

YOUR FIRST DAY IN HEAVEN

Message 3

Hebrews 10:19-31

INTRO: We have now looked, at least briefly, at the tabernacle. I have proposed to you that it is a picture of heaven. In my view, construction of the tabernacle in heaven got under way when man sinned. Sin had created a barrier between God and man, a barrier that had to be breached if God would have man to be with Him. And when Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, when they had crossed the Red Sea, they came to Mount Sinai. There God gave Moses the law of God and instructed him on how to build the tabernacle. We saw that it was a replica of the real tabernacle which is in heaven, a tabernacle that God Himself had made.

We looked at the fence surrounding the tabernacle and its furniture. We looked at the tabernacle itself and the furniture in the Holy Place and in the Holy of Holies. When you take a straight path through the gate into the holy of holies, and then look at the Candlestick on one side and the table of showbread on the other, you have the cross.

And now let me read Revelation 6:9 once more: "When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held." We are back at the altar. I have proposed to you that this altar was the first piece of furniture inside the white fence, just inside the one gate, so it is the first place we come to in heaven.

This morning we want to see what happens before one ever arrives at this altar. You see, by far the majority of people who ever live never arrive here. Why not? Well, our text does tell us why. So we want to look at what happens before a person arrives here?

II. HOW THE BELIEVER ARRIVES AT THE ALTAR

A. By Way Of Conversion

How do people, who have lived physically on earth, arrive at this altar? How do they get here? Note that our text tells us. They were slain. They died. We will look at that

later. Note second, and which will be our beginning point, that they were slain for the Word of God and for the testimony which they held. Now this happened on earth, before they arrived here. To arrive at this altar, something must happen with regard to the Word of God while a person is alive on earth.

So to see how a believer arrives at the altar, we must begin then at the believer's time on earth. So I want to show you then, the very first thing that must happen in life if we are ever to spend our first day in heaven. You know it well, there is one key issue that keeps people out of heaven. What is it? It is SIN. And before a person will ever spend his first day in heaven, he or she will have to deal with personal sin.

It is no secret then that in order for a person to ever arrive at this altar in heaven, sometime during the time of this life on earth, a person must be converted. Jesus said in Matthew 18:3, "Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." If anyone is not converted, he or she will never spend one day in heaven!

Scripture concludes that all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. So nobody gets here without dealing with sin. So all unbelievers are lost. That is clear to us from Scripture. So it is obvious that unbelievers will not go to heaven. And what must become abundantly clear is that before anyone will ever come to that altar after death, he or she will have to be converted. So listen to Revelation 6:9, *When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.* They had the testimony of conversion, otherwise you have no Christian testimony. As a matter of fact, Revelation 12:10 tells us that they overcame the devil by the blood of Christ and the word of their testimony.

Now, conversion requires two things, repentance from sin and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Luke 13:3 and 5, twice Jesus said, "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Repentance is not a work,

it is a requirement to enter this white fence and this requirement is offered by grace.

The second requirement in conversion then is faith, which is very clearly the teaching of John 3:16 and many other passages. It is believing in the very One represented by the white fence, the one gate, and by all the sacrifices offered on the altar we are looking at. And let me say that repentance from sin is not a once for all thing. When sin takes place in life, repentance must happen again and again. The altar we are studying teaches that in the OT. It is one of the weak elements of today's church. Today there are those who teach that repentance is a work and that it is never necessary at all. That is a false Gospel. It is amazing the messages this view can concoct. But it is unbiblical and wrong and I trust we will see some of that in these messages.

B. By Remaining Faithful In Life

But, not only must one get saved, one must remain faithful in one's Christianity. This is a biblical fact that is not stressed enough in today's Christianity, in my estimation. One must not only be saved, but one must remain faithful in life. Saving faith in the NT is present tense faith. That means one does not only believe once, but one continues to believe. John 3:16 does not say that he who has once believed will be saved. It says he who believes, present tense. That is he who goes on believing. You see, the saints that arrived at the altar were martyrs. What if they had denied Christ? They wouldn't be there! They would still have been alive on earth at that time.

One of the great difficulties of the early church when so many were martyred for the faith was what to do with the person who denied Christ before the authorities. And then they recanted or recanted and came before the church to repent of recanting to the authorities. The Church's question was, could they be allowed back into the Church? Some said they could, others said they could not. But what if one recants of one's faith and one does not return?

John 8:31 says, "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.'" Revelation 7:14, speaking of the tribulation says of the Church that is with Him, that they called, and chosen, and faithful. Three things are said about these believers, and the third is that they are faithful. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:2 that it is required of servants that a man be found faithful.

In Matthew 24, dealing with the tribulation, Jesus said that those who endure to the end will be saved. Many will not endure to the end. Many today do not endure to the end. Faith must be ongoing faith. One must continue in the faith.

Turn to Galatians 5. Such Scriptures as 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, and Galatians 5:16-21 are addressed to believers. Unbelievers are bound for hell, period. These Scriptures addressed to believers, give us lists of sins, and warn us that if a Christian lives in any of these, that is continues in those sins without repenting, he will not inherit the kingdom of God either. Such Scriptures do not speak of unbelievers, but believers.

So look at Galatians 5:16, "I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." He is speaking to believers, of course. And we ask, can a believer walk in the flesh? He goes on in verses 17-18, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law."

And now he will list some of the works of the flesh in verses 19-21. He writes, "Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God."

One of the things we hear over and over again today is that we should not judge. And one of those common deceptive sayings is this, "We must be careful not to judge because there will be many people in heaven we never thought would be there." Where in the Bible did we come up with that? Is there such a teaching somewhere? No this came from a sinister place. This teaching has shut the mouth of many, and given excuse for many others to keep their mouth shut to things they ought to speak out about.

There may be some truth to that statement, but what the Bible teaches is the exact opposite. It teaches that there will be many people we think will be there that won't be there. Listen to Jesus words in Matthew 7:22-23, "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'"

Now, do we expect to see people who do those kinds of things in heaven? They cast out demons; they prophesy, and they do many wonderful works and they say, "Lord, Lord." Do we expect them to be in heaven? Yes we do. Now listen to the rest of what Jesus said, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'" What kind of people are those? Those we would think will be in heaven!

So, Jesus said MANY of them will not be there. I did not say that, Jesus did. You see, not only do we expect to see those people there. In today's teaching we expect to see sinning Christians there too. We call them carnal. So they are Christians and will go to heaven. We will deal with carnality in another message.

Now I want to show this truth, that we must remain faithful in life, from the altar before us. Turn to Leviticus 5. You see, here at this altar we are studying all the sacrifices of the children of Israel were brought, whether they were grain offerings, peace offerings, trespass offerings or any other offerings. And all manner of sin was taken care of here. Let us take one example from verses 1-13. For the sake of time I will skip some

verses, but in verses 1-4 we have someone who is guilty of sin. So we go to verse 5:

5 'And it shall be, when he is guilty in any of these matters, that he shall confess that he has sinned in that thing;

6 'and he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD for his sin which he has committed, a female from the flock, a lamb or a kid of the goats as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin.

Verse 5 says that he shall confess that sin. And then he must take care of it by way of a sacrifice. How does this carry over to our day? Christ is our sacrifice, but we must still confess our sins. Today one of the missing marks in the church is the requirement of confession. When John the Baptist came preaching repentance, people came confessing their sins.

So confession of sin takes place and the priest makes the sacrifice offering, and we go on in verse 12:

12 'Then he shall bring it to the priest, and the priest shall take his handful of it as a memorial portion, and burn it on the altar according to the offerings made by fire to the LORD. It is a sin offering.

13 'The priest shall make atonement for him, for his sin that he has committed in any of these matters; and it shall be forgiven him. The rest shall be the priest's as a grain offering.' "

But listen now to Exodus 21:14, "But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die." This man was to be barred from the altar. Why? There was no sacrifice for this kind of sin. The KJV translates the NKJV word *premeditation* as *presumptuous* sinning. The original word is *zu'od*. The Online Bible says of this word that it means, *to boil, boil up, seethe, act proudly, act presumptuously, act rebelliously, be presumptuous, be arrogant, be rebelliously proud*. Such a person was not to

be allowed to come to the altar. Why? There was no sacrifice for such sins!

Numbers 15:30 says, "But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people." The word translated *presumptuously* is the word ru'om. Once again, the Online Bible says it means, *to rise, rise up, be high, be lofty, be exalted*. What is this kind of sinning? Sinning without fear of God; sinning in pride. For such sins as murder, death was prescribed. For sins like mentioned here, such a person was to be cut off from the people. That is OT excommunication. Such a person could only come back upon repentance. If there was no repentance it was a presumptuous sin. When a believer lives in adultery, lying, fornication or such sins as we read before, unless he repents there is no sacrifice for those sins.

Turn now to Hebrews 10. As I have mentioned earlier, the book of Hebrews is full of references to the tabernacle or the sacrifices, or the ministry of the priests. We begin in verse 19:

19 ¶ Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus,

20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh,

21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.

23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

You see how full of tabernacle teaching this is. We have boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Christ. Think how unbelievable this must have sounded to the Jewish people to whom the writer is writing. For them, in their day, only the High Priest could go there, and that, only once a year. And we have free access! There our

hearts are sprinkled with the Blood of Christ, cleansing our conscience. And our bodies are washed with pure water. Now note the exhortation that believers are to hold fast. Why give such an exhortation if we are not in danger of letting go? We go on in verse 24:

24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works,

25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

We are to spur one another on to love and good works, and not forsake the assembling together of ourselves with other believers. Why? Because we are always in danger of drifting away. The book of Hebrews has many such warnings. And what is the danger? Let us read on:

26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

Here we are at presumptuous sinning. You cannot sin presumptuously and go to heaven. There is no sacrifice for such a sin. Think of divorce and remarriage, is that not presumptuous sinning? I remind you of our former church. There was presumptuous sinning. There was lying. There were violations of agreements. Those violations have been clearly pointed out. And what were the results? I ask you, is that not presumptuous sinning? Since God is just, somewhere those sins will be dealt with.

Now notice something in our text. There is no sacrifice for this kind of sinning. Presumptuous sins cannot be forgiven unless fully and cleanly repented for. What remains for a Christian who sins in this fashion? We read on beginning from verse 26:

26 For if we (who is 'we'?) sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.

28 Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses.

Who were these that rejected Moses' law? Israelis. They were believers, or professing believers. We go on:

29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Clearly this is speaking of Christians. Our point is to ultimately arrive at this altar in heaven, we must not only become Christians, we must remain faithful. There is no sacrifice for presumptuous sins. There may be all kinds of arguments to say the writer is not talking about believers here, but Scripture says he was sanctified by the blood of the covenant. And this one has insulted the Holy Spirit of God, the Spirit of grace. We read on:

30 For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people."

31 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

I know of nothing more fearful than what is described here. I am saying, to arrive at this altar in the book of Revelation, not only must we be saved, we must remain faithful. And remaining faithful does not earn anything. It is an incredible opportunity fully provided by grace. You see, those in our passage remained faithful, even up to a violent death.

D. By Death

Well, having seen that to ever spend on day in heaven we must be converted, and we must be faithful, let us now consider that before we spend one day in heaven something

must happen to this physical body. You see, we cannot arrive at this altar in this body. Those in our text were slain. They died. Let me point out that there are two means of arriving at this altar. The most common is through physical death. That is what has been happening for 6,000 years. To dwell in heaven, this mortal body must go. So, the most common way people have entered heaven and will enter until we are done with sin on this earth is through death.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 15. The only other way besides death is to be raptured. Blessed are those who are raptured while they are still physically alive. Their bodies will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Look at verses 51-53, "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

If we are right on the pre-tribulational position, the rapture will have taken place not long before the scene we have in Revelation 6. The largest group to enter glory at one time in all of time here on earth is the entry of the Church at the rapture. We do know that those in Revelation 6 under the altar are not raptured. They were slain, so they died. Death is the most common way people arrive at this altar.

And now we ask, what is it like to die? Well, who knows? The only thing we have to go by is those who have died briefly and come back to life, but we cannot base anything on that with certainty. Today there are all kinds of fanciful, money making, stories being written and a lot of foolish money is spent on foolish accounts of some kid or other who went to heaven and came back to tell us about heaven. What we can know with certainty is that which the Bible tells us. So let us talk about what we can know.

Let me briefly explain death. Death is basically separation. The day Adam and Eve ate from the tree of

knowledge of good and evil, they died spiritually. That is spiritual separation from God. Physical death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body, as the book of James clearly says. Eternal death, the last kind, is to be resurrected after dying physically, being judged and cast into hell. The death we are speaking of here is physical death.

You see, most believers arrive at the altar through physical death. Death is a most incredible phenomenon. It came upon man because of sin. God said to Adam that the day they ate the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would die. They did die that day. It was spiritual death. Death is very hard to define, but I think whatever else it might be, the core event is a separation. The death Adam and Eve experienced the day they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was spiritual death. They were separated from God. That is why God asked Adam where he was.

D. By Being Transported To Heaven

We go to our next point. Turn to Luke 16. I want you to think of something. There must be some kind of transition from physical life to physical death, and then there must be some means of transportation from earth to heaven. That is just logical. And we ask, how do we get there? Have you ever thought of that? Once more the Scriptures do not remain silent. We find that in verse 22 of Luke 16, which says: *So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom.* Isn't that an incredible revelation? Here is some most amazing information. The beggar died. His life on earth was over. But then we are told the angels came to get him and carry him home. Is that not phenomenal?

Let me share with you the picture I have had in my mind for many years. It is this. God can hardly wait for those who are truly saved to come home. There must be divine reasons why He has to wait a certain amount of time. You see, Psalm 116:15 says, "Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints." Why would that be precious? Because God will have this person in His presence and will

be glorified by this person for all eternity and there will be mutual fulfillment between the two. There is no more danger of this person falling for Satan's tactics. When the saint dies, he is safe forever.

Now let me make a note on the beggar in our account. He did not go to heaven because he was a beggar, nor did the rich man go to hell because he was a rich man. But there will probably be many more of those who were poor on earth who will be in heaven than there will be of those who were rich. The poor man went to heaven because his trust was in God Almighty. That is the only way anyone can enter heaven. And the most amazing information is that the angels came and carried the beggar to heaven. Here we are very clearly told how the believer is transported from earth to heaven. It is not our purpose to speak of the lost here, but the contrast in the passage between these two deaths is stark. Can't you just picture the Lord dispatching angels with joy, to go and bring a precious saint to glory? But the rich man went to hell. No angels. He just dropped in!

We do not know how long it is from when our body is pronounced dead until the believer is in glory. It need not take long. The Jews said spirit hovered around for four days. I have read as well that after being pronounced dead, the brain still sends out electrical impulses for, if I remember right, thirty some hours. And though it is a long distance from here to the third heaven, it may not take long to get there once the body is dropped. But this is a matter we cannot know. What we can know is that the angels come to take the believer to heaven.

We have seen then that the believer's first day in heaven takes place after conversion on earth, and after physical death takes place. And when he dies, the angels carry him to heaven. We want to now look at with what personal characteristics the believer arrives at the altar in heaven.

E. With Personal Characteristics Of Existence

1. An interim body?

So, we have now finally come to the time when the believer arrives in heaven. And we want to now look at with what characteristics he arrives. To begin this subject, let me point something out here. We go back to Revelation 6:11 which says, "Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed."

Now ponder this. It says that white robes were given to each of those that arrive at this altar. And here is the question that has been pondered by Bible scholars for centuries. How can a non-material body wear a robe? I might add that it may also be that this passage is where the idea of ghosts with white robes comes from.

How can a spirit wear a white robe? It has been proposed that they get an interim body until the time of the resurrection. You see, all believers except raptured believers enter heaven without a body and they do not receive a body until the resurrection. So do these believers get an interim body? It seems improbable that a spiritual being could wear a white robe.

Turn to Luke 16. It is not impossible that those who go to hell get an interim body as well. Look at verses 22-24, "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes (his what? His eyes) and saw (he what? He saw) Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said (he did what?), 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger (Lazarus had fingers?) in water and cool my tongue (cool my what?); for I am tormented in this flame.'" So it is possible that there is some kind of interim body.

2. Ability to communicate

I want you to notice another most important personal characteristic in our passage. John said he saw the souls of those who had been slain. So they were visible. Furthermore, look at verse 10. It says, And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Now notice that they spoke. They were able to communicate and address questions to whomever they met there at the altar. You see, we have many of the characteristics that are exactly the same as they are while we are alive physically on earth.

3. Memory

Then I want you to notice yet another important thing with regard to their personal characteristics. Here is what they said, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Notice that they remembered what had taken place on earth. They had memory of past events. What will our first day in heaven be like? We will have memory of where we came from and what happened there. We will see. We will be seen. We will communicate. You see, except for speculating that they are given an interim body, though that has some evidence, I am only telling you what the Bible says.

4. Emotions

Then I want you to notice yet another important thing with regard to their personal characteristics. Here is what they said, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Now notice that they have desires and emotions. They wanted their wrongful death avenged.

We may think that vengeance is wrong. Vengeance is not wrong. It is right! If it is not right, it is not vengeance. The NT word for vengeance, *ekdikēsis*, means 'out of justice'. There is no more just place than heaven. And justice on earth, in the end will

come from heaven. And all that has been done wrong to people by people will be straightened out by God. Romans 12:19 encourages believers not to take vengeance, because He, God, wants the privilege of meting out vengeance.

Lehman Straus, writing on this verse says, "The language in verse 10 sounds strange to the Christian. These martyrs are actually calling for vengeance against their persecutors. How unlike the attitude of Christ and of His followers in this present Age! Our Lord prayed for the forgiveness of His murderers.. "(163). Now Lehman Straus was a good man of years past, but carried the same kind of misconceptions that produced our modern Christianity. I did wonder though, if he ever paid note to Jesus cleansing the temple and driving people and animals out with a whip.

Well, the tribulation that is in progress when the verses we are studying is taking place is the time when God will exact judgment on all wicked living people. Read Revelation 6-19 and you will find a God and a Jesus who exact justice and punish. If you ponder hell, it is simply the meeting out of justice. And these who have just entered heaven by having been violently killed on earth are crying for justice. It is not wrong to cry for justice. There is something wrong when we don't want justice.

If we should consider Luke 16, we would find that those who go to hell, very sincerely desire that someone should warn their relatives so that they might not come into the place of torment. The lost too have desires.

5. Five senses

Now our subject is the believer's first day in heaven. And we are looking at what personal characteristics we will have when we get to heaven. It is important then that we understand another matter that the Bible reveals, and that is with regard to what we call the five bodily senses. They are, in fact, not bodily

senses at all. The five senses are not part of the body, but part of the soul. The soul uses the body to experience them as long as we are in the body, but the soul experiences those same senses when we are no longer in this body.

Turn to Luke 12. I have not time to make full proof of this point, though the evidence is plentiful. But let us just note verses 16-20:

16 Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully.

17 "And he thought within himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?'

18 "So he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods.

19 'And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; (soul) take your ease; (soul) eat, (soul) drink, and (soul) be merry."'

20 "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?'

CONCL: And so we conclude. Over the years I have heard numerous opinions of what heaven might be like. Will a fourth dimension, or a fifth be added to the three dimensions we are familiar with? Will we be floating around somewhere? Will we have feelings or emotions, will we remember things from earth, will we know one another and on and on.

Listen, heaven will not be so much different from how things are now as far as we as persons are concerned. Where we dwell in relation to God, and the fact that there will be no sin, such things will be the major changes. But as far as personal beings is concerned, or living in a material world, and such things will be very much like we know it now. We will not suddenly be some kind of aliens.

And let me remind us in closing of the importance of true conversion, and remaining faithful to the Lord who bought us with His own blood. And let me add one thought on verse 20 of the passage we just read, before we close. God said, "Fool! This night..." and the original wording is, "...this night THEY will require your soul of you." There comes a time when God lets the demons have a lost or unfaithful person, and then he dies and goes to hell.