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Heaven is a Perfect Place

Hebrews 11:24-26a, "By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God, than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin; considering the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt..."

Moses was the third most powerful man in Egypt and he could have anticipated living like a king the rest of his days! Many of us would love to have a life like this. And yet, he gave it up "considering the reproaches of Christ" to be "greater riches than the treasures of Egypt"! This is crazy! Yet what is it that brought Moses to such a strange position?

Hebrews 11:26b, "...for he was looking to the reward."

Moses made the choice to give up the wealth of Egypt to suffer as a Christian because he interpreted his present life in light of eternity! This is why Paul exhorts us to “...keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:1b-2)!

When a person is regenerated and so placed in the house of God, they receive many benefits.

Hebrews 12:22-24, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.”

The key phrase for our study is found in verse 23, “...[but you have come to] the spirits of righteous men made perfect...” It is obvious that “the spirits of righteous men” are those saints who have gone before us and yet now are dead, those who during their time on this earth trusted in Christ for salvation and so at their death entered into glory. Now referencing these saints who have gone before the text goes on to explain their present state: “...the spirits of righteous men made perfect...”

The word “perfect” is τελειόω (*teleioō*) and literally means “to carry through” or “to complete.” It was used of the priests in the temple who being ceremonial pure were unhindered in their service. When used of the glorified in heaven, it references their condition of being without sin and therefore unimpeded in their service. Now it is important that you understand what this means, or more importantly what it doesn’t mean.

In the English language we have the notion that something that is “perfect” is complete. And so, for example, perfect knowledge would be complete knowledge/omniscience. Yet that is NOT how the term is used in the Bible. In Scripture, to say that something is “perfect” is to say that it is untainted by sin! And so, perfect knowledge is not complete knowledge, but a knowledge that is not impeded by sin. Perfect bodies are bodies which are not subject to decay or any other consequence of sin. Perfect love is NOT complete love, BUT a love not tainted by sin. Heaven thus is not a place where we become gods, that is, have fulness of knowledge, power, etc.; rather, it is a place where never again will we be subject to the tainting of sin. The Bible tells us of the New Heavens and New Earth:

Revelation 21:27, “And nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it...”

Heaven is a perfect place!

Revelation 22:14-15, “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.”

Heaven is a perfect place! The weaknesses, frailties, liabilities, inadequacies, etc. which cling to us on

account of our sinfulness are gone! Think of this. Our greatest lamentation, sin (Romans 7:14ff) will be gone! We will love, know, serve, worship, and enjoy Christ and one another perfectly! In fact, notice four things we shall enjoy in heaven.

Perfect Pleasure

Psalm 16 was written by David in order explain why he loved God as He did. After a series of reasons, he then wrote, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever." (Psalm 6:11b) When we enter into glory everything that presently makes us groan will finally be done away with, and we will find ourselves in the very presence of God where the truest and purest kind of pleasure is possible.

You say, "Pleasure? I thought pleasure was sinful!" Truly, it is not pleasure that is sinful, it is the worship of pleasure or the setting of pleasure as the end that is sinful.

1 Timothy 6:17, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy."

God has given us all things for our pleasure!

1 Timothy 4:4, "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude."

Truly, pleasure is not sin. The problem is that as we have been created by God to worship, our tendency is to worship that which is not God, including pleasure. In light of this, I hope you see that it is not pleasure that is bad. It is when sin infects it or taints it! But herein we see the glory of heaven! Imagine:

- Enjoying the things of God without sin?
- Delight without sorrow?
- Celebration without grief?
- Pleasure without pain?

As God is our greatest desire and joy, to be in His presence will be to enjoy perfect pleasure!

Perfect Knowledge

In his exhortation for the Corinthians to seek NOT the showy gifts of the Spirit, BUT the most important gift of all, love, Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then I shall know fully [the idea here is, "perfectly"] just as I also have been fully known."

This is nothing short of amazing. In heaven we will know perfectly! Now again this DOESN'T mean

that we will know all things completely. To know all things completely would be to possess omniscience, an attribute of God we never will share, not even in glory. Furthermore, as we'll learn later, one of the activities of heaven is learning about God, so again, Paul here is not talking about complete knowledge. Rather, the point of comparison here is the quality of our knowledge (verses the quantity). In heaven our knowledge will not be tainted by sin! And what will this mean? To answer this we need only answer the question: What effect does sin have on our knowledge today?

To this we could give three answers:

1. Sin misleads us so that we can make false conclusions (Jeremiah 17:9). For example, we see that a person is late and falsely conclude that they are irresponsible. We study the "laws of nature" and conclude that the earth is flat.
2. Sin deceives us so that we don't live according to what we profess (Galatians 3:3). For example, we profess that Christ is Savior, and yet we relate to God on the basis of merit. We say that God is in control, and yet we worry about tomorrow.
3. Sin weakens us so we forget what we learn (Hebrews 4:11-14); and here I can't think of the example I was going to give for this point.

Now in contrast, when we enter heaven we will know "as we also have been fully known." (1 Corinthians 13:12) This means that we no longer will be misled, deceived, or weakened when it comes to learning or growing in our knowledge of God and His kingdom. In heaven, we will be able to plumb the depths of the kingdom of God and live accordingly! Richard Baxter put it this way¹, speaking of heaven...

No more error, no more scandal to others, no more disquiet to our own spirits, no more mistaking zeal for falsehood; because our understandings have no more sin. Many a godly man has been a means to deceive and pervert his brethren, and when he sees his own error, cannot again tell how to undeceive them; but there we shall all conspire in one truth, as being one in Him who is that truth... no pride, passion, slothfulness, senselessness, shall enter with us; no strangeness to God, and the things of God; no coldness of affections, nor imperfection in our love; no uneven walking, nor grieving of the Spirit; no scandalous action, or unholy living. We shall rest from all these forever. (MacArthur, 1998, pp. 183-184)

Today we "know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:12), but in heaven we will know perfectly!

Perfect Comfort

Christ spoke of the rich man who died and went to hell.

Luke 16:25, "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.'"

Clearly, heaven will be a place of perfect comfort. In fact the word used for "comfort"- παρακαλέω (*parakaleō*) is one and the same as the name Christ used to describe the Spirit of God.

John 15:16-17, “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper [that is, “comforter”- on who comes alongside and speaks peace to the soul], that He may be with you forever; *that is* the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, *but* you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.”

And that is exactly what happened. Upon the death of Christ, the presence of the Spirit of God was magnified in the lives of God’s people. He was there before, yet unnoticed; now His presence would be both seen and felt.

Acts 9:31, “So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria enjoyed peace, being built up; and, going on in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it continued to increase.”

One of the redemptive acts of the Spirit of God in our lives is that of comfort. Yet in this life it always is going to be tainted on account of our sin. As such, at times we may know the comfort of forgiven sin, but then the Accuser of the brethren is there calling for our heads and so we live in fear! We may know the comfort of God upholding all things, but then sin rears its ugly head and we doubt the goodness of God, as did the disciples in the boat (Mark 4:38). We may know the comfort of loved ones in the hands of God, but then death comes and we are left with the ache of separation! In glory we shall know no impediment to the Spirit’s comfort; ours will be a consolation untainted by sin! Listen to the promise of God:

Revelation 21:3-4, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them, and He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.’”

When we enter into the presence of God no longer will we have:

- Doubts.
- Fears.
- Concerns.
- Grievs.
- Weaknesses.
- Ailments.

All our hopes will be realized and we shall see God face-to-face! It is at this time that God Himself will wipe the tears from our eyes, intimately dwell among us, and take away our mourning, crying, and pain! And thus unlike today when the word of God is received and we derive a comfort, but nevertheless experience grief, infirmity, and questions, heaven will be a place where we will enjoy perfect comfort from God.

Perfect Love

Once again, in his treatment of the priority of love over every other gift that a Christian can receive,

Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 13:13, "But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love."-

Why is it that love is the "greatest of these" virtues? It is because in heaven hope will be realized (Romans 8:24) and faith will be swallowed up by sight (1 Corinthians 13:12)! And thus of the three, all that will remain is love! In fact, speaking of Christ's love for His disciples, we read this:

John 13:1b, "...having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end [lit. He loved them "perfectly"]."

It is this kind of love that we will possess in glory. The perfect love that Christ has for us will someday be returned, and we will love Christ with an unsinning heart! Robert Murry McCheyne put it this way:

When I stand before the throne, dressed in beauty not my own, when I see Thee as Thou art, love Thee with unsinning heart, then, Lord, shall I fully know, not till then, how much I owe. (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 545)

I trust that you see that heaven is a place of perfect love! In fact, speaking of the perfection of Heaven John MacArthur said this:

In heaven there will be no sin, suffering, sorrow, or pain. We will never do anything to displease God. There will be no temptation because the world, the flesh, and the devil will all be conspicuously absent. There will be no persecution, division, disunity, or hate. In heaven there will be no quarrels or disagreements. There will be no disappointments. Prayer, fasting, repentance, and confession of sin will cease because the need for them will cease. There will be nothing to confess and nothing to pray for. There will be no weeping because there will be nothing to make us sad. With sin and its effects erased forever, it will be a life of unimaginable blessing! (MacArthur, 1998, pp. 126-127)

Heaven is a Permanent Place

Yet heaven also is a permanent place. As an apostle of Christ, Paul encountered severe persecution and difficulty. Yet he did not shrink back, for his gaze was fixed on Christ.

2 Corinthians 4:18, "...we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

Truly, what good would it be to us if all that we have seen about heaven could be forfeited? Think of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. What would it have been like to be there? What would it have been like to see the earth before the fall? To fellowship with God face to face? To know perfect love, joy, comfort, knowledge, and much, much more?

Yet much of our amazement is truncated when we realize that in spite of all that they had, God drove them out of the garden on account of their sin! When it comes to God's will for us in Christ, Heaven is it! As the final plan of God regarding our redemption, heaven will be our final home!

- In the Garden of Eden mankind was holy and yet able to sin.
- In the state of rebellion mankind became sinful and unable to obey.
- In the state of redemption God's children become holy and yet able to sin.
- In the New Heavens and the New Earth we will be holy and unable to sin!

And thus, Heaven will be a permanent place! Never will there be any loss, missed blessing, or forfeited benefit. All that God has promised us in Christ will be ours for eternity! And we shall forever enjoy the Lord! Speaking of the Second Coming of Christ, Paul said:

1 Thessalonians 4:17, "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."

Look to the reward that awaits us all as did Moses! Let it impact you and change how you view the present trials, difficulties, wants, desires, and glories! Henry Alford described our eternal home with these words:

Ten thousand times ten thousand in sparkling raiment bright, the armies of the ransomed saints throng up the steeps of light: 'Tis finished, all is finished, their fight with death and sin: fling open wide the golden gates, and let the victors in.

What rush of hallelujahs fills all the earth and sky! What ringing of a thousand harps bespeaks the triumph nigh! O day, for which creation and all its tribes were made; O joy, for all its former woes a thousand fold repaid!

O then what raptured greetings on Canaan's happy shore; what knitting severed friendships up where partings are no more! Then eyes with joy shall sparkle, that brimmed with tears of late; orphans no longer fatherless, nor widows desolate. (Great Commission Publications, 1990, p. 323)

End Note(s)

¹ *The Jewels in our Heavenly Crown* printed in MacArthur's *The Glory of Heaven*, pp. 183, 184.

Bibliography

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 27, 2011. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.