

Subject: *The Church – A Foretaste of Heaven*

Scripture: *Ephesians 3:14-21*

Scripture describes God's relationship to His people by using pictures or analogies that we can understand and appreciate. He is our King and we are His subjects. He is the Creator and we are His creatures. He is the Shepherd and we are His sheep. He is the Master and we are His servants. He is our Father and we are His children.

The church is also described in several unforgettable ways. The church is Christ's bride and He is the bridegroom. The church is Christ's spiritual body and He is the head. Another picture of Christ and His people is the vine and the branches. A branch must be connected to the vine if it is to live and bear spiritual fruit. The church is God's temple. Christ is the foundation and cornerstone and we are living stones. Christ is the builder and we are the building. In the OT God had a temple for His people, but now He has a people for His temple. The church is where the glory of God is seen most clearly on earth, and the place of corporate worship and instruction takes place.

All of these pictures show the spiritual unity of Christ and His people. Scripture speaks of believers being in Christ and Christ being in us. Christ is not just with His church; He is in His church and the church is in Him.

In verse 15 Paul speaks of the church as "the whole family in heaven and earth," which reminds us that part of God's family is in heaven and part is on earth. One day all of His family will be in heaven and that's what all believers long for.

Philippians 1:23-24 ²³ For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better. ²⁴ Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

All believers have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better, and here's why. We are citizens of heaven; our Father is in heaven, our treasure is in heaven, our names are written in heaven, our home is in heaven, our Savior is in heaven, fellow believers are in heaven, and our inheritance is in heaven. Scripture says that we are to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth (Col. 3:2).

But right now it is more needful for us to remain here in the flesh. And that's true for a number of reasons. But while we wait we should remember that the church gives us a foretaste of heaven on earth. The church is the one place where the activities of heaven are reflected on earth. The church is the one place where God is glorified and worshiped.

The church resembles heaven in a number of important ways:

1. God's people submit to His perfect will

Matthew 6:10 Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Heaven is a place of submission to God's will, and so is the church.

2. God's people obey Him out of love and devotion

John 14:15 If ye love me, keep my commandments.

1 John 2:3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

Heaven is a place of obedience flowing out of love and devotion, and so is the church.

3. God's people are called to serve Him

Revelation 22:3 And 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.

Heaven is a place of serving God, and so is the church.

4. God's people are called to be holy

1 John 3:2-3² Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.³ And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Heaven is a place of holiness, and so is the church.

5. God's people adore and worship Him

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.

Hebrews 13:15 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Heaven is a place of worship, and so is the church.

6. God's people enjoy rich fellowship with one another

1 John 1:3 That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

Heaven is a place of fellowship, and so is the church.

Submission to God's will, loving obedience and devotion, Christ-centered worship, faithful service, holiness, fellowship with other believers are just some of the ways that the church is a foretaste of heaven on earth. All of these things should cause us to grow in our love for the church and our longing for heaven. Every time we gather we should be reminded that this world is not our home.

The church on earth is only a partial and temporary taste of heaven, that perfect and eternal place. But it is still a very real taste of what life is like in the presence of the Lord, and for that reason we love the church, pray for the church, and ask God to make His family on earth more like the church in heaven. This is a prayer ascribed to Richard of Chichester (1197-1253): "May I know thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, and follow thee more nearly, day by day." May that be the prayer of every member of God's family right here.