

HEAVEN:
The Place of Everlasting Paradise!

Message 2

Scripture: Col. 3:1-4; Hebrews 12:1-2

INTRO: I mentioned in the last message that one of the most important matters in discussing heaven, and that is true of all prophecy, is that the Bible interpreter must use the right method of Bible interpretation. That, we said, was the literal, normal approach to interpreting all other kinds of written material. When you have a figure of speech, you do not take it literally, of course, but as it is meant to be understood; a figure of speech.

Then we said that to refer to the life of the believer after death simply as 'heaven' was too restricted. Our view of heaven has been greatly affected, I believe, by our a-millennial past which was affected by our non-literal approach to Bible interpretation in the matter of prophecy. And I proposed to you that we call our eternal abode Paradise, with a capital 'P', and this is with the view that this refers to the Garden of Eden.

We then considered the expectations of those in the OT, but only very briefly. We saw that they believed in the conscious existence after death and that such people went to heaven, or paradise. But when we come to the NT, we learn of things they believed that are not revealed so clearly in the Old. Look at Hebrews 11 (read 13-16).

But one of the clear expectations of the OT saints was that of the imminent coming of the Messiah. And when He came, He would set up on earth a kingdom and this kingdom would last a long time. I have read that the Jews expected it to last a millennium, 1000 years.

Someone has rightly said that the NT is in the old concealed; the OT is in the new revealed. In OT times they saw future events through a glass darkly. In the NT, future events come into sharp focus. If one but takes a normal, literal approach to Bible interpretation, there is no big mystery to what will happen in the future, nor is heaven or paradise so far above our understanding that it cannot be described or comprehended.

So we begin our voyage to a deeper understanding of Paradise by looking at the expectations of life after death

in the NT. And here it is very important to understand that this experience falls into two great sections. The expectations of life after death, but before the resurrection, and the expectations of life after death after the resurrection.

And before we begin, I want to ask us this question: Is it important to know what happens after death? Should we pursue a deeper knowledge of heaven or paradise? I am indebted to Randy Alcorn for drawing my attention to a passage of Scripture that deals with this question. Let me read for you Colossians 3:1-4, *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

Now here is a command of Scripture: "...seek those things which are above..." Well, what things are those? Well, we can determine that by where these things are, "...where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God..." So, we are to seek the things that are in heaven! Well, now I ask you, how will you do that? Notice what it says further, "Set your mind on things above..." So, we are to seek the things above, and I ask you, are you obeying this command? "Well", you say, "how can I set my mind on things I don't know about? The Bible is so confusing and future things are so hard to understand. This command is not so easy to obey." I want to challenge you in the week ahead to set your mind on things above, and I want you to see if you can do it without going to the Bible! You see, if you will obey this command, you will be hopelessly lost if you do not turn to the Word of God! So, I challenge you, seek the Bible for things above. Are you reading through the Bible this year? Write down all the references you think speak of things above and see what you find.

Man can endure a lot of trials and a lot of pain, if that which lies before him is even better than all the pain. Hebrews 12:2 says that Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame. And what carried Him through the pain and the shame? It was the joy that was set before Him!

Now, you might say, "Help me a little. How can I set my mind on things above." OK. Look at our passage. It says,

"Set your mind on things above..." Now note carefully the next words, "...not on things on the earth." This coming week, see how we set our minds on things on earth. And when you learn how we do that, because you will be doing it, probably even today, but certainly tomorrow morning, then say, "Now how can I do the opposite of this?" You will learn quick enough.

Now why should we do this? Well our text says it is because we died and our life is hidden with Christ in God! A real Christian has died, and his citizenship is in heaven, how then is he so glommed onto this earth? We used to sing a little German song and two little lines said this: "Fonn der Erde reis mich loos, machee meinum Glabun gross." "Tear me loose from this earth, make my faith great."

And why all this? When Christ, who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory! Do you think Abraham thought about things above? Listen to Hebrews 11:9-10, "By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God." What did he do? He set his mind on things above!

Listen to Hebrews 13:14, "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come." I ask you, are you doing that? Listen to 2 Peter 3:13, "Nevertheless, we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." I ask you, are you looking for a new heaven and a new earth? Maybe you say, "I never even heard of looking for such a place. I just looked for heaven." Set your mind on things above, and you will hear about such things.

III. EXPECTATIONS OF LIFE AFTER DEATH IN THE NT

A. Before the Resurrection

1. At The Time Of Death

So, we begin this first section in the NT of expectations of life after death but before the resurrection. This is a very important part to understand. You understand that people have been dying for 6000 years. Where are they? What are they doing? And then when we understand what they

are doing before the resurrection, we must learn what they will be doing after the resurrection. And then things get complicated. Because, there are two resurrections. The resurrection of the just and of the unjust. And these two do not happen at the same time. And furthermore, listen carefully, do not let this go by unnoticed; the first resurrection does not all happen at one time! So, you say, "Woa! Just a minute. Could you explain that?" And I say, "You have to keep coming back. That comes later. You see, what we are doing is seeking things above, and we have no little subject before us.

1. The experience of death

So, we begin by looking at life after death, but before the resurrection. We want to begin, at the beginning, and so we want to look at what happens right after death. Now remember, we are talking about Christians. We have already looked at hell, and our concentration now is on Christians. What happens at death? We are so very blessed to have the NT. It gives us an incredible amount of information.

There is one passage of Scripture that opens a very big window and lets us look into the other side. And it tells us what happens at death. Turn with me to Luke 16 (read 19-22a). Now the beggar did not go to glory because he was a beggar. He went to glory because, though in this world his possessions were few, he was a Christian. He was a believer. He trusted Jehovah God and he went to glory. Now understand, we are talking about an OT saint here. The Church age has not yet begun, and Jesus is showing us what happened to OT saints when they died. He was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. This was a Jewish expression for what we would call heaven.

I expect that in heaven the scene may have been something like this. God called several angels and said, "Henry is about to be released from his earthly body. I want you to stand ready, because the moment he expires, I

want him here as fast as possible!" Do you think God longs like that for His saints? Listen to this verse from the Psalms, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints!" And precious it is indeed! The word 'angel' is in the plural form in Luke 16. I do not know how many there are, but there are 2 at the very least two! There could be 100! And they have one soul purpose, and that is to bring this beggar home, to heaven!

2. The entrance into glory

Now I ask, what is the name of this place where the angels take this person? You will say, "It is heaven!" No, this place he was taken was to a place IN heaven. You see, the Garden of Eden was a Garden IN Eden. Eden was the bigger area. The Garden, the lesser area in Eden. What is this place called that the beggar went to? Well, the NT tells us that too. Actually it is the Lord Jesus that tells us. Let me read for you Luke 23:43. You see, Jesus is hanging on the cross between two criminals and the one cursed him but the other said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And you know what Jesus said to him. He said, "Today, you shall be with me in heaven!" No! "Today you shall be with me in Paradise! Paradise is a place in heaven!"

I understand that there are those who believe Paradise was in the heart of the earth at this time yet, and I have told you that I do not prescribe to that view. You see, Paradise today, or the Garden of Eden, if you like, is in heaven! He did go to heaven, but to a particular place in heaven. When the Garden of Eden was on earth, it was in Eden. Today, that garden is in heaven. In the Greek language of the NT it is Paradise!

Now let me deal with another matter, since we are thinking on things above as we are to do. Let me begin with a question: Where, in the universe or beyond the universe is paradise?

Do we know that? Well, turn with me to 2 Corinthians (read 12:3-4). Paul said he knew a man who was caught up into Paradise. And here he heard words that he was not allowed to communicate. Does that not tell you something wonderful about Paradise? We can know many things about this place, but some are too wonderful for us for now, so we must wait to know until we get there.

But look now at where Paradise is (read 12:1-2). This man was caught up to the third heaven. And verses 3-4 indicate that Paradise is in this third heaven. The Jews speak of seven heavens. The Koran, getting much of its information from the Jews speaks of seven heavens. But the Bible speaks only of three. These are the first heaven, the atmospheric heaven. Then the second heaven is the realm of the stars and galaxies. And the third heaven is beyond the stars and galaxies and it is the abode of God. If you have an understanding of how they measure distances in this great expanse it is by light years. And from that we know the third heaven is as yet far beyond the reach of man. And it is there that God dwells, and it is there that Paradise is.

Now you might say, "How long will it take to get there?" Well, I do not know, but I know it is considerably less than a day! How do I know? Jesus died at the close of the day, between 3 and 4 in the afternoon. But this thief died even later than Jesus. Turn with me to John 19 (read 31-33). So, there was but very little time from when this thief died until that day was over, because their day ended at sunset, and yet Jesus said he would be with Him in Paradise that day! And it is here that those who die, enter glory!

Now I must tell you something else. We are talking about the believer's entrance into glory. I have told you this numerous times and yet I would suppose there are those here who do not yet understand this. For a long time we have used this unbiblical cliché: "The angels

in heaven rejoice over one sinner that repents." I have told you before that the Bible nowhere says that. I want you to turn to Luke 15 to see what it actually says (Lk. 15:10). Now notice very carefully what it says, "...there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

So, I ask, who is there in the presence of the angels of God that would rejoice when a sinner repents? People often say that must be God, or Jesus! But it is not right to say that God or Jesus are in the presence of angels. Angels are in God's presence. But who is there in the presence of angels? Well, none but the saved who have already entered glory! I see no other alternative! Read Revelation 4-5. Here are 24 elders, representatives of the saved, and they are in the presence of angels before God!

Now let us glean one piece of information from this passage. If it is correct that these are the saints, or Christians that have gone on that rejoice here, that means that they are informed about those that are getting saved on earth! Think that through for a moment. So, those who have died and gone on know at least some of the news of what is happening on earth!

Second, if there is rejoicing in the presence of angels over one sinner that repents, what do you think it will be like when one saint dies and enters glory? Today, there are many millions of believers in heaven, no doubt, though that is but a small number of all those who have lived and died. There are millions who died as babies alone! What must it be like when another saint comes home? The hallelujah chorus must sound again and again in heaven!

CONCLUSION: So I want to conclude this morning by telling you a little story. This story is my effort to paint a picture of words for you of what it might be like when a believer enters glory. For those who were with us years ago when I did the series 'Pilgrims Progress: The Journey of the Church Age Believer' you may notice from time to time

when I repeat various parts. I thought about that and thought I would just go ahead and repeat them. I trust you will find them new and interesting again. For many of you, most of this will all be new to you. However I want to repeat a story I gave there of what it might be like when a believer enters glory.

I wonder, do you know what it will be like to reach heaven? Well we are not told, but it will certainly be an experience unequalled in all the rest of the Christian's journey up to that point. I have shared with you the verse that says there is rejoicing in the presence of angels when one sinner repents. I believe that those who are in the presence of angels are none other than Christians who have gone on before. So if there is rejoicing among the saints in heaven when a sinner repents, what must it be like when a believer dies and is escorted into heaven by an angel (Lk. 16:22). What will it be like to enter the courts of heaven among all the saved? Gary Inrig, who was a pastor in Calgary AB for some time, gives us an earthly story that may give us a little idea of what it will be like. I

"What will it be like to reach heaven? A story out of the recent past may give us some idea. During June, July and August of 1965, an ordinary man from Cleveland Ohio lived out a dream. Forty-six-year-old Robert Manry purchased a thirteen-and-one-half foot, thirty year old, dilapidated boat. He repaired her, christened her *Tinkerbelle*, and learned how to sail. Then on June 1, 1965 his dream began. He set out from Falmouth, Massachusetts for Falmouth England, far across the Atlantic.

Manry's voyage was to take seventy-eight days, many of them cold, wet, and painful. Hit by storms, confused by hallucinations of hitchhikers and assassins, washed overboard, delayed by winds that were too great and becalmed by lack of wind at all, plagued by loneliness, and troubled by saltwater sores, he kept sailing.

Manry expected to sail into Falmouth Harbor quietly, let his family know of his arrival, secure passage for himself and *Tinkerbelle*, and return to the States. It did not turn out quite that way. Word of his voyage had reached England. As he neared the coast, Shackleton bombers from the Royal Air Forces 42nd squadron flew over in salute. Newspaper teams from both sides of the Atlantic vied for his story. Great ships hovered alongside with congratulatory messages.

During the last miles, a flotilla of ships and boats sailed out of Falmouth to greet him. Royal Navy helicopters formed an umbrella above. Boats circled and flocked about him and the people called out, "Good show!" "Glad you made it, Mate!" "Well done. Well done!" Sailing along the quay, he could see crowds of cheering people jamming the ramparts of Pendennis Castle. Manry later wrote:

"People were everywhere; standing along the shore, perched on window ledges, leaning out of doorways, crowded onto jetties, thronging the streets, clinging to trees, and cramming the inner harbor in boats of every size and description. The whole place was teeming with humanity. I heard later that 50,000 people were there to see *Tinkerbelle* and me complete our voyage.

"I was dumbfounded, numbed by the enormity of it all, and not a little bewildered. It was just too much to take in all at once...every boat and ship in the harbor let go with its horn or whistle and shook the whole waterfront with reverberating sound as the crowd yelled. Royal Air Force Shackletons flew overhead in wigwagging salutes and a band...St. Stythians Silver Band, played 'The Star-Spangled Banner' and 'The Stars and Stripes Forever.'"

Well, that may give us a little earthly idea of what it will be like to enter heaven at death. From that I want to urge us all, "Push on Pilgrim friend, push on". No doubt, in any believer's life, this will be one of the rarest and most glorious moments of all time; past, present and future!"

I encourage you this morning, "Seek those things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of the Father!" That which lies before us far outweighs anything we might experience here! So, for the joy that is set before us, let us push on!