will see God. That is something we will do in heaven. Now, right away, I know, springing to your mind are some objections to that statement that we will see God - such as John 1 and verse 18. Jesus is incarnated in flesh, tabernacling among us, and John writes: 'No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him'. So it seems clear that no one has seen God at any time. John, the same author, in 1 John 4:12 says: 'No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us'. Remember that this is the same John who writes to us in the Apocalypse, the book of the Revelation. But Paul also says, writing to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:16, speaking of God, the One: 'Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen'.

Those three verses alone seem to be against the idea that we will ever see God - but there are other Scriptures that indicate that we will see God. Those that are for this proposal - first of all there are many, but I'll give you quite a few tonight - Genesis 32:30 from the experience of Jacob. He called the place where he met God 'Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved'. In Judges 13:22 we read that Samson's father, 'Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God'. In Job 19:26-27 Job says, after all his sufferings that were eating at his flesh: 'And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another'. In Isaiah 6, Isaiah says that he saw the Lord high and lifted up in the Temple, that is heaven, His train filling it. In verse 5 he said: 'Woe is me! for I am

undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts' - Jehovah of hosts.

Then we come to the New Testament, and we find the same idea of seeing the Lord in the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:8: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God'. Hebrews 12:14: 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord' - the implication is, with holiness and the purity spoken of in the Beatitude, we will see the Lord. Then in Revelation 22, if you turn to it with me, and verse 4 John categorically says that in this new eternal state, verse 3: 'There shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him: And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads'.

Now I believe the explanation to this seeming conundrum and, as some would say, contradiction is that whenever we see the Lord Jesus Christ in heaven we will see God. We will see everything that God is because Jesus was, is, and always shall be the permanent manifestation of Divinity. He was the Word, declaring God; He was the Christ incarnate, tabernacling, God in our midst, the express image, the brightness of His character and person. As He said to Philip in John 14:9: 'Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?'. I believe the principle way that we will see God in heaven is through the Son. Let me say this: there might be other ways that God will manifest His glory. We might see a Shekinah, as those who, in the Old Testament, viewed God's light and glory in the cloud - but here's the point: in heaven, seeing Christ will be seeing God, and seeing Christ will be all-in-all.

What will we do in heaven? We will see God manifest in Christ! Have you ever imagined what that will be like? Sometimes we are too busy, and we need to take some time, even after a meeting like this, and sit down and imagine: what will it be like to see Jesus? What will be in His eyes when you look at Him? In all the studies that we are engaged in about heaven, we must ensure that our greatest and most joyous anticipation of heaven is seeing God in Christ, and our longing for heaven should be a longing for Jesus! Though there are many gifts and many prospects, and matters that would cause us to anticipate the new heaven and the new earth, and being absent from the body and present with the Lord now, we must always remember to focus on the Giver - the Tabernacle of God will be with men, and He will be their God, and they shall be His people. What will it be like to see Jesus? I can't describe it!

The saints of God down through the years have tried, let me give you a sample of what some of them say. Randy Alcorn, who has written a book on heaven that I have been richly blessed with, says this: 'When John saw Jesus in heaven he fell at His feet as though dead. We will see Christ in His glory - the most exhilarating experiences on earth such as white-water rafting, skydiving, or extreme sports will seem tame compared to the thrill of seeing Jesus, being with Him, gazing at Him, talking with Him, worshipping Him, embracing Him, eating with Him, walking with Him, laughing with Him! Imagine it! Not only will we see His face and live, but we will likely wonder if we ever lived before we saw His face. To see God will be our greatest joy, the joy by which all others will be measured'.

John Dunne, that Christian poet said: 'No man ever saw God and lived, and yet I shall not live till I see God - and when I have seen Him, I shall never die'. Sam Stornes, the theologian, says: 'We will constantly be more amazed with God, more in love, and thus evermore relishing His presence and our relationship with Him. Our experience of God will never reach its consummation, we will never finally arrive as if, upon reaching a peak, we discover there is

nothing beyond that - no! Our experience of God will never become stale, it will deepen and develop, intensify, amplify, unfold and increase, broaden and balloon'. Renee Pachet (sp?), the Bible teacher and theologian, says: 'Here on earth we know what it is not to be able to take our eyes off a lovely sight. A wonderful flower, a magnificent panorama, or an unusual work of art can make us quite beside ourselves - what will it be when we shall see, face-to-face, the Author of all that is beautiful and perfect?'.

What will it be to see God? It was denied Moses, and yet Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4: 'For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ'. Second Corinthians 3:18: 'But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord'. What will it be to see Him? What will it be, as John says, to see Him and to be like Him? We can identify with Thomas Binney when he said:

'O how shall I, whose native sphere
Is dark, whose mind is dim,
Before the Ineffable appear,
And on my naked spirit bear
That uncreated beam?'.

But he answers in another verse, and we too can rejoice that:

'There is a way for man to rise
To that sublime abode:
An offering and a sacrifice,
A Holy Spirit's energies,
An Advocate with God'.

We will see God in the face of Jesus Christ. What will we do in heaven? We will engage in service, we will be served, we will worship, and we will see God. Next time we study I want us to consider whether or not we shall reign, we shall have fellowship, we shall learn, and we shall rest.

Glimpses Of Glory - Chapter 7

"What Will We Do In Heaven? – Part 2"

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Let us turn in our Bibles to a passage that we're not going to read initially, but we'll be looking at as one of our first verses - that's Revelation 22. We're looking tonight at 'What Will We Do in Heaven?', of course part two, our second study. As we're sort of systematically studying this subject, we're not taking a Bible passage and doing an exposition of it, but we're looking at various Scriptures - and I hope you understand why that has to be the case when we take a subject like heaven that spans the whole of the scriptures.

I couldn't help thinking today, when I was in the study contemplating what to say tonight, how we started this series way back in January, and how now - just before, probably one week from concluding it, near the end of March - some of our dearest friends have entered heaven, and have experienced the joy that we are combing the scriptures to foresee. They are there now experiencing it all, and faith has given way to sight - isn't that a wonderful thought? Yet personally, for me anyway, more lovely is the thought that for all of us, even where we are tonight, heaven is only a sigh away. Now maybe that doesn't comfort you at all, but if your faith is rooted and grounded in Christ, and you do have an eternal perspective, and you do see heaven the way it is, the way you ought to see it, that should be the case for any of us here. Of course those of us who are saved, and those of us who have come by repentant faith to God through Christ in the gospel, that ought to be our present possession.

Now we've covered a lot of ground over these weeks, and I just want to spend a few moments - because it's been so long since we've been in this study - just reminding ourselves, and recapping over what we have learned. In our first week, which was really an introduction, we learnt why it is important to study heaven. Now I hope that over these weeks that has really come to bear upon you: the vital nature of a knowledge of what we are going to experience not only when we die as Christians, but when we enter into the eternal state of the new heaven and the new earth at some point in the future after our Lord comes. But we really narrowed it down as to why it is so important to study heaven to this one point overarching all, and that is that we need through the medium of the scriptures to imagine what heaven is like. Many of us have been impoverished concerning the anticipation of heaven because we have not learned to imagine, through the various types, descriptions, metaphors and literal descriptions that the Bible gives us, what heaven is like. We haven't pictured it, and so our anticipation has been low - and I hope that I've convinced you how important it is to glean the scriptures and to look very delicately at what the Scripture says regarding heaven, and that will engender within you an ability to imagine, an illumination in your mind and heart of what heaven might be like, and therefore you will be given an anticipation in your heart - and a desire, I hope, to seek after heaven, and eventually to be in heaven.

This is echoed in the writings of Richard Baxter. Richard Baxter was an English puritan, and he wrote what many regard to be the greatest treatise on heaven, entitled 'The Saints Everlasting Rest', which was published in 1649. When he wrote this book - or not really wrote

it, but when he had the thoughts that are contained within it - he was in a very frail condition, indeed at 35 years of age he suffered a total collapse in his physical health. Many feared, including himself, that he was going to die. So, in wanting to prepare himself for death, for leaving this world and passing to the next, he began to meditate on heaven and its joys. He wrote all the little thoughts down on bits of paper for his own benefit, and after he recovered, unexpectedly, from his illness, he put them all together and it comprised this massive tome which I would encourage you, perhaps, to get - and it will take you a couple of years to read it if you read it properly! He suggests to his readers in that book that they follow his own example - what was that? Of meditating half an hour every day on heaven - now I know that's probably unrealistic for most of us here this evening, but he did say these words which are very instructive to us in thinking of this practice of his, he says: 'For want of this recourse', half an hour thinking of heaven, 'to heaven, thy soul is as a lamp not lighted'. In other words, not to think of our eternal destiny, not to have a heavenly perspective in our minds and hearts is to be like a lamp or a candle that is not lighted. There is something missing when we do not value the importance of thinking and anticipating heaven - that is why it is so important to study the subject.

Regarding information that God gives us in the Bible, which we spent much time looking at, Baxter says these words: 'It has pleased our Father to open His council, and to let us know the very intent of His heart, and to acquaint us with the eternal extent of His love; and all this is that our joy may be full, and that we might live as heirs of such a kingdom. Shall we now overlook all, as if He had revealed no such matter? Shall we live in earthly cares and sorrows, as if we knew of no such thing, and rejoice no more in these discoveries than if our Lord had never written it? O, that our hearts were as high as our hopes, and our hopes as high as these infallible promises'. I want to re-echo that to you tonight: Oh, that our hearts were as high as our hopes, and our hopes as high as these infallible promises! Oh, that as we put these words of God into our minds, that they would filter down into our hearts and lift us, as it were, into the heavenlies with such an ecstasy of our anticipation. That's what should happen, that is why it is important to study heaven.

Then we saw in the following week that heaven is a physical place. Speaking not specifically of where we go when we die in Christ now, but of this eternal state later on after the second coming of the Lord: the new heaven and the new earth - we saw that the Bible tells us that this is an actual location, it is found in time and space, and indeed we are given a key to understanding a little bit about it by the gift of creation that God has given us all around us in nature. Many of the figures and descriptions of that place are similar to what this world is like, of course in an un-fallen state.

Then thirdly we saw also from God's word, I believe, where the dead are at this very moment. Not thinking of the future eternal state of a new heaven and a new earth, but thinking of what theologians have called an 'intermediate heaven', what Paul called the 'third heaven', or 'paradise'. We saw that though some have questions regarding where the soul goes now when the believer dies, Scripture is clear in many regards concerning the consistency and the existence of the soul now in heaven. Paul said it is to be with Christ, Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8, it is to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. I think that answers any questions that one could have.

Then we looked after that at the fact that the dead, how are they now? What is their state of existence? We saw in that particular study that the dead are conscious. Being conscious, they remember the earth, and they know what is happening on the earth to a certain extent - not completely, but to a certain extent. We even looked at the issue of the fact that they may well

have the semblance of form. We couldn't go as far as to say that they have a physical, literal body; but certainly those who have died in grace and gone to that place have appeared since in a physical manifestation that others could recognize. Then we concluded that particular night again with Paul's words in Philippians 1:23 - whatever we don't know about how the dead are now, we know this much: that to be with Christ, Paul says, is better by far! That should always be our full stop at the end of any questions we have concerning the subject.

Then in our fifth week we answered a very important question that many of you have asked at some time in your life, and many of you are asking poignantly this very evening: will we know one another, and will we relate to one another in heaven? We saw from the scriptures that it indicates that we will. It is God's intention with the human family that we should know reunion, and we know that we will be caught up together to be with the Lord in the air - that is one of many verses that indicate that we are made as relating creatures to one another, we are made as those who need each other - even the first man on the first day of creation in the perfect idyllic paradise, he was not complete without a helper fit for him. So reunion is in God's plan, and we see that recognition is necessary for reunion. We need to recognize one another in heaven, there are many verses to prove that fact - and I encourage you to get these recordings and scan them again. Also we saw that there will be not only recognition, but there will be relation, and though the marriage institution will cease to exist, the relationship that we have had, the relationship of love and intimacy will continue - and many family relationships and filial relationships will go on into eternity we believe.

Then we looked in our last study at what we will do in heaven. You'll remember - this was my own quote, and I don't know how accurate it is, but you've heard the saying 'Variety is the spice of life', we concluded that 'Variety is also the spice of eternal life'. We will not get bored in heaven, you will not get bored in heaven! We saw in our last study, negatively, what we will not do in heaven. There will be no sin, there will be no sorrow, and we spent a bit of time on that, and that's immensely encouraging. Some people think that all we can know about what we're going to be doing in heaven, and what heaven will be like, is what we're not going to do, and what will not be there - that's far from the truth. We saw last time that the first thing, at least as we had it on our list, was that we will serve the Lord. Revelation 22 that you have turned to just now, verse 3: 'His servants shall serve Him'. We will have plenty of work to do in heaven, and that work will comprise of priestly service, and the wonder of it all is: as we serve the Lord, as we bring our lives in worship to Him, living sacrifices, though they be eternal life, there will be no failure, there will be no sense of inadequacy or weariness as we serve the Lord for ever. We will be able to stand back and, without an ounce of pride, know that we have offered to God a job well done - something that you or I have never been able to do. I'm looking forward to that day, are you not?

We will serve, and then we saw that we will be served. In Luke 12 we looked at that parable where the Lord Jesus Himself in that figure and story was teaching the disciples that He would serve them. When the Lord comes back He is describing how He will take us to heaven, and it will be His delight in that place called heaven to serve His people, and He will be to us a Servant forever. Now that is amazing! We think of His service as something that is involved only in His humiliation and His condescension, but that is far from the case. Though He was humiliated and took the place of a Servant that He now does not have, we praise God that He is ever serving us as our Great High Priest at the right hand of God, for if He were not we would not be able to come into the presence of God. But it doesn't stop there: it goes on until the day that He takes us to be with Him in the air, and then brings us to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and then eventually we enter into the eternal state forever. It will be His

constant, everlasting delight to serve us as His people. It's amazing to me! It tells us a lot of things, it certainly tells me that there is no shame in service; and, as the Lord Jesus taught us, the greatest among you is the one who serves.

Then not only will we serve and be served, but we will worship. We saw that this is the 'where' of heaven - not looking at a geographical location, but the atmosphere in which we will exist will be one of worship. Wonder of wonders to us in this sphere and era, it will be perfect worship, unhindered worship, worship that knows no distraction of a sinful thought, or a temptation of the flesh or of the mind, or of the will or heart. It will be pure worship, in pure motives, from pure hearts! Of course, that worship, as we saw, will be expressed in singing and music, and in various other ways.

Then we concluded in our last evening's study on the fact that that worship of the Lord, as we fall prostrate before His throne in His presence, will come to climax and crescendo in a moment when we will see God. Revelation 22 verse 4: 'And they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads'. Of course, we saw that God is Spirit, He is invisible, and we believe that what this is speaking of is that though we may see some manifestations of God Father in His Shekinah glory, we believe that the Lord Jesus, as the Word pre-incarnate, as the Son of course also; but as the One who was made flesh and dwelt among us, as the One who testifies of God, the express image of His person, He will go on forever in eternity manifesting God to His people. We will see the glory of God shining in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord. We reminded ourselves, and we need to do it again tonight as we look at this subject once more, that in all of our studies in heaven, we must make sure that our greatest and most joyous anticipation is seeing Jesus Christ, seeing God in the face of Jesus Christ, dwelling in His presence, lavishing in the light of His countenance! Our longing for heaven, no matter how great it is, must always be our longing for Him.

'The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear Bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory
But on my King of grace.
Not at the crown He giveth
But on His pierced hand;
The Lamb is all the glory
Of Emmanuel's land'.

Now we're going to look at another four occupations tonight. The first three really are occupations, the fourth is not in one sense because it is rest. The first we will look at tonight is 'reign', we will reign in heaven. Secondly we will learn in heaven. The third: we will fellowship in heaven. And then, as I said, the fourth: we will rest in heaven.

Now let's look at Revelation 22 again as we first of all consider how the Bible teaches that we will reign in heaven. Verse 5: 'And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever'. Not only do we have the record of John here in Revelation 22:5 that we, as the saints of God, shall reign with Christ forever and ever, but the Lord Jesus Himself in some of His parables that He told when He was on the earth speaks of how He will assign certain authority and responsibility to His servants at His return. For instance, two that you would like to look at in your own leisure may be Luke 19 and Matthew 25. We will look at both of those a little bit later, but the Lord's teaching in John's Revelation and various other passages of Scripture gives us the impression that God will operate His eternal kingdom in a similar way that He

operates His kingdom now in all of our hearts. Now what I mean by that is: when we go to Paul's epistles we see clearly that God, by His Spirit, has gifted the church. There are certain individuals who have particular gifts. All of us are gifted in some way, but not all can lead the church as elders, not all can serve the church as deacons, not all can preach, prophesy and so on - we have different spiritual gifts, the Spirit is the Lord who gifts the church for the purpose of administering the kingdom of God in our hearts now through the church.

Now, as that is such, we believe that God in the eternal state, as well as the millennial reign of Christ, will delegate its operation to His own people in a similar sense. In other words, forever there will be a sphere of responsibility and authority in God's kingdom. Now, right away that shows how foolish any idea of anti-authoritarianism may be. Authoritarianism is in ill repute today, and people balk at any authority, we see that authority is not something that's going to be abolished, or roles, or delegated responsibility - that's not going to disappear in eternity. This is something that God ordained before the fall, and something that will move on into forever. Now the difference between the responsibility and levels of authority that are gifted to men and indeed women in the church of Jesus Christ where His kingdom is expressed now, the difference between them now and then is simply that we will never fail in the delegated responsibilities that God gives to us.

Now I know we have struck this note before, but I can't help striking it: as someone who is continually, rightly and at times wrongly, whipping himself because of the sense of inadequacy, failure, lack of pure and dedicated service to the Lord - isn't it wonderful to think that there is a day coming when we will feel no more guilt, no more shame at falling short of the responsibilities that God has given to us!

There is not only a difference between the 'now' and the 'then' regarding reigning, but there is also a relevance to the 'now' when we contemplate the 'then'. What am I talking about? Well, we see clearly from the New Testament that authority and faithfulness, authority and faithfulness are inextricably and indeed eternally linked. The authority that God gives any of us is relevant to our faithfulness in His service, and that will be the case in heaven. Our reigning is relative to our faithfulness now.

Just to emphasise this to you, I want you to turn to the first parable I quoted from in Matthew 25 just for a moment. Matthew 25 verse 14, now I know there will be reward in the millennial kingdom, and I know there will be a certain reigning in that, but this carries on further right into the eternal state. Verse 14 of Matthew 25, the Lord Jesus says: 'For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things', underline that, 'I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord'.

Now, the unprofitable servant that just buried his talents, and didn't make any money out of it, we see what happened him, and we see that this is how we conclude that this has more of a significance than simply just the millennial reign. Verse 29: 'For unto every one that hath

shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth' - that is hell! But what the Lord is teaching us, and what is relevant to us tonight, is: our authority in the eternal state, as well as in the millennial kingdom, is relative to our faithfulness in the responsibilities that God has given us here on earth and in the body, which is the church. That is very sobering, is it not? It's also relative to the suffering service that we are engaged in. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:12: 'If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us'. So the more responsible we are, the more faithful we are even in the face of adamant persecution down here on earth, the more responsible in authority we will be in glory.

Again, look with me at Luke chapter 19 for another similar parable, Luke 19 verse 12: 'He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come. But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us. And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading. Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds. And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities. And the second came, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained five pounds. And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities. And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin: For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow', and we'll finish the reading there. Again the principle is the same: our responsibility that we are given here, and faithfulness in it, is related directly to how we will reign with Christ.

I wonder do we ever think, I believe erroneously, on these terms: 'I wonder what responsibility I will have in heaven?'. Do you ever think like that? 'I wonder what I will be doing, where I will be reigning, what authority I will have?'. In one sense you don't need to wonder about it, you don't need to surmise or even wait, because theoretically what we are doing now, or what we are not doing now, will determine what we will do then! Think of it: our life, the life that you live today and in your history of existence is putting into Christ's mouth word-by-word what He will say to you on the day He judges you.

That's one reason we need to meditate and anticipate heaven: because this world system is robbing us of our heavenly reward, because the world that we love and all its materialism and affluence, sensuality - yes, as believers! - our love affair with this age and system is robbing us of what we could know in heaven one day if the earth down here wasn't so big and so bright. We need to get a perspective like Paul, when he said at the end of his life in 2 Timothy 4:7: 'I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing'. I know he was an apostle, but did he have a red telephone line to heaven to know that he was going to get this crown and this reward? Of course he didn't! He knew it because of the life that he sowed in spiritual death, that he would reap the reward - that's how he knew! You can know, and I can know, if we live for eternity. Whitefield, the great evangelist, said: 'O could I always live for eternity, preach for eternity, pray for eternity and speak for eternity. I want to

see God only!' - that was his desire! If we do that, Jesus will say to us as He said in Luke 12 and verse 43: 'Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath'. Isn't that amazing?

How will we reign? Well, I don't really know that. Some people think we will explore an unknown corner of the universe. C. S. Lewis suggests we will govern a distant star - I don't know about that, but I'm pretty sure from the word of God that we will reign by serving others, and serving the Servant King, the Servant forever.

We've got to move on: we are going to learn in heaven. I don't know if we'll get through all this tonight, but 1 Corinthians 13 and verse 12 says: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known'. Now I haven't got time to go into this, but that's got nothing with the canon of Scripture. Though we will be in heaven perfectly moral, there is no suggestion whatsoever in the whole of the book of God that we're going to know everything. I think that's a common misconception that people have. In fact, if you remember, when we looked in Revelation 6 and verse 10 the souls of the martyrs under the altar were crying unto God for vengeance, and saying in verse 10: 'How long?' - they didn't know how long it was going to be until they were avenged of the righteous blood. We've got to realise that not knowing everything is not a flaw - did you hear that? Not knowing everything is not a flaw, that is what it is to be human and not be God. So it is very foolish for us to think that in heaven we're going to know everything, because if we knew everything that would make us God.

Omniscience, to be all-knowing, is a divine attribute. 'He alone is the high and lofty one', Isaiah says, 'who inhabits eternity. He alone is the one who has known the mind of the Lord'. 'His Spirit alone has been His counsellor', Romans 11:34. So in heaven there is an awful lot of learning that we're going to have to do. I believe the Lord Jesus, as He trained His disciples down here on earth, He will be our great instructor in heaven. He will teach us, He will lead us into further light and truth. You might say: 'Well, what will He teach us?'. Well, He'll teach us many things, probably regarding the new heaven and the new earth, but I believe the primary lesson that He will teach us is, as the redeemed people of God, to love the Lord our God as we have never loved Him before! I believe He's going to teach us more about God, and more about His inexhaustible grace! Chapter and verse? Well, turn with me to Ephesians chapter 2 and verse 6, Paul says: 'God hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus'. Now that word 'shew' there is literally 'reveal', and it speaks that there's going to be an eternal revelation of God's grace toward us, and Christ and the Spirit are going to continually unravel for us the wonder of eternal salvation, and all eternity will not be enough time to show us it! Is that amazing?

You're going to learn all right, even Ephesians 3 verse 18, it tells us that Paul's desire in prayer is - and this will be fully consummated and realised only in heaven - that we 'May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God'. You see, we're going to find out and learn that in God is hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, that God is even greater than eternity, and learning of Him will exhaust all the time and the energies that we will have. As Jonathan Edwards put it: 'There will never be a time when there is no more glory for the redeemed to discover and enjoy. We will never stop learning about God, and never stop learning about the wonder of God's grace'.

Now maybe you're doubting this? If it's new to you, you should be questioning it. 'Learning' - maybe you don't like that idea, you didn't like school, and you couldn't wait to get out and all the rest - well, we often think that the devil invented learning. God invented learning, just like He did working and thinking. Intellectual curiosity is not part of the curse that came upon us through the fall of mankind. You look at the wonder of a little child who is learning. Our son at the minute, Noah, everything he sees he's going 'Ohhhh', like this - it's wonderful to see. Now that doesn't come from the devil, does it? God has put this inquisitiveness in our hearts, and it even says of Jesus, the Christ of God, that He learned and He grew in knowledge. There is a pleasure in learning, a God-intended pleasure that He is going to permit us to partake in for all eternity.

Martin Luther understood this, because he said: 'If God had all the answers in His right-hand, and the struggle to reach them in His left hand, I would choose His left hand'. Now why did he say that? Did he want to know all the answers? He said it because he understood the pleasure in learning, the pleasure in discovering, the pleasure in finding things out, coming to the knowledge of the truth, being led by God. Now here is my challenge to you: I think it is very clear that we will learn in heaven, but why not start down here? Learning about God, learning about eternity, learning about heaven as your home; and the implication of this, therefore, is that we will carry into eternity whatever we have learned here in time! Banish the idea: 'Och, it doesn't matter what I do here now, everything will be alright in the end' - isn't that the way we think about heaven? Well, that's correct in one sense, but that's merely a conception in the mind that down here doesn't matter, and we find out that what we are being taught as we contemplate heaven in the New Testament is the exact opposite: that down here matters immensely to what up there will be like for us! That's the common thread throughout all of this truth on heaven: in every way 'now' relates to 'then'.

We will reign, we will learn, seventhly - you didn't think I'd done seven tonight! No, it's adding the two together - fellowship. Hebrews 12:22-23 tells us that we: 'come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel'. Whatever way you interpret those verses, there is a lot of people going to be in heaven, and a lot of creatures there. There is going to be great fellowship - no wonder heaven will be a place of never-ending learning, just getting to know everyone will seem to take all eternity! The redeemed, these great angelic creatures.

Now there are many passages in the New Testament which speak of the final fellowship that all believers will have in heaven. All of them point towards this truth: that we will forever interact with, as Revelation 7 says, a great multitude which no man could number out of all nations, kindreds, people and tongues. Again it's worth mentioning that it would be ridiculous if you were having fellowship with all these people, and couldn't know them or recognize them. There will be fellowship there.

Now here's another challenge, this is so practical - remember the 'then' relates to the 'now', and the 'now' to the 'then' - how are you fellowshiping with your brothers and sisters in Christ down here? How does it with you? Why don't we practise some of this heavenly unity of fellowship on the earth? Before you say it, yes, it's unity in truth, I know all that, and that's where the ecumenists get it wrong. It's unity in God's truth, but here's a question I want to ask you, and I want you to think about this - and don't be putting it in the question box now! - what truths do we unite on? What truths do we unite on? Fundamental truth, of course,

what about secondary truth? Of course, every individual church - don't misunderstand me - has to have agreement on secondary issues in order to operate effectively and efficiently; but I believe, in the light of heaven and in the light of many scriptures in the New Testament on the unity of the body, that it is a travesty, a travesty how we have allowed relatively unimportant issues to divide us. I have never found anyone who I agree with completely, or anybody who agrees with me completely - sometimes I can't find anybody who agrees with me half the time. That's why it is so difficult when we mount up all these little criterion for fellowship.

Jesus prayed in John 17 and verse 11 that 'they would be one, as the Father and the Son were one', that is the church, that is His people. Now I have heard all the explanations: 'Oh, that's the global unity of the mystic body of the church'. I know we are all united in Christ, even those in heaven and on earth who are in Christ are united together - but we are the ones who are very quick to say in spiritual things: 'Ah, but there's got to be a practical outworking', aren't we? 'Oh, there has to be the practice, doctrine and practice. Justification is not enough, sanctification has to come; and it's only when the sanctification comes that it proves that the justification was valid, and you will achieve the glorification in heaven' - we say that, don't we? Faith without works is dead, that's what that is - so you're not allowed to say 'Oh, this is only a spiritual unity, but we can fight the bit out with one another down here on earth!', no, it doesn't work like that! No. We've got to grapple with this.

It's an interesting question - I'll maybe put this one in the question box and see if I can answer it! - will we all agree on absolutely everything in heaven? That's a good one, isn't it? Don't say it's a stupid question, it's not. Will we agree on absolutely everything in heaven? If deliberation, and debate, and reasoning - is that not part of the process of learning? Is it not? You have to think about a thing. We're not talking about moral right or wrong here, we're talking about all sorts of issues that will be in eternity. Or will we be like little robotic know-it-alls, we'll know right and wrong all the time, we'll not even need to think about it - now, I know some of you have your reward already, that's maybe the way you operate down here! But our problem is: we've made the mistake of believing that unity equals uniformity, that's where we fall down. There is going to be diversity in heaven: out of every tongue, tribe, people and nation - that's the strength of both the church militant on the earth and, I believe, the church triumphant in heaven. You think about that one. Will we not have to think and even discuss as we learn about the wonder of the universe in heaven as God reveals certain things to us?

I have to move on before I get into even more trouble! The last point is this: we will rest in heaven. Praise God, we will rest! Revelation 14 is the first I want you to turn to, Revelation 14 and verse 13: 'And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them'. Now, when we go to the very beginning of the Bible we find that the rest principle is enshrined in the Sabbath principle. Incidentally, that was a principle that was enshrined before the fall - God rested, and we are to rest. After the fall that same rest principle is found in the law of Moses, and in the practices of the nation of Israel. The Bible says in Hebrews that there is a rest now appointed unto the children of God in the church, and Revelation now tells us that there will be a rest in heaven.

Now, we know from what we have learned already that the rest that we will experience in heaven clearly is not due to the absence of work, for we will work, we will serve and do all sorts of things in heaven, we will learn. But it's a rest like that which was in Eden - there was plenty to do in Eden, there was responsibility and authority given to Adam and Eve, but they

had to also rest. We have seen in recent studies that the work that we will do in heaven will not exhaust our energies - now don't ask me to explain it all, but I feel personally that when we serve the Lord and labour in our energies, our energies will continually and perennially be replenished. In other words, we will never grow tired or weary. So we join these two things together: we will be busier than we have ever been in heaven, and yet we will be more rested than we have ever been. Is that not perfect? We'll not be lounging around all day, we'll be working and resting, working and resting.

You might say: 'Well, why do you need to rest if you don't grow tired?'. Well, look at verse 11 of chapter 14 of Revelation to contrast those who are in hell, it says about them: 'the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name'. That tells us something of the type of rest that this is, it is the opposite to the unrest that is in hell. Jesus, in Matthew 11, said: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light: and ye shall find rest unto your souls'. Do you know what this rest is? It is the absolute contrast to all the unrest that we find in this life! We have entered a rest by faith, Hebrews says there is a rest appointed unto the people of God - and though we can experience this by faith now in our hearts, one day we're going to realise it in heaven with all our faculties.

'Our pain will all be over,
We'll sin and sigh no more;
Behind us all of sorrow,
Naught but joy before'.

What causes you toil? What causes you pain? What causes you unrest, turmoil of mind and heart? Is it disease, illness, weakness of mind, of emotion? Is it separation, is it bereavement? Praise God, we can enter, by faith, a spiritual reality of this rest and peace now - but even when we do that and are most triumphant in our Christian faith, not all the remnants of the fall can be erased here and now, but they will be then in that perfect rest. Needless to say, that's why endless litanies, and going through laborious rites to attempt to achieve rest for the dead - it's all pointless. Praying for the dead, baptising for the dead, even saying: 'May he rest in peace' - if a man or a woman rest in Christ, they couldn't rest in any more peace!

A little girl was taking an evening walk with her father, wondering as she looked up to the stars, she exclaimed: 'Oh Daddy, if the wrong side of heaven is so beautiful, what must the right side be like?'. I know you like a good rest down here - I do anyway - but what will that rest be like up there?

Richard Baxter, who I quoted at the beginning, in his book - and I finish with this - 'The Saints Everlasting Rest', puts it better than I ever could, and I'm just going to quote him. It's quite lengthy, but listen and let it thrill your heart tonight: 'Rest, how sweet a word is this to mine ears. Me thinks the sound doth turn to substance and having entered at the ear doth possess my brain and thence descendeth down to my very heart. Me thinks I feel it stir and work and that through all my parts and powers but with a various work on my various parts. To my wearied senses and languid spirits, it seems a quieting powerful opiate. To my dulled powers it is spirit and life. To my dark eyes it is both eye salve and a prospective. To my taste it is sweetness. To mine ears it is melody. To my hands and feet it is strength and nimbleness. Me thinks I feel it digest as it proceeds and increase my native heat and moisture and lying as a

reviving cordial at my heart from thence doth send forth lively spirits which beat through all the pulses of my soul.

'Rest, not as the stone that rests on the earth, nor as these clods of flesh shall rest in the grave so our beasts must rest as well as we. Nor is it the satisfying of our fleshly lusts, nor such rest as the carnal world desireth. No, no, we have another kind of rest than these, rest we shall from all our labors which were but the way and means to rest, but yet that is the smallest part. O blessed rest, where we shall never rest day or night crying holy, holy, holy Lord God of sabbaths, when we shall rest from sin but not from worship, from suffering and sorrow but not from solace. O blessed day when I shall rest with God, when I shall rest in knowing, loving, rejoicing and praising, when my perfect soul and body together shall in these perfect things perfectly enjoy the most perfect God when God also who is love itself shall perfectly love me, and yea, and rest in His love to me as I shall rest in my love to Him and rejoice over me with joy and singing as I shall rejoice in Him'.

Do you think he got a glimpse of glory? I hope, over these weeks, I have at least started you to think about heaven, in the very least caused you to imagine heaven, so that your imagination might give way to anticipation, and the joy of the Lord might spread abroad in your heart.

O Emmanuel, we long for Your land, we long for that life that springs eternal, we long to be in Your presence. Yet there is so much for us to do down here, but Lord, let us do it in the light of that great eternity. Let us not miss heaven for the sight of earth. Lord, thank You for this wonderful truth that You have revealed to us, and to our children's children, may we cherish it, and may it make a lasting difference to our lives now and our lives to come. Amen.

Glimpses Of Glory - Chapter 8

"Questions And Answers On Heaven"

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by Pastor David Legge*

Well, first of all let me say, in introduction, a few remarks. I was very encouraged by the questions that were submitted, because they are all evidence of the fact that, if nothing else, you have been thinking about heaven over the last eight weeks. That has encouraged me, and the questions are very insightful - and because, as we have gone along, we have answered a lot of obvious questions that most people ask, like 'Will We Know One Another in Heaven?' and so on, because of the fact that we have answered those, hopefully satisfactorily, there have been created a whole new layer of questions. The more questions we sought to answer, it seems the more questions were rising in our hearts and minds. So we are seeing the fruit of that, and some of the questions I could never have anticipated.

Now a little caveat, a note of caution before I embark upon these questions tonight. There are some things about heaven that we can be dogmatic about - 2 Corinthians 5:8, that it is to be absent from the body, for the believer to die, and be present with the Lord. However, most of the questions that are asked, and the answers that are given about heaven, we can't be dogmatic about, we can't be absolutely sure. I will say that this evening when I'm answering questions, when we cannot know possibly for sure - but we can surmise from some Scriptures that God has given to us, and there are some rational speculations that are not unwarranted that we can make, derivative from portions of the Word of God. But I want to air this word of warning: don't take everything that I say tonight dogmatically, and please do not get upset if you don't see it the way I portray it this evening. Be like the Bereans, and search the scriptures whether these things are so.

Now I want to lay a foundation for all I say tonight very quickly, and for any questions that we seek to answer. The first is this: keep in mind the things that we are sure of. Please don't miss that, for there is a lifetime of rejoicing and satisfaction in what we know - Philippians 1:23, that whatever heaven is, whatever our questions are, Paul says 'It is better by far'. Psalm 16:11, at God's right-hand there are pleasures forever more, and whatever will be, and whatever further questions you are left with tonight unanswered, or answered unsatisfactorily, remember what the Psalmist says in Psalm 17:15: 'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness'. Whatever it will be, you'll be satisfied, and it will be beyond anything that you could ever have wanted.

Then this second foundation I want you please to lay before we answer these questions is: whatever difficulties and problems and questions we have, we need to realise that they are not difficulties and problems to God. Nothing is a problem to God, and therefore you ought not to let any question about heaven bother you. Don't let anything I say tonight bother you. Jeremiah 32 and verse 27 says: 'Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?'. I was reading recently in the nativity story in Luke chapter 1, and in verse 37 concerning the virgin conception which men think impossible, and God says: 'For

with God nothing shall be impossible'. So whatever problems and questions we have, they are not problems or difficulties to God, they will all be ironed out in the end.

Now it is not possible for me tonight to answer all the questions - you would know that right away - the questions that I have been given. Some of the questions that were submitted were not specific to the subject of heaven, so I apologise, but I have had to leave those out for obvious reasons. If your question isn't answered tonight, I also apologise, and maybe if we have time tonight afterwards, you might want to wait behind and I will try to answer them personally if I can. Now I want to split these questions into four categories, and the answers. The first category will be those that we do not know the answer to, or cannot know the answer to. The second category are questions that I have already answered in the series, and maybe you weren't here that particular night, and I will try to answer those that have difficulty, perhaps, with some of the explanations that I have given over the past weeks. The third category are different questions, but having the same answer - so the question has come in several different forms, but it's the same answer to them all, and so I have tried to clump a few questions together to get you value for money tonight! Then fourthly there is a final section on separate questions that are unrelated, and some of these questions we will be able to answer quickly, and some will need more time. So let's see how far we get this evening.

The first question for our consideration, and this is one I think we can't really know the answer to: do you think that our earthly occupations will have any bearing on what we will do in heaven? Well, I don't know whether they will or not. I suppose it will depend on your occupation. It might have: but if you're an undertaker or a doctor, I can say absolutely for sure that you will have nothing to do in heaven according to the trade that you have here on earth - but maybe if you are a gardener, or an engineer, there might be something for you to do up in glory, but we can't be sure of these things.

Now we have been talking quite a lot about heaven at home, because of the subject, and because of so many whom we love who have gone to be there, and even folk in the church who are entering that place as we speak. Lydia, my five-year-old daughter - it's amazing the questions that children can ask you on these eternal truths - along with asking recently 'Are there any birthdays in heaven?', she asked (that's a good question, and I can't answer that one), she asked: 'Do people pray in heaven, and does God turn around when He hears them pray?'. How could you answer that one? There was another question came in the box that was very similar: can the saved dead continue to ask God for things that they had been praying for on earth? For example, can they still make requests for people for whom their prayers had not been answered during their time on earth?

Turn with me to Revelation chapter 6, and this is a portion of Scripture that we looked at already on a previous night. We have here the souls of dead martyrs who have been slain, and they are under the altar, and they are crying unto God, it says, and my interpretation of this passage is that they are in heaven - and that is the intermediate heaven at present, where the dead saved go - they are there, and it says in verse 10: 'And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?'. So it appears, at least, that some folk who have died in Christ, these martyrs, are praying, and here they are praying specifically for vengeance and God's righteousness to be displayed against those who persecuted them and took their lives. Ultimately that is a prayer for God's judgement and redemptive plan to be fulfilled. So this prayer of those who we believe are in heaven, certainly they are the saved dead, it fits in with what is being decreed by God in heaven, and what is being executed in His plan of redemption

and judgement on the earth. Also, I think you'll agree hopefully, there is an element of solidarity here with these dead martyrs who are praying, solidarity that is with suffering saints who are still suffering on the earth for the judgement that they are looking God to give their persecutors, their persecutors who are still persecuting the living saints of God who are striving in the kingdom.

So these martyrs are aware that they have been martyred, and they are aware that others are still being persecuted, and so they are praying in heaven according to the knowledge that they have. Now, they are not the only ones that we know pray in heaven. Christ is, at the moment, praying for us in heaven as our Great High Priest. So it's reasonable to assume that we will pray more in heaven than on the earth. I remember preaching on prayer on at least one occasion, and saying that you need to pray all you can now, because when you die and go to heaven you'll not be able to pray any more - and that was a lot of nonsense! Some of you know I talk a lot of nonsense from time to time, but the fact of the matter is: how will we talk with God? How will we commune with God in heaven, in His immediate presence, other than prayer? Now it will be a more direct communication and dialogue of course, but is that not prayer? We find praise and worship throughout the book of Revelation which could also be categorised as prayer, but from the scant information we have: any prayer that is found in heaven seems to be related to God's plan and purpose in redemption through the church, and that's interesting. For you remember the Lord Jesus in John 17 said: 'I pray for them', that is the church, 'I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine'. So what I'm saying is: we can't really know, but we know that these martyrs are praying for God's vengeance and fulfilment of God's righteousness on the earth. We know that Christ is praying, but there is nothing to suggest that people in heaven would be praying concerning unanswered prayer on the earth. In fact, I feel personally that it is unlikely.

Now our next question is: if no marriage - this is in the second category of our questions, that is those that I sought to answer in previous weeks, but maybe the answer wasn't satisfactory for some, and I'll try and answer a bit more satisfactorily tonight. If no marriage is in heaven, and our relationship with each other is better by far, what about people who have married twice? Now as I said, if you want to get the tape on study 5, 'Will We Know One Another in Heaven?', and how will we relate to one another, do that - indeed, all of the series is available as soon as we can get them run off if you want to order those. In Matthew 22 of course, verse 23 and following, the Lord Jesus, in answer to the Pharisees and also the Sadducees, said that there would be no marriage in heaven. So as an institution, marriage will cease. The reason we gave for that in our study number 5 was that, as Ephesians 5 teaches us, Paul shows that marriage is a shadow of the unification of Christ as the Bridegroom and His bride, the church, in heaven. So it is an echo of the great redemption story, it is a signpost, and once we get to our final destination the shadow and the signpost is not necessary any more.

But I did allude to the fact that our relationship will carry on, though we won't be married, everything that we have known will be better and greater. Now our problem is that we cannot conceive how we could be happy if two spouses whom we were married to on the earth were in heaven. The reason why we can't conceive of being happy with that scenario is that we wouldn't be happy with it down here on earth - isn't that right? Now, there are two important facts that we must not forget, and this will help you if this is your question or you are perturbed by it. The first fact is this: though the relationship fostered in life, the relationship, the deep intimacy on an emotional and spiritual level, I believe will continue, you will not be spouses in the institution of marriage in heaven. So, therefore, there will be no other spouse to be jealous of, there will be no other spouse, for there are no spouses in heaven in the sense of the marriage institution. So though the emotional bond will continue and the

relationship that was in the family will continue to exist, I believe, there will be no other spouse. Then the second fact is: jealousy won't exist. We will be perfect! If I could put it like this: literally we will have the best of both worlds, if you find yourself in this situation. That is, you will have a more fuller relationship than you had on earth with your husband or wife and, even if another husband or wife is there, jealousy or resentment will not enter in, and you will even have a perfect love towards them.

Maybe that's idealistic for you, but that seems to be a reasonable assumption that we can make, I feel, from the word of God. So remember this, whatever your perplexities are, remember: we will be perfect and we will be happy - you might say: 'That's impossible!'. You're forgetting something: nothing is impossible with God! So whatever your problem is dear, or sir, it's not a problem to God. You will be happy there, and you will be satisfied there, and there will be no jealousy, or animosity, or resentment, or a feeling of being robbed. Here's the important thing in all these questions: you don't need to worry! It will be even better than when you had your spouse down here on earth to yourself, that's the bottom line. There were two widows, they might be here tonight, who said to me - I think it was after study number 5 - that I did them a power of good, because they realised that their husbands would be perfect in heaven! I said: 'Aye, but you have wee problem here: will you be able to recognize them then?'. But praise God, the Lord will make all these things right in glory.

Now the third category, which is I think the largest one tonight, are different questions that have the same answer. This is the first clump of them tonight: how will we not remember the things we have done wrong? In the light of Luke 16, that's the story of the rich man and Lazarus - the rich man in hell, Lazarus in Abraham's bosom - will we remember those who are lost? Third: will the saved in heaven see the lost in hell? Loved ones who have died unsaved, will the memory of them be wiped from our memory? So let me give you an answer that I think covers all of these in somewhat of a way. Luke 16, the difficulty in our minds regarding memory often derives from Luke 16 and some other portions of Scripture that seem to indicate that the saved have some knowledge of the lost. Lazarus in Abraham's bosom seems to be aware of the rich man in hell, and aware of the great gulf fixed, and so we're aware of little verses like that that tend to trouble us, and yet we feel within our heart of hearts that such a knowledge would impede upon our experience of heaven. Indeed somebody said to me over these last weeks: 'Heaven wouldn't be heaven if I knew that my unsaved loved ones were in hell'.

Now, we established this fact, and I think it is categorically clear: that there is no doubt that memory is a part of our humanity, it's something inbuilt in our human personality. But there ought to be, at least in our emotions, the lack of assurance that we don't want to remember anything that's bad - do you understand? We feel that anything that's bad, or a memory of it, would impede upon our experience of heaven. Now, I'm quite sure tonight that we will not remember everything - listen to that: we will not remember everything in heaven. For instance: specific sins. How will we not remember the things we have done wrong? Though we will remember, I believe, that we were sinners, we will not remember the sins that we have sinned. Now you say: 'How will this be?'. Well, God says that 'Your sins and your iniquities, I will remember no more' - now if God can do that for Himself, surely God can do the same for us? Does that not follow? Yet we still have doubts, perhaps, at times. If you think about it, sure most of us have already forgotten many of our sins that we have sinned, isn't that the truth? None of us can remember everything that we've ever done that is wrong, so do we not think that God can do supernaturally in His wisdom what we do naturally in our ignorance? I'll repeat that: do we not think God can do supernaturally in His wisdom what we do naturally in

our ignorance? Do you not think God can cause us to remember no more our sins and our iniquities?

Now, though that be the case, I'm sure, regarding some areas, that the greater work of heaven regarding our memory - and I'm thinking particularly of the intermediate heaven, paradise now, where the dead in Christ go at this moment of time - I think the greater work about heaven is that God will enable us to see difficult things through His eyes. We will be able to see things from His standpoint, the way He sees them. Now I don't want to expand on this too much, because it's problematic, but I want you to turn with me to Revelation chapter 19 for a moment or two. So we're saying that we're not going to remember everything, we're certainly not going to remember things that will trouble our experience of heaven and shake us in our joy and peace, but the greater work of heaven will be that God will bring us to a place where He will enable us to see things, that would have been difficult for us down here on earth, from His standpoint. Revelation 19, and we are reading of the fall of Babylon: 'And after these things', verse 1, 'I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia', that's an expression of praise to God, 'Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand. And again they said, Alleluia', more praise, 'And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen; Alleluia', more praise to God. 'And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth'.

Four times we find that expression 'Alleluia', and what is it an expression in reaction to? God judging Babylon! Now listen to me: Babylon isn't some kind of impersonal nonentity, it's going to be a group of people, human beings - but because we have been brought so perfectly into the centre of God's sovereign plan of redemption and judgement in heaven, we will be in a position where we will be able, from the depths of our hearts, to praise God for Him judging rebellious sinners. I know that's hard, but it's in God's word. After all, God knows all about what's happening, the bad and the good, and the angels do, and Abraham did, and Lazarus did, and it doesn't rob their experience of heaven.

That said, let me say that I don't think the saved in the eternal state will forever see the lost in hell - I don't think that that is possible. Someone asked in one of the questions: Jesus said to the Jews that the time will come, Luke 13:28, that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out - and they asked the question, 'When will they see, and how will they see if they are lost in hell?'. Well, I think the sense of Luke 13:28 is about the day of judgement, when those unbelieving Jews of Jesus' day will see others, verse 29 of that passage talks about people coming from the north, south, east and west into the kingdom of God, and it's insinuating Gentiles, and these Jews who thought they had inherited the kingdom will see Gentiles entering it, and they will be cast into hell. That's what they will see: they'll see those who were out of the commonwealth of Israel entering the kingdom of God, and they are cast out into outer darkness. That doesn't mean that when they are in the outer darkness that they'll see the righteous in heaven, no.

Nor do I think that we will continually carry the memory of the lost in our minds in heaven. I don't think that's possible. Certainly there may be an awareness that God's wrath and God's judgement are just, but it's hard to imagine throughout the aeons of eternity that we will

have in our minds the memory of those whom we have loved and literally lost, I don't think that's possible. But the general point to remember is this: we will not be as we are now, and just as our resurrection bodies will be fitted with greater capacities, so will our minds. Even things that we find would be impossible for us to hold and conceive of now, we will be able to do then. Though we will not have omniscience like God, we will have a more complete knowledge, where we will be able to see things as never before, even as God has seen them. So things that seem problematic, even impossible for us now, will not be then. It's important to remember that.

So I hope that comes some of the way to answer that question. Here's another one someone wrote personally: 'As a granddad myself, I can now look back to when, as a young boy, I had a lovely relationship with my granddad. How will we relate to each other then?'. In other words, he related on this earth as a child to a granddad, but he's not going to do that in heaven - that's his insinuation. So how will he relate? His granddad didn't know him as an adult. Here's another question: after the end of time, when the Lord makes all things new - though time will not end - will the earth be peopled, and will children be born to them? So here's another question that relates to age, what age we will have if there is age in heaven. Children who die, another question, in childhood: will they be children in heaven? Another: will parents who have lost unborn children through miscarriages, or stillborn, recognize and fellowship with them in heaven? Another: what age will we be? Will we all be the same age?

Now I'm going to give the one answer to all these questions: the Bible does not indicate what age we will be in heaven, nowhere. I don't believe that it's a reliable thing to take the age of our Lord when He went to glory as a guideline, there's no reason to do that. The Bible doesn't say either that we'll be the same age, or whether there will be children in heaven, or whether we'll all be adults in heaven. There is no indication at all, but there are two things that I think we can be sure of - and if you want to know why, get our fifth study on 'Will We Know One Another in Heaven?'. There will be recognition of each other in heaven, and there will be relation with each other in heaven. Those two things we can be sure of, because we have precedent for people after death appearing, who are in heaven now, recognized; and we also know that they relate to one another, because we have been made to relate to one another, and there are incidents and illustrations of how they relate to one another in the Bible.

Now, though we cannot know, we do know that children have a special place in God's heart. That is revealed in the scriptures. For instance, Matthew 18 verse 10, the Lord Jesus said: 'Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven'. There are other portions of Scripture to show that God has a special sympathy toward children: 'Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven', and many other verses. So God is predisposed to have mercy and grace towards little children, and we must assume that that's the same with little children who have died. Now all that being said, it does seem through the weight of Scripture that maturity and coming of age seems to fit in with the ideal of heaven. If heaven is to be the consummation of all things, it seems that maturity is the goal of what heaven will be, and an entering into what we should be, and the growing to be what God intended us to be.

To give you a Scriptural foundation for that, turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 11, Paul says: 'When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity'.

So Paul is showing us that, though we look through a glass darkly now, when we get to glory in heaven we will see all the clearer; and though we have been children here in our understanding, there we will be adults. Now that doesn't mean literally in age, but it still has the idea that there is a level of maturity that will be achieved in heaven, and a spiritual growth. So development and growth will be matured in that realm. Now, because we know - and we'll touch on this in a moment or two in an answer to another question - but because we know, I think it was last week, that we will be learning in heaven, it may be - because nothing is impossible with God - that God marries these two things together: development, growth, maturity and learning.

So it is quite possible, though we are only speculating, that children who have died down here on earth, parents may have the joy of seeing these children as children in the eternal state, but enjoying their growth and development as they missed out on it down here on earth, and seeing them come to that maturity. That may be, it's impossible to know, but one thing is sure: that whatever was cruelly lost and taken from a parent through the death of a child, that will be restored in heaven to their satisfaction. So miscarriages that have been mentioned - I'm led to believe, I'm not an authority on it, most women have miscarriages in their life and don't even know about some of them. So there are myriads of children in glory, miscarried, stillborn. Can you imagine that, I think in America, every day there are 4000 abortions - and all those children, we have no reason not to believe, are in heaven? Whatever age they are, I don't know, but isn't it a wonderful thought that there are plenty of orphaned children in glory at this moment in time, whatever maturity they have, to go round everyone - even those who never had their own children down here on earth. We saw in that particular study, in week 5, that we will be one whole family, and parental instincts that some have been robbed of in this life will be well fulfilled in the next with each other as we relate to one another in that great family of God. It's wonderful, isn't it? So whatever questions we have of age, we will be sure that these dear children will be in glory.

Now here's another question, two questions that I will give one answer to. 'You said animals and nature will be in heaven' - I know people with allergies didn't like that one - 'and maybe this will be on the new earth'. So this person is subscribing that: 'Well, I can see that happening on the new earth that will be created, but will it also be in heaven?' - I imagine they're going to try to relegate themselves in heaven, and keep away from the new earth if there's too many pets down here. So they want me to explain: do I mean that there will be animals in heaven itself? Here's another question quite similar: 'I'm unclear about the city foursquare', that is the New Jerusalem, 'which is to come down out of heaven. Will we be able to live either in heaven or that city?'.

So I want to answer both these questions with the one answer. Turn with me first of all to 2 Kings 6:17 - you people who don't want animals in heaven, you need to look at these verses now. Don't forget you'll be perfect, the perfect animal lover that you've always wanted to be but resist in your heart of hearts, you will be one day. Second Kings chapter 6 verse 17, and this is one you've probably never noticed, in this regard anyway: 'And Elisha', verse 17, 'prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes', the eyes of Gehazi, his helper, 'that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha'. Now, where did these horses come from? Do you know? Where did they come from? Heaven! There's no new earth yet, so they came from heaven. I know they're celestial horses, but they're horses - a horse is a horse, of course. Where did they come from? They came from heaven. Now turn with me to Revelation 19 in case you think: 'Oh, that's a strange verse, you can't build it all on that'. We're not being dogmatic, but these are the indications from Scripture - Revelation 19 and

verse 19, and it's not the beast I'm talking about here, I know that's figurative: 'I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army'. Verse 11: 'I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war'.

Now, you're the folk that are always telling me and others that you need to take the book of Revelation literally, that's all I'm doing, and there is a horse coming out of an open heaven, and the Lord Jesus is on it. There's no problem here with thinking about animals in heaven. Then Revelation 22, it's not just animals but nature we find in heaven, Revelation 22 verse 2: 'In the midst of the street of it', this is the eternal state now, and the New Jerusalem, 'on either side of the river', so there is a river there, 'was the tree of life', so there is a tree there, 'twelve manner of fruits', so there is fruit there, 'and yielded her fruit every month', month is there by the way, time is still there, 'and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations'. If you go back to Revelation chapter 2 for just a moment, you see this tree of life in relation to heaven now, not the eternal state but heaven now, where the believer goes when they die now. In verse 7 of chapter 2: 'He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God', heaven now.

Now, I think in our second study, where I talked about how heaven is a physical place - I at least insinuated that I believe that what was lost in Eden was taken to heaven, that paradise of God, and that's why heaven is called 'paradise', and the tree of life that was in Eden is now in heaven. We have that there in Revelation 2, and that same tree of life, that was in Eden and is now in heaven existing at the moment, will be in the eternal state in the New Jerusalem. So there is a tree there, and this helps to answer the next question about this city foursquare which is coming down out of heaven. Will we be able to live either in heaven or that city? Well, in answer to that question, remembering everything I've just said about the first question, it is not an either or. It's not 'Will we either live in the city foursquare, or will we live on the new earth?', because what the Scripture teaches - although not everything is clear, of course, concerning it - is that there will be a new kind of unification of heaven and earth in the new heavens and the new earth.

If you turn with me to Revelation 21, this is where we find this fact, verse 1: 'I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God'. Now some expositors have tried to explain that the New Jerusalem, the city foursquare, will hover like a satellite over the earth, and we will be able, like spacehoppers, to move from one to the other - I don't think that at all, because God's word says that this New Jerusalem is coming down to earth, that's what it says. So that the tabernacle of God will be with men, and God will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and He will be their God. So there is this unification, if you like, of heaven and earth. Now I'm not saying the heavens will cease to exist, or anything like that, because Hebrews tells us that the heaven where God dwells is unshakable - but what it is telling us is that there will be a new unification of heaven and earth, so that the New Jerusalem will be on the earth. So it will not be 'Will we live in one or the other?', but we will live in both, and I think there will be a certain amount of freedom for us to live in either of those places, and to move from one to the other.

In verse 3 we hear the voice saying that the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them - so there is this joining of heaven and earth. Now if you want another verse to help you with that, turn with me to in Ephesians 1, and this is a verse that indicates God's purpose in salvation ultimately. Ephesians 1, so we're thinking of the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven and residing on earth - incidentally, that will mean that the Garden of Eden, where that tree was, will be back on earth again, Eden restored. Remember, that's God's plan: not to make new things that never existed, but to make old things that existed, and that were tainted by sin, new, redeemed. Verse 10 of chapter 1 says: 'That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him'. There it is clearly, I believe, for you. So the possibility of living both in the new heaven and the new earth is real.

Now, we move on to individual specific questions, in the time that is left we will try to answer them. If reward in heaven is different for each individual - which we showed last week it was - how will we not be disappointed? Now I can answer this one pretty quickly, and it's with an analogy that I found very helpful to me. You can take a bucket down to the ocean, or you can take a thimble, and you can fill both of those receptacles with the ocean - the bucket and the thimble can be filled with the sea. That's the way you ought to think of God's reward in heaven, reward is like the capacity of a bucket or a thimble, and both of them are equally filled. Whatever your reward is in heaven, all of us will be equally satisfied, and will equally, in a sense, be fulfilled and joyous in that realm - but the big question is: would you rather have a bucket or a thimble? Which would you rather have? So we will be satisfied without the same reward, and yet those who have greater reward will have great satisfaction and a great capacity, a greater capacity I believe, to enjoy heaven as their reward.

Another question: last Monday you said there might be discussion etc in heaven, and this individual thought it was disturbing to think people may disagree and fall out in heaven. I did say last week, and I think it is true, that though we will be perfect in a moral sense in heaven, there is nothing to suggest that we will know everything in heaven. Indeed, Revelation 6 and verse 10, where the martyrs are under the altar there, they are crying to God: 'How long until you avenge our souls?', and that infers that they didn't know how long that God was going to take to judge the earth. So we don't know everything in heaven, whilst we have a clearer and more perfect knowledge, and see face-to-face, it is not absolute because omniscience, all-knowledge, is a divine attribute. But the mistake we make - and again I'm going over old ground, but it's necessary - is we think that not knowing everything is a flaw, that not knowing everything is a flaw. It is not a flaw, it's like memory, it's something that is human - because God is the only one that knows everything.

Now if we are entering into a new heaven and a new earth, and there's no reason not to believe that there will be all sorts of new phenomenon in that realm that we have never seen in this realm, we have much to learn about. The Scripture does indicate clearly that we will, in eternity, learn more about God and more about His grace. Let me remind you of Ephesians 2, if you care to turn to it, and verse 6: 'God hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus' - that word, I taught you, 'shew', means 'revealed'. So there's going to be a progressive revelation right throughout eternity where God will reveal to us more and more about the wonder of the plan of redemption, and the great glories and wonders of God and the person of Christ; so that we will enter more into the knowledge of the height, and the length, and the depth, and the breadth of the love of God. Because God is greater than all eternity, learning of God and

learning of His grace will exhaust all the time and all the energies that we will care to engage in the pleasure that God intends in learning.

So I think it's very clear that we will learn in heaven. Intellectual curiosity is not part of the curse, the devil didn't teach us to think, or work, or learn - and the perfect Man, the Lord Jesus, the perfect Man learned and grew in knowledge. So the question I pose just for you to think, just for you to think, is: do you think in heaven that everyone will walk around like robots, knowing everything there is to know, and will never have discussions, and will never reason or will never debate? Now I don't mean debate in a negative sense, where people are losing their head and walking away, I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about deliberation. Now I think it's obvious that deliberation, reasoning, is part of the process of learning. I'm not talking here about moral issues, we will know right from wrong, and we will know God's truth; but as God causes us to enter into the depths of His truth, and the depths of His wonderful universe that is around us, will we not be asking questions? Now when you and I learn in this scene, we ask questions of ourselves, and we say to ourselves: 'What does this do?', or 'How does this work?', or 'What does that mean?' - and if we ask those questions of ourselves down here, and we're going to be exposed to a whole realm that we have never known here, and we'll not have all-knowledge up there, does it not follow that we might ask those questions: 'Boy, I wonder how many solar systems there are in this new heaven and new earth?'. Do you think you'll just know like that? Or, 'Isn't the tree of life beautiful, how did God make all these things so beautiful?'. As God reveals more and more things to us, as we have been looking at even in these weeks, the more questions you have - and if we ask those questions of ourselves in the process of learning and reasoning, what then is there to stop us asking them of each other? I'll ask Jim here, if he gets there in the end, I'll ask him: 'What do you think of that?', and he'll tell me all the answers! But there's nothing wrong with it, and it will be part of the joy of learning.

Here's where our mental block is, and I said this last week: we make the mistake of thinking that unity is uniformity, and because we have never learned the lesson down here of learning what it is to discuss things and not fall out, we think it's impossible to do it up there, but it's not. We'll be perfect, and we'll not fall out - and won't it be wonderful that if two of us are discussing something in heaven, and we don't know the answer, we'll have the Lord, and He'll have the answer!

Now here's another question, and we're nearly finished: could you lay out the schedule of events referring to the following: we die in Christ, are present with the Lord, the dead in Christ shall rise first, and then those who remain will be caught up with Him in the air, what part do we take if we are in heaven? I think the thought is, and I'm reading a bit behind this question, that the person is saying: if we are already in heaven, and the dead in Christ rise first, how does that happen? I think, to follow the process of thought here, if we die now as a believer, our souls go to be with the Lord - 2 Corinthians 5:8, absent from the body, present with the Lord; Philippians 1, to die is to be with Christ, which is far better. Then 1 Thessalonians 4 tells us that the dead in Christ, when Jesus comes again, will rise first, and we that are alive and Christians will be caught up. First Corinthians 15 talks about the translation of the saints when they rise at the last trump, and the corruption puts on incorruption, and we shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye, and this mortal must put on immortality. Now the only reasonable way to reconcile these two clear biblical facts is that God will unite body that is in the earth, and soul that is in heaven, together as He raises the dead bodies of believers and translates them. God is going to unite the whole man, and that is the resurrection plan.

The final question, you'll be glad to know, well the final one for tonight anyway, is - and this is my favourite question out of them all, whoever gave this one, I like this one: will we have the opportunity to spend one-to-one time with our Heavenly Father, Saviour, and Holy Spirit, either collectively or separately, just to sit alone and commune with them? I think that's what heaven is all about. God is spirit, and the Holy Spirit is spirit, so the Father and the Holy Spirit are invisible, non-tangible, but we said that we will see God in the face of Jesus Christ. So through the Son, as now, we will know the Father and we will worship the Godhead, both collectively and individually. Now don't ask me to explain the logistics of this, because obviously there will be so many Christians there, a great company that no man can number - but don't worry about it, we'll be there for all eternity and there will be plenty of time to commune with the Lord, though I know that it's hard to imagine.

Revelation 21:3 says: 'I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men', we read it, 'and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God'. The implication of that is communion, fellowship, relationship. So it will be there, and it might be that it will be there with all of us, at all of the time, at every place, every opportunity. Revelation 22 verse 4: 'And they shall see his face', talking about fellowship, 'and his name shall be in their foreheads'. I don't know how it will happen, or how it can happen, but it will happen.

Here's a thing that came very forcibly to me in answer to this question: in a very true and literal sense, to spend one-to-one time with our Heavenly Father, Saviour and the Holy Spirit is an opportunity and a privilege we have now. Do we take it? Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son, Jesus Christ, now. Can I leave you, as I close, with a quote - and out of many of the quotes that I have read in my life, this has been one that has been most instrumental - it is John Owen, that great puritan, in his book 'The Glory of Christ', and I've quoted it to you in my introduction and along the way, but it is profound - and if you miss it, you will miss heaven. 'No man shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight in heaven, who does not in some measure behold it by faith in this world'. No man or woman shall ever behold the glory of Christ by sight in heaven, who does not by faith in some measure behold it in this world. Do you see Jesus as the Author and Finisher of your faith? Him having not seen, do you love Him? Will you be with Him in heaven?

I was with a dear man before I came here tonight, and soon he will behold His faith in all its beauty. He is dying, there is no cure for him, but soon he's going to be with Christ. Will that be your experience? It can be, only through Jesus.

Father, we thank You tonight for Jesus' blood and righteousness, for the solid ground on which we build our house. We know that when the storm of judgement comes upon this world that, because we are built on the Rock, the Word of Christ, we shall endure, and endure unto the end. Even the gates of hell will not prevail against His church. Thank You Lord, for salvation, thank You for the certainty of heaven, and Lord we thank You that one day we will be in glory, and we shall see the King in all His beauty. Lord, if there is one soul here tonight without such hope, arrest them in Jesus' name, and save them. From this day on, our Father, let us have a view of heaven that keeps us going down here on earth, as we give You thanks for everything in Christ's name, Amen.

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