

HEAVEN:
The Place of Everlasting Paradise!

Message 4

Scripture: Revelation 4

INTRO: We had Revelation 4 read for us this morning, not because this message is about that chapter, but to get our minds into our subject. And also because we are dealing with several different aspects of Paradise this morning.

In the last message we put in place some of the foundational building blocks that help us understand life after death. We go to an actual, material place. This place, we saw, is 1500 miles cubed. It is an immense city! Now this may not seem all that important but I have heard many fascinating possibilities about where heaven is and what it might be like, but these simple foundational truths eliminate most of them. There are speculations of entering a fourth, or even fifth or sixth, maybe even a seventh dimension. Now if you want to take your mind to where it runs amuck, just simply try to imagine a fourth dimension. And if you do that, you will be happy to learn that Paradise knows the same three dimensions we are familiar with, for this city is foursquare, which limits it to three dimensions. Nor does the Bible, as far as I can tell, ever refer to any other dimensions.

Furthermore, we saw that there is time in Paradise. There are months, so there is every other duration of time including forever. Forever is the forward part of eternity. It is time with the forward end knocked out and it just keeps on going forever. Eternity is time with both ends knocked out, but it is still time. These two building blocks of time and space help us greatly with regard to understanding Paradise, up in the third heaven and beyond.

We further said that there are some indications that we will receive an intermediate body for the time between when we enter heaven up until the resurrection. This does help us to understand some things in the Bible that are otherwise hardly understandable. Lazarus rested in Abraham's bosom. White robes are given to departed saints. The tribulation saints that are martyred and go to heaven wave palm branches.

This morning we want to see who will already be in heaven by the time we get there if we die before the Lord takes us

home. Then we want to see if we will recognize others in heaven and see if we will know what is going on on earth when we are in heaven. Then we want to see if there are animals in heaven. And then, even if we speed this morning, we will only be able to begin looking at what people do in heaven before the time of the resurrection. That should keep us busy for this morning.

d. Who will already be there?

Let us seek to answer one more question this morning. When we arrive in Paradise, who will already be there? Let us begin by asking who was the first person to enter Paradise? Who would that be? Well, we know the answer to that question. It was Abel. The very first person to ever be born, became the very first murderer! The second person ever born, became the very first martyr! He was persecuted to the death! So he was also the very first believer to enter glory was a martyr!

Now, what size was this city when Abel entered there? Did it grow as more and more people entered? Was it always 1500 miles cubed? We do not know. But we do know that for the very first time, a human being entered this city! If we had but the time, we might reflect on those who have entered as martyrs. The word martyr means a witness, but it is a special reference to those who died as a witness for the truth of the Gospel.

I am assured that Adam and Eve entered there as well, many years after Abel. There they were reunited with their son. There, David was reunited with his son. And so, all through OT times, one by one, heaven, or Paradise, began to fill more and more.

Let me add here something of interest. Though Abel was the first human being to enter heaven, another man was the first to enter there, as far as we know physically. Look at Genesis 5 (read 5:24-25). Later Elijah was caught up to heaven physically. Were their bodies changed? Did they receive intermediate

bodies? Or did their bodies undergo the same change that raptured believers will experience? Well, I think I can safely say they did not receive their resurrection bodies because Christ was the First-fruits of the resurrection.

But let us consider something here. Turn with me to Matthew 17 for an interesting passage (read 1-2). Here is Jesus in His unresurrected, physical body. But there on the mountain, His body seems to undergo a change of some kind. Now the text says He was 'transfigured'. The word here is 'metamorphothee'. A transliteration would be that He was 'metamorphasized'. He was changed. It could be something like this that they experienced.

Well, after all the OT believers died, finally, at the appointed time, something most incredible happened in heaven. Already, there were thousands upon thousands of people there from earth. And then God said to the second Person of the Trinity, "The time has come for you to go down to earth and take on a human body. The greatest part of My plan from the foundation of the earth has reached a very crucial point." And so it was, according to Scripture, in the fullness of time that Jesus laid all His glory as the second Person of the triune God and became human. For 30 years He walked on earth, and then came another very crucial moment in God's plan and Jesus died on the cross. To the thief on the cross who turned to Him in his greatest need He said, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." And then He died, and before the sun set in Jerusalem, they had both entered heaven.

And so, for three days and three nights his body lay in the tomb. Three days and three nights He spent in glory, only to return to be the First-fruits of the resurrection. And then for forty days He gave proof of His resurrection until He gathered with His disciples on the Mount of Olives, there

overlooking the city of Jerusalem He ascended to heaven!

And then another momentous event took place in heaven. I heard a brief message by Paul Washer on Psalm 24 a while ago. Look at it (read vv. 7-10).

Ten days after the ascension of Christ, a most significant thing happened on earth. The Church, the bride of Christ was born. That very day 3000 people got saved and very soon Christians were martyred for Christ. Do you know who was the first? First was the deacon, Stephen, Acts 7. Then Herod killed James, Jesus' half brother. James was known for his prayer life as he spent much time on his knees and talked to his half brother, the Lord Jesus, in heaven.

After James, thousands upon thousands of people became Christians. They lived and died and many, many were killed for the faith. First by secular Rome, and then by religious Rome. Catholicism became one of the greatest enemies of the Gospel and burned and tormented and slaughtered thousands upon thousands of Christians. They died and went to heaven.

In the 1100's there was a man by name of Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant of Lyons in France. He became a devout Christian. He sold his property and became poor and preached the Gospel. From him came those that would be known as the Waldenses. Thousands became Christians through their preaching and many, many died for their faith. Sometimes these folk entered glory, 50-60 on the same day from the same place! From them sprang the people who later became known as the Mennonites. Did you know there are thousands of Mennonite martyrs there from the 15 and 1600's alone? Some of these have been in heaven for about 500 years by now. Did you know there are Wiebes and Thiessens and Teichroeb and all kinds of other familiar names there? Oh, yes, many of them are there! And if they are there,

there are at least two things that are happening in heaven in this group unless they have undergone a great change. They are having Faspa, and they are checking to see who is related to whom. I'm kidding of course.

So, how many people are already in heaven? We do not know, but we know it will be a very large number by now, though that number will be little in comparison to all who have lived.

e. Will we recognize others?

So, we ask another question: Will we recognize others there? Well, no doubt they will. Try to think for a moment what Paradise would be like if we did not recognize anyone. Then we could not possibly remember anything from earth. That certainly cannot be the case. That people can remember things from earth is clearly indicated in Scripture.

So, we go to Luke 16 again (read 20-28). Lazarus is still Lazarus. Abraham is still Abraham. The rich man recognized Abraham. Furthermore the rich man remembered his five brothers and was concerned for them.

Go with me to yet another passage in Matthew (read 17:1-4). Here we are told that Jesus was transfigured before them. We saw the word earlier. He was metamorphasized, to coin a new word. But what we want to learn now is that Moses and Elijah were still Moses and Elijah. Furthermore, the disciples recognized them! Will we recognize others in heaven? Of course!

Now let me speculate a little. If hundreds or thousands of people get saved every day, and there is rejoicing in the presence of angels, over one sinner that repents, of all the people in heaven, who do you think rejoices the most? Let me suggest to you that those that are closest related, or have known each other while on earth will rejoice the most. And who do you think rejoices the most when another believer enters Paradise? Let us say

the mother or dad of a wayward child has gone to glory. Then this wayward child gets repents and is saved. Who do you think rejoices the most about that? And when that person enters glory, who do you think is waiting there to welcome them in?

f. Will we know what is happening on earth?

We come to yet another question and it is this: Will we know what is happening on earth after we go to heaven? A very revealing window into heaven is opened for us in Revelation 6 (read 9-11). Now these are Christians that are martyred during the future tribulation. Here they are shown after they are martyred. They are aware both of where they have come from and how they died.

Now these three verses are an amazing window into Paradise. Here, if you will use your powers of observation, you will learn wonderful things. But with regard to our topic, notice that they know that their killers are still on the loose on earth.

I want you to notice a few more things while we are here. I wonder how many of you have been wronged, and inside you are tore up and you feel like taking revenge? And how many of you think it is wrong to feel like that? But notice that these people are in heaven and they feel like that too! But now let me remind you of what vengeance is. It is the exacting of justice. And these martyrs know it is coming and they are wishing for it to happen as soon as possible. But they, like we are to do, are waiting for God to do this for the Lord says, "Vengeance is mine saith the Lord, I will repay."

Do people in heaven know what is going on on earth? Well, we have some indication that they know at least some of what is going on. Turn with me once more to a passage we have looked at before (Luke 15:10). Now we have said before that those who rejoice are those

Christians who are already in heaven. Now note that they know when a sinner repents! I have no doubt that those who knew the person that repents are the ones that rejoice the most. And what we have here is a clear indication that those who have gone on to glory know at least some of what is happening on earth.

g. Will there be animals there?

Well, we now go to another question, one that is most difficult. It is this: are there animals in heaven? Now, we have briefly seen that someday there will be a new earth. We will yet see the time of the millennium on earth. I am not asking if there will be animals there. I am asking if there are animals in heaven? Well, we have seen that there is vegetation in heaven, so should it seem impossible that there are animals? But, I ask, does the Bible say anything to this?

Well, look at 2 Kings 2:11-12 (read). So the question is whether these were heavenly horses or was that what Elisha saw only? I do not know. Turn with me now to Revelation 19 (read 11-14). Here we seem to clearly have horses. John does not say they looked like horses. He said they were horses. So it would seem that if there are horses there, there would be other animals as well. But since we are not told more and must be content to leave it at that.

Let me with that briefly ask one other question: Do animals go to heaven when they die? I believe the answer is no. I believe animals cease to exist when they die. The study of the makeup of animals and the difference between animals and man is complex and I do not want to get into it because I would have to spend too much time explaining. So let us settle with one verse. Ecclesiastes 3:21 says, "Who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?" Now this passage and its context is not easy.

However, I believe the animal returns to what it was before, dust.

h. What do believers do in Paradise?

Let us ask one more question and that is: What do believers do in heaven before the resurrection takes place? We are given very little information on this. However, we can glean some information from the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16. In verse 25 Abraham said that Lazarus was comforted in the place he entered after death. The contrast to the rich man is that he is tormented. What a vast difference in these two places.

So we note that believers are comforted. What can we learn from this? The word for comfort is *parakaleo*. One of the names of the Holy Spirit, the *Paraklete*, comes from this word. It literally means, 'to call to one's side'. Now this can be for one of two reasons, either to comfort or encourage, or to exhort. No doubt the idea of comfort is given here because Lazarus is resting in Abraham's bosom.

Now, no doubt that Abraham by comforting Lazarus is imparting information to him that is comforting. He is teaching him those things that help him understand where he is and how things work here and that he is forever safe. You see, we have seen earlier that believers have at least some idea of what is happening on earth. We might say, "Well, how could they be happy in heaven if they know what is going on on earth?" Well, right here might be the answer.

Now when you comfort someone you teach them certain things that console their anxieties. So you have to learn things to be comforted. I am fully persuaded that in heaven we will be constantly learning. You see, the verb 'to comfort' in this passage is a present, passive, indicative verb. Let us learn a few things from that. It is a present tense verb. That means it is going on right at that time

when the rich man was talking to Abraham. So we learn from this that it is a process. It takes time. How many questions do you think Lazarus had for Abraham? And Abraham comforted him. It took time to comfort him. It was a process.

Second, it is a passive verb. Abraham was doing the comforting. Now I want to propose something to you. Let me raise a question first: Do you think that Abraham comforts Lazarus for all eternity, or do you think there comes a time when Lazarus is initiated in heaven and Abraham goes on to comfort someone else? Here is my proposition: After one believer has been comforted and has learned what they need to learn in heaven to live there, he goes on to comfort others that too are arriving in heaven.

So, while Lazarus is passive, Abraham is active. He is doing the comforting. No doubt, the time of comforting passes and then, it may well be that Lazarus is comforting others who are arriving. Listen to 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." So, Lazarus, having been comforted, may well now be the comforter to others.

And last, with regard to this verb, it is in the indicative mood. What does that mean? It means Jesus made a statement of fact. That is what was happening at that time. If what He said here is not a fact, then Jesus is a liar. One thing you and I know beyond a shadow of doubt is that Jesus does not lie. This is a fact. Abraham was comforting Lazarus at the time he communicated with the rich man.

CONCL: So, what have we seen this morning? Well, we looked briefly at who is there in heaven already. Voice of the Martyrs calculates that about 150,000 Christians are

martyred every year! Then we believe all those who die before the age of accountability will be there. And then, of course, all those who die as Christians are already there. So, by now there are many, many people already there.

Will we recognize others in heaven? No doubt we will. Will we know what is going on on earth while we are there? We can safely conclude that we know at least some of what is going on. Will there be animals there? Well, we are not told much about this, but Revelation 19 reveals that there are horses there. There is hardly any doubt if there are horses there then there would be other kinds of animals as well. And, no, animals do not go to heaven when they die. They cease to exist. At least that is what I believe.

In the next message we will continue the subject of what believers do in heaven between when they arrive there and when they are resurrected. For the next message, write down and ponder these passages (Rev. 6:9-11; 7:9-17).