

**HEAVEN:**  
**The Place of Everlasting Paradise!**

Message 8

Scripture: Rev. 4-5

INTRO: Let me begin by briefly catching us up once more to where we are. I have said that to deal with prophecy in such a way as to get the truth God intended for us to get we must use the literal method of Bible interpretation. Then we defined Paradise. This is the Garden of Eden which is now in heaven. It is the place godly or Christian people go after they die.

We briefly looked at the expectations given in the OT. We saw that the Jews concentrated on the coming of the Messiah to set up an earthly kingdom, a view that is correct and will yet happen. But with the rejection of Christ by Israel, God inserted a time period we know now as the Church age in which He is taking out of this world a people for His name. For these people, whom the NT knows as the bride of Christ, Jesus has gone to prepare a place. I believe it is to this place Christians go after death, and here they await the resurrection of their bodies, an event we will see later.

We are presently seeking to answer what Christians do in heaven between when they die and when they are resurrected. We suggested that they receive an interim body and that at the altar of sacrifice any things not yet taken care of are cleaned up and then this person receives a white robe and is given access to explore this city! Glory!

And in the last two messages we looked at Jesus' Father's house, the place where He is preparing a place for His bride. And then we spent one day, a normal day, in Jesus' Father's house on earth and said, "What may it be like in Jesus' Father's house in heaven?" You see, this is the REAL temple! Those that have been on earth were only replicas! And last message we tried to get some idea of what believers may be doing in heaven before they are resurrected.

After the last message, and the questions I was asked later, about service in the temple in heaven let me clarify a few things. The day we described was one day in the earthly temple. I have not been able to determine all of what happens every day in the temple in heaven. Maybe I

will learn some of that in the future. But let me tell you this, in the heavenly temple there are NO ANIMAL sacrifices. Jesus, after He had offered Himself up as a sacrifice once for all, sat down in heaven (Heb. 10:12). Second, the earthly priests did not only serve in the temple and that is all they did. No, they lived in towns scattered among the other eleven tribes. Only one week in 24 did they serve in the temple. How would you like that. One week on, 23 off. Well, they did other things as well.

And so, this morning, we want to go once more to Jesus' Father's house in heaven, and take a brief look around. We are seeking to ascertain what Christians do there between when they die and the resurrection.

h. What Church age believers do in Paradise?  
(cont'd)

This is the fourth message on the subject of what Christians do in heaven before the resurrection. It shows that I was not as prepared for this point as I thought or it would be outlined better. Point h. has been variously named, but it has to do with what believers do after death but before the resurrection. It is because I discovered something that very few commentaries cover, and that is that Jesus' Father's house in heaven is the real temple. We will see more of this place in Revelation 4-5. By the way, Dr. David Jeremiah is preaching through Revelation on the radio and you can pick him up at 10 p.m. each evening and I recommend his preaching to you. I have listened to two of those messages and he is in Revelation 4. That is why I listened to him.

This morning we go to Revelation 4. The book of Revelation is a very chronological book. It gives us the Church age in chapters 2-3. Then it gives us the rapture in 4:1. And in chapters 4-5 we are introduced to heaven and some very important introductory matters. Then chapters 6-19 deal with the tribulation. Chapter 20 deals with the millennium and the final judgment. Chapters 21-22 deal with eternity, the new heavens and the new earth.

The book of Revelation is not complicated when once this key is discovered.

So, I believe, along with most others who hold the view that Christians will be caught up to heaven before the tribulation, that 4:1 is representative of the rapture (read 4:1-2). Very soon, the Lord will say to His bride, "Come up here."

In verse 2, we are told that John is in the spirit. I believe that means he is transported in the spirit to heaven, and transported forward in time to the time of the 'catching up'. And where he is taken is to the throne of God Almighty Himself. And, as though fearful to look at the One sitting on the throne, he notes first that a throne was set there. And then he says that ONE sat on the throne. There is God Almighty! Now I ask you, where God Almighty's throne is in this city, the New Jerusalem?

Well, we are given some clues. In verse 5 we are told that seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne. Here, no doubt, is the holy place where the seven branch candlestick stood in the earthly temple. We are told here what that seven branch candlestick represented, and it is the sevenfold Holy Spirit of God. This candlestick indicates that the throne is in the Holy of Holies in the Temple in heaven.

Furthermore, it tells us in verse 6, that before the throne was a sea of glass, like crystal. Dr. David Jeremiah said there was no way of ascertaining what this speaks about, but I disagree. John F. Walvoord, and a finer commentator on Revelation you will not find, says that this refers to the 'sea of brass' in the temple (1 Ki. 7:23), or the 'molten sea' in the later temple (2 Chr. 4:2). This was made of ladies brass mirrors (Ex. 38:8). This was also where the priests washed for cleansing when in the service of the temple. So, once more we have an indication that God's

throne here is in the real Temple in this city in heaven.

When God came to dwell in the tabernacle, and later the temple that Solomon built, where in the temple did He dwell? Listen now as I read a number of passages: 2 Samauel 6:2, "And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the LORD of Hosts, **who dwells between the cherubim.**"

Now I could multiply Scriptures here but for the sake of time let me just say that dwelling between the Cherubim meant He dwelt in the Holy of Holies above the ark of the covenant, between the Cherubim placed on top of the ark.

So, in Revelation 4:2-3, where in the heavenly city are we? In the throne room of the temple, the Holy of Holies! In this throne room, in the replica that existed on earth, no man could stay alive unless he was God's chosen High Priest. Here is the very Presence of God Almighty Himself. It is here, the apostle John is taken when he is transported in the spirit to heaven. Now let us read verses 5-8 as John further describes this throne and what happens there (read).

Now I left out a very important verse to our subject. It is verse 4 (read). There is no doubt in my mind that the throne John saw is in the holy of holies in the real Temple which is in heaven!

Having established where we are, we now must answer the most difficult question of all, one that has puzzled theologians over the ages, even theologians who are premillennial in view find this task difficult. And it is this: Who are the twenty four elders? Some have held that these are angels. I will not entertain that view. It is not possible. However, a common view is that here we have 12

representatives of the twelve tribes of Israel and 12 representatives of the 12 apostles.

I quite agree with Dr. David Jeremiah's conclusion that these 24 elders are representatives of the Church, those who have been taken to Jesus' Father's house. So, let me read for you a quote from David Hocking's newsletter, *Hope for Today*, on "Who are the 24 elders?" He says the term "elders" connects them with church leaders (Acts 14:23). They cannot refer to angels because in Revelation 7:11 they are separated from 'all the angels'. They cannot refer to tribulation believers because in 13-14 it is clear that 'one of the elders' does not know who the multitude is. If he were one of them he would know them. They represent a larger group just as 24 divisions of priests and singers represented the nation Israel (1 Chron. 24-25). They cannot refer to the completed nation of Israel, since that does not happen until Israel's salvation at the end of the tribulation (Rev. 12; Zech. 12:10; Rom. 11:25-27).

I believe that here we have representative leaders of the Church. They are in Jesus' Father's house. They are elders, a term specifically used of the office of pastor in the NT (Acts 14:23). Furthermore, there is no doubt that the number 24 is important. And there is only one major place in the Bible where the number 24 is very important and it is in the Levitical priesthood.

Ed F. Vallowe has written a book called, "Biblical Mathematics." It deals with the meaning of various numbers in Scripture. And of the number 24, he says that it speaks of 'priesthood'. The priesthood of the believer was an important doctrine in early Anabaptist history. These believers held that every believer was a priest, not just the elected officials such as in the Church of Rome.

In the OT the priesthood was divided into 3 major groups. First were the Levites that took

care of the Sanctuary, the Father's house. They were divided into 24 courses. Second were the musicians of the Temple services, and they were divided into 24 courses. Last were the gate keepers, and they too, were divided into 24 courses. I believe the number 24 stands for priesthood, and the 24 elders refer to the Church and are representative of those in the Father's house in heaven.

Let me give some evidence for that from the Scriptures (read Rev. 1:4-6; 1 Pet. 2:5, 9). Now in Revelation 1:6 it says He has made us 'kings' and 'priests'. In 1 Peter 2:9, it says that believers are a royal priesthood. Now in the OT you could not be both a king and a priest. You could not have a royal priest. Kings had to come from the line of Judah. Priests came from the line of Levi. The two did not mix, but in believers they mix. In heaven they mix!

So, these 24 elders sit on thrones. There is the royalty! And then they wear crowns of gold. That is royalty. Furthermore, in Revelation 4 we read they are dressed in white. There is the priest. So we have kingly priests, or priestly kings! This, I believe, can be none other than the Church!

I want us to notice one more thing. It is with regard to their crowns. Yes, they are of gold, but there is something else. You see, there are two kinds of crowns in Scripture. There is the diadem crown. It is the crown of kings. This crown is mentioned 3 times in the NT, all in the book of Revelation (see 19:12). Then there is the stephanos crown. We get the name "Stephen" from this word. Jesus' crown of thorns was a stephanos crown. The crowns won in the Olympics that Paul talks about, were stephanos crowns. They were usually made of leaves, and thus were corruptible crowns. The crowns in Revelation 4:4 are stephanos crowns, but they are of gold. They are permanent!

I want us to note one more Scripture here that my wife pointed out to me a while ago. Turn to Hebrews 12 (read 18-24). In verses 18-21 we have a terrifying mountain. It is Mount Sinai, and the time is that of the giving of the 10 commandments. The writer of this letter now seeks to encourage these faltering believers that they have not come to this terrifying mountain. No, rather, they have come to Mount Zion!

Oh, what a blessed picture we have in these verses. There is a seven point message right here. First, as believers we have come to Mount Zion. This Mount Zion is in this city we are talking about. You can find this in Revelation 14:1. This city is further described as the city of the living God. Oh, what an incredible truth! You see, it is further described as the heavenly Jerusalem! Yes, that is our city! It is in this city that Jesus' Father's house is. This is our future home! Second, we have come to an innumerable company of angels! Third, we have come to the general assembly. And what is that? It is the Church of the firstborn! It is the Church! They are registered in heaven! I wonder this morning, are you registered in heaven? If you are born again, then you are!

Fourth, believers have come to God! But they are carefully reminded here which God this is. This is the God that is judge of all. We do well to pay heed. Fifth, we have come to the spirits of just men made perfect. This is what triggered my wife's interest. Does this refer to those who have come past the altar of sacrifice in heaven? Sixth, believers have come to Jesus, that Jesus who is the Mediator of the new covenant! That is the covenant that all born again believers enter. And last, but certainly not least, believers have come to the blood of sprinkling. But this was not the blood of animals, such as Abel sprinkled. This is the blood of Christ!

Now, what I want to point out is number 3, that believers have come to the general assembly, the Church of the firstborn. Now do the words, 'the firstborn' refer to Christ or to believers? That is not difficult to determine. In the original it is in the plural, 'the firstborns'. It refers to believers. All believers are firstborn. God originally chose the firstborn in the family to be the priests. Later they were exchanged for the Levites. Now, in heaven, it seems to me, that once more the firstborn are His priesthood.

So, I am suggesting that the Church serves with God in heaven, both in ruling the universe (thrones and crowns, kings) and in dealing with all manner of sin (white clothing, priests) as it is repented of and taken care of on earth!

Now go back to Revelation, but this time to chapter 5 (read chapter). Now I want to suggest to you that Revelation 4-5 is not a picture of how it always is day by day, but that this is a very special event. But notice now verses 8-9 (read). I want us to notice first that here, the 24 elders now serve at the altar of incense! Ponder this when you have time.

Second, I want you to notice that they now also have harps! Here are the representatives of the choir, but not of the earthly temple, but of that in heaven! I do not know if the Jews will ever be able to reconstruct the notes of the Psalms. I hope they do and I would give much to hear it. But I want to propose to you that the highest music ever developed, is that which was developed in the Church, where the hymns are sung in four parts and every note is easily readable by sight! Ever since we got tired of four part harmony in the church, church music has degenerated. It has degenerated in its lyrics and in its music.



So, if the 24 elders are representatives of the Church, then the Church is providing the music in heaven! How much greater can honor get, than that! Now notice verse 9a, "And they sang a new song..." There is the heavenly choir! Now notice 'what' they sing (read 9b-10; read Revelation 11:15-19).

Now notice something in Revelation 5:9. It says they sang a new song. The singing is the notes. But notice that when they sang they were saying words. Here are the lyrics. Now if you are using a newer version, you will find that 4:8b, 4:11, 5:9-10 and 12, and 13 are in poetic form. Notice also that each of these is preceded by the word, 'saying'. I believe that these are parts of songs. They *said* these words, but it is highly likely that when they said them they *sang* them in musical notes!

CONCL: So, let me sum up what we have seen so far with regard to what believers do in heaven before they are resurrected. We saw that Abraham comforted Lazarus. I recommend that he prepared him for life in the New Jerusalem. I further recommend that after Lazarus is initiated and comfortable in his new dwelling, he does the same for others who enter heaven. These are OT believers.

But what of Church age believers? Well, I have suggested that when they get to heaven, after they have been comforted they are taken to the altar where sin is expiated. Here, anything unfit for dwelling in heaven is taken care of. Once that is done, they are dressed in white. Since Jesus promised Church age believers that He is preparing a place for them in His Father's house, I think it most likely that Church age believers enter service in the heavenly Temple. What all happens there I do not know, but whereas the sacrifices in the earthly Temple only pictured what happens in heaven, I believe here sins are actually dealt with. We spent one normal day in the earthly temple to try to get some idea of what may be happening in the heavenly Temple.

This morning we saw the end of the Church age, and a picture of the catching up of the Church to glory. I would like to spend a lot of time here on other things but it is out of the range of our topic.

In the next message we want to see what do believers do who die during the tribulation, but before they are resurrected. This will, in brief form, cover all of man's experience in heaven. It is a brief description of life in Paradise in heaven from Abel's death until the end of the tribulation. After the tribulation something very incredible will happen as we will see later.