

HEAVEN:
The Place of Everlasting Paradise!

Message 3

Scripture: Revelation 21:9-21

INTRO: Heaven, the place of everlasting Paradise! Where are we in these messages? We have considered in previous messages what the expectations of life after death were in the OT. We saw that they believed in the conscious existence of people after death. We saw that they expected the Messiah to come at any time and He would set up a kingdom on earth and reign here on earth. These OT believers also believed in the resurrection of the dead.

Then we began to look at the expectations of life after death as given in the NT. We said that these expectations could be divided into two great time periods. These are life after death but before the resurrection and life after the resurrection. In the last message we looked at what happens at death and then speculated what it might be like the moment a person enters Paradise. I tried to describe for you what may happen when a Christian enters glory. Whatever does happen, it must be an incredible moment for that believer, for other believers and relatives already there, for God and for the angels! We also saw that the place believers go at death is the place called Paradise which is in the third heaven. This is the city Abraham was looking for and the city of which God is the builder and maker.

This morning we begin looking at what happens between the believer's entrance into Paradise and the time of the resurrection. In doing so, we want to first see whether Paradise is a literal, physical place and whether there is time there. Then we want to see in what form we will exist in heaven if we die before the rapture. That is, are believers spirit beings after death and do they float around in an invisible place? Though these are very elementary questions, they are very important for it will give us a much better understanding of the reality of heaven, or Paradise.

3. Between Entrance into Glory and the Resurrection

So, as we begin, the time between the believer's entrance into glory and the resurrection may be

referred to as the intermediate state. The intermediate state is the time between when we are separated from our fleshly body until we are resurrected and receive a new body. It is this time period that is so mysterious to us. And so, I will go through this, catechism style; question and answer.

a. Is Paradise a material place?

Our first question then is, whether Paradise is a material place? We could simply ask, is Paradise a place? And you might say, "That is a strange or elementary question." You see, to understand heaven aright, we must get our elementary facts straight. In the passage we had read for us this morning in John 14, Jesus said, "I go to prepare a PLACE for you." So, I ask, what does the word 'place' signify? It is this: a 'place' is a particular part of space. A place takes up a certain amount of room. So I ask, the Paradise up in the third heaven, does it take up space? And if so, how much space does it take up? Do we know? The answer is that the Bible gives us all this information.

When it comes to this subject of heaven or Paradise, the book of Revelation adds a considerable amount of data to our understanding. So, we go to Revelation 21 (read 1-2). Now notice first in verse 2 that this city comes down from heaven. So, it is originally in heaven. I believe what we have here is the city whose builder and maker is God, and the city for which Abraham was waiting. Here is the city where God dwells right now. When John saw it here, it was coming down from God out of heaven.

So let me give some evidence that this city is the present Paradise in heaven, the place Christians go when they die. We saw in an earlier message that John, the Apostle, was caught up into the third heaven to a place called Paradise. Paradise was 'up' in heaven. Now I want you to look at a promise given to

believers through the message to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:7 (read). We learn here that the overcomer will be granted to eat from the tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God. Now go to Revelation 22 which speaks of the city John saw coming down from God out of heaven (read 1-2). Here is the city with the tree of life. So we can safely gather that this city that comes down from God out of heaven is the same city known as Paradise, since this is where the tree of life is.

Now go to Revelation 21 (read 9-15). Here we see this city ascending from God out of heaven. And this city had a name, it had foundations, walls and gates. Later it says it had streets and trees and a river. And now I ask you, do you think these were material walls and gates and streets and trees? I cannot imagine any other kinds of walls and gates and streets and trees, can you? So, yes, Paradise is a material place that takes up space.

Our question was so simple, yet so profound and important. It was this: is this Paradise, this city, a literal, visible, physical, material place? Well, it has colors. It has gates. It has streets. It has trees. It can be measured, so it takes up space. Yes, it is a literal, visible, physical city! It is made of matter. It is not a spiritual city totally foreign to our way of life. It is not an invisible place where we float around as spirits beings and nothing is made of matter. No, it is a place made for man. A place where man can identify with things as he does here on earth. God did not make man spirits. He made angels spirits, but not man, and this city is made for man. It is literal, and visible and made of real matter! This is Paradise!

So, if Paradise is a material place, and takes up space, just how much space does it take up? Well, the Bible tells us that too. Look at

21:16 (read). Here we are told how much space Paradise takes up. First, it is cubed in shape and it is 12,000 furlongs in every direction. Now, let me just add that some think it is in the shape of a pyramid, but I think it is cubed. And just how much space does 12,000 furlongs mean? Well, there are 8 furlongs in a mile. So if you divide 12,000 by 8 you get 1500 miles. Put that into kilometers and you get about 2450.

Now we have before us an interpretational dilemma. Shall we take these measurements literally, or are they so unbelievable that we ought to resort to taking them symbolically? We may not find it so unbelievable that the city in heaven is 2450 kilometers squared, but can we imagine a city of this magnitude on earth? Well, listen to a few commentators:

Robertson's Word Studies says, "It is useless to try to reduce the measurements or to put literal interpretations upon this highly wrought symbolic language. Surely the meaning is that heaven will be large enough for all..."

John Gill says, "...a monstrously large city indeed! such an one as never was upon earth; and which shows, that this is not to be understood literally, but mystically..."

Barne's Notes say, "Of course, this must preclude all idea of there being such a city literally in Palestine. This is clearly a figurative or symbolical representation; and the idea is, that the city was on the most magnificent scale, and with the largest proportions, and the description here is adopted merely to indicate this vastness, without any idea that it would be understood *literally*."

On the other hand are the interpreters who hold to the same literal view I hold to. They tell us the Bible means what it says. Such are commentators like J. Otis Yoder or J. B.

Smith, both old order Mennonites. Or others like Tim Lahaye, Or William R. Newell, or J.F. Walvoord or Layman Strauss and many more. Listen to William Newell, "It is a literal city because of the literalness of its description. If gold does not mean gold, nor pearls - pearls, nor precious stones - stones, nor exact measurements - real dimensions, the the Bible gives nothing accurate or reliable. There is no one on earth who can assure your heart concerning the meaning of these 'symbols' - if they are symbols!" (pg. 348 on Rev.)

You will remember that I told you at the outset of these messages that one must determine one's method of Bible interpretation when you come to the subject of prophecy. I mentioned that I hold to a literal, normal approach. So when I come to a passage like we just had, unless there are reasons within the text to indicate we have a figure of speech, I take it literally. So, how big is Paradise? How much space does it take up? Fifteen hundred miles cubed, just like the Bible says!

So, I ask another question regarding this city: Is it big enough to contain all the people who will ever enter there? Some have questioned if the ark of Noah's day was big enough to contain all God said it contained and the answer is, yes, it was. Is this city big enough?

That leads us to another question. How many believers are in heaven by now? No doubt, if it was a great cloud of witnesses when the book of Hebrews was written, it is many clouds of witnesses by now! I understand there are more people alive on earth right now than have ever existed from Adam up until now! So, every day, many new people enter heaven.

So, is a city of 1500 miles square big enough for all of them? Tim Lahaye says that Dr. Henry M. Morris, an expert engineer and author, has done the math and if Paradise

should eventually hold as many as 20 billion people, every person would have a cube of space of 1 mile. Now I have one daughter, I can't tell you which one or I have to buy her lunch, but she will need that much space for all the things she will collect. But all joking aside, Paradise is one immense place!

b. Is there time in Paradise?

So we ask another question. Is there time in Paradise? Well, again we go to the Bible, not our hymnbook, right? In the hymnbook we sing, "When the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more..." But what does the Bible say? Look at 22:2 (read). Notice that this tree of life bears twelve fruits with each tree yielding its fruit every month. Now it takes time to grow fruit and a month is a time unit of 30 days in the Jewish economy of things. So, what do we have? A literal material place that takes up space and exists in time!

So, someone will say, "I thought there would be no more time in eternity." I say to that that the word 'eternity' itself speaks of time. You see, every other time word has an end. A month ends at 30 days. A week ends at 7 days. An hour ends at 60 minutes etc... But 'eternity' is a time measurement that has no beginning and no end. It does not indicate timelessness, but time without end in either direction!

Now you will say, "I thought the Bible said there would come a time when time would be no more." The KJV gives one verse that seems to indicate that. It is the only version that says so (read Rev. 10:6). However, this verse cannot mean that such a thing as time had come to an end because the tribulation period was not even over yet. Then comes the millennium and it is a period of time. Then comes a short season, and that is a period of time. What it means is that time was up and God would bring

the events of the end of the tribulation about right then. There would be no more delay.

So will there be time in Paradise? Of course. There will be time and space just like we know it now. And maybe you say, "Well, you make Paradise or heaven sound a lot like the things we are familiar with now." Yes, only it will be better and there will be no sin and that will make it different in other respects.

b. Will we be physical in the intermediate state?

Now we ask an even more difficult question. If we will be in time and space in Paradise, will we be physical or material beings when we get there? I am talking about the time before the resurrection. After the resurrection, no doubt we will be physical. This question has come to me time and again and I never gave it much time or thought until now when I prepared for these messages. The question is this: Do we receive a temporary body for the intermediate state? Are we physical beings after we enter heaven? Not so very long ago I claimed that the Scriptures were silent on this. It is true that the Bible does not come out and say man receives an intermediate body, but I have to admit there are a number of indications that this may well be the case. So, I have changed from saying I do not think so, to I think so.

Now for many years I had this question in the back of my mind that I toyed with. It bothered me, but I did not know how to answer it. And so I placed it on the back burner, but I did not really want to touch it. Let me show you what first caused me to have this question. I think it may well be 25 years ago or more that this question first presented itself to me. Turn with me to Revelation 6 (read 9-11). Now, first it says John saw souls. Can you see souls? Well, you can as long as they are embodied. It is no strange expression in Scripture to refer to people as souls. Genesis 46:22 says, "These are the sons of Rachel,

which were born to Jacob: all the souls were fourteen." Well, 46:25 and 26 speak of people as souls in the same way.

In Revelation 6 John said he saw these souls. But, furthermore, it says that white robes were given to them. Now how do you put a white robe on a 'soul' when there is no body with it? I pondered these things. Though these texts do not tell us anything about an intermediate body for the soul, it may well be indicated in the facts that they were seen and clothed.

So in reviewing more information and studying this subject anew, I have come to think that we will receive an intermediate body so that we will be able to literally, visibly and physically enjoy Paradise! As a matter of fact, it is also likely that those who go to hell also receive an intermediate body. So, let us look at some of the evidence for such a proposition.

Turn with me to Luke 16 again (read 22-26). Now I want to give you a wee little test to see what you believe, and then I want to give you a wee little assignment to take home to see what you believe. Here is the test. I want you to raise your hand if you agree with the statements I am going to make:

-Jesus said, "There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day." Was there once in fact such a man?

-He said further, "But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table." Was there once such a man?

-"Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores." Did that actually happen?

-"So it was that the beggar died..." Was that actually so?

Here is your wee little test. When you get home today, finish the rest of this account and always ask the question, and then answer the question. If you have friends for lunch or faspas, try it with them. Then discuss the matter. I don't want 150 phone calls so you have to think for yourselves.

But what you will note in particular with regard to the topic we are addressing is the physical aspects ascribed to Abraham, Lazarus, and the rich man, indicating some form of an intermediate body.

Come with me to Matthew 17 (read 1-3). Now we may say that it is understandable that Elijah had a body because he never died. He was taken into heaven alive. But it seems hard to understand that he could have ascended to heaven in his original body unless his body went through some kind of a change like happens in the rapture. But what of Moses? He died! Now he appears in a visible, physical form. And the disciples recognized him.

We go to yet another passage, Revelation 7 (read 9-10). Now these are saints that die during the tribulation. They are not resurrected until after the tribulation and yet every description here indicates they are physical beings. They are given white robes. Furthermore, they have palm branches in their hands. Does that indicate vegetation as well? I think it does. You see, we are in a literal physical place.

But we must consider yet one more passage so we turn to 2 Corinthians 5 (read verse 1-4). Now this earthly house or tent is our physical body. But what is this building from God, this house made without hands? I always took this to refer to our resurrection body, but is that the case? It sounds as though when this body is destroyed, dies, we have another one made in heaven. There is no indication of a long duration of time between the destruction of the body and the reception of the new

building. If this is correct, it is, however, not the final resurrection body. We will see later when the resurrection of the body takes place. So if we receive a body when we enter heaven it is an intermediate body, and the indicators are that this is the case.

Now you may be saying, "You make heaven sound as if we will actually still be people and we will have time and space just like now." So I ask you, when we go to heaven, what do you think we will be? Will we be disembodied spirits floating around in meaninglessness, or we will be entities that do not experience space or time any more? This is worth thinking through with the Bible in one hand.

CONCL: So, let us conclude this morning. We have considered two very significant propositions. First, is Paradise a material place? I think we can safely conclude from the Bible that, yes, Paradise is a literal, material place. It has trees and a river and walls and gates and streets. Everything speaks of a material place.

Furthermore, contrary to what we may have been led to think, there is time in heaven or Paradise. This is a place where time will never end. We will be able to change the expression, "I have all the time in the world", to "I have all the time in Paradise."

Another major proposition we made this morning is that when people die and go to heaven, they may well receive an intermediate body. So, the sum of this message is that when we go to Paradise, we go to a literal, physical place and we are physical beings in a physical place. And though it is a physical place, it is resplendent in glory, and beyond anything we have ever seen here. I think we can safely say it is not entirely foreign to us and we will recognize the substances and the plants, the gold on the streets and so on.

Let me tell you the major difference between Paradise and life right now: In Paradise there is no sin, no sickness and no death.