

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

Message 10

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:20-25, 50-55

INTRO: What we have looked at so far is life in heaven after death but before the resurrection. We have seen that when the righteous die, angels come to take them home to heaven, to that city God has made for the righteous. We have seen that after they enter heaven, they are comforted. In Luke 15 we saw Abraham comforting Lazarus. As I see it, the transition from life here, to heaven will be a very dramatic change and so much will be unfamiliar to us. And I suppose that when Abraham comforted Lazarus, he initiated him into life in heaven. I do not expect that from the time Lazarus entered heaven until today, Abraham is still comforting him, but it is more likely that Lazarus is doing the same for others as they enter this entirely new way of life.

We saw that it appears that those who enter heaven receive a temporary body, since they are said to wear clothing and some of them wave palm branches. I have proposed to you that as the martyred saints of the tribulation time arrive first at the altar, that this may be true for all those who enter heaven. Here, at the altar of sacrifice, every particle of sin left in the life is cleaned up and then they are dressed in white. Once they have experienced this, they are fit to enter the temple in heaven and come before God Almighty Himself. And from here, they have access to this city that is 1500 miles cubed. I suppose that we cannot imagine what sights they behold in this city.

But, life after death, even if there is an intermediate body, is incomplete from what God had intended for man. And so, life in heaven is never fully what it will be until the resurrection of the body and that is the subject of our message this morning.

B. After the Resurrection

1. An understanding of the resurrection

Let me first explain what the word 'resurrection' means. The NT word is 'anastasis'. It is made up, as most good Greek words are, of two words. Vines Dictionary gives it as 'ana' meaning 'up', and 'histeemi', to cause to stand. So it is to cause to stand up. The resurrection is the standing up of the dead. They have been laid to rest, and at the

resurrection they are caused to 'stand up' again. The resurrection has to do with the body of the believer, which has died and usually been buried.

Now you understand that from a human standpoint this seems so impossible that the resurrection is often mocked. The Sadducees of Jesus day did not believe in the resurrection. The Greeks of Corinth had trouble with this doctrine. But the Bible affirms it in no uncertain terms. There will be a resurrection. None will be left out.

Now with regard to the resurrection, it is important to understand that there are two resurrections spoken of in Scripture. The Apostle Paul says in Acts 24:14-15, "But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust." The just and unjust means everybody.

These two resurrections are further called the resurrection of life and of damnation or shame. John 5:29 says, "In John 5:28-29 Jesus said, 'Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth-- those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation. And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.'" Daniel, in the OT says in 12:2, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt."

The resurrection is further called the first and last resurrection. Revelation 20:4-6 says, "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I* saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of

the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."

So there are two major resurrections, called the resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the unjust; the resurrection of life and the resurrection of damnation; and the first and the last resurrection. The resurrection of the unjust or the unsaved happens all at one time and it does not happen until after the final rebellion of Satan after the thousand year reign of Christ (read Revelation 20:11-15). From creation until just before the new heavens and the new earth, no unsaved person is ever resurrected.

I am sure that growing up in the kind of church life I grew up in, when it comes to the resurrection you had in your mind the picture I had in mine. Some day Christ would return. All people would be resurrected and gathered before Him and there they would be judged. The unrighteous would be cast into hell and the righteous would go to be with God in heaven forever and ever.

While it is true that the resurrection of the unrighteous takes place all at one time, it is not so with the righteous. You see, the resurrection of the unsaved is the LAST resurrection. If the righteous and unrighteous are all resurrected at one time there is no first and last resurrection. Then the one resurrection is both the first and the last. And so I take you to a very important chapter, the resurrection chapter of the Bible, 1 Corinthians 15 (read 15:20-26).

We are not dealing this morning with the resurrection of the unrighteous, but with the resurrection of the righteous. That is the resurrection dealt with in this passage. Now what we must first note most carefully in our passage here is that the first resurrection does not happen all at one time. In the first resurrection Christ has already been raised. He is the first-fruits. After Christ's resurrection a number of other people were resurrected (Matt. 27:52). Of these we

know very little other than that they were resurrected.

Then after the resurrection of Christ and those raised right after Christ's resurrection, we have the resurrection of those who are His at His coming. The 'coming' in 1 Corinthians 15:23 is the Greek word 'parousia'. There are some 39 different Greek words translated 'to come' in English. The particular word translated 'His coming' here is 'parousia', a word used elsewhere for the coming of Christ. Vine's Dictionary says of this word, "When used of the return of Christ, at the rapture of the church, it signifies, not merely His momentary 'coming' for His saints, but His presence with them from that moment until His revelation and manifestation to the world." So, included in the resurrection at His parousia is the resurrection that takes place at the rapture, the resurrection of the two witnesses in the middle of the tribulation, and the resurrection which happens at the end of the tribulation of the OT saints and those who died during the tribulation. All of this is the 'first' resurrection.

Jesus Christ was part of the first resurrection. He was the firstfruits, but that was at least 2000 years before the rapture! So in the first resurrection we have first Christ, then those raised right after He was raised, then the resurrection of the Church; then the resurrection of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:8-11. Then comes the resurrection of those who died during the tribulation (Rev. 20:4-6). As I understand Scripture, the OT saints are resurrected here as well. All of this is the first resurrection, or the resurrection of the just, or the resurrection of life.

And so, in my understanding, the next part of the first resurrection is that which will happen at what we call the rapture, or what the NT calls the 'catching up' of the Church. As you will know, I believe that the catching up of the Church happens before the tribulation. I will not deal with the reasons for that in these messages. If you are interested you can check out the 'Prophecy' series or the messages, 'The Journey of the Church Age Believer.'

## 2. The 'catching up'

And so, we go to that part of the first resurrection that will happen at the rapture or, catching up. Let me take you to the most central passage to this event (read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Let me give you a little history to the passage. The Thessalonians were ungodly, immoral idolaters before Paul brought the Gospel to them. And when they were converted, Paul taught them about the return of Christ. Now from what he had taught them, they expected Christ to return at any time and so they were excited about this and looked with anticipation to His soon return (read 1:9-10).

However, they expected Christ to come so soon that when several of their people died and Christ had not returned, they were concerned that those who died had missed out (read 4:13). So Paul now further instructs them as to what will happen. First, those who die before the rapture will not miss out. As a matter of fact, God will bring those with Christ when He returns at the rapture (read 14). What happens is Jesus brings the soul and spirit with Him when He comes. Here is what will happen. The Lord will descend with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God. Then the bodies of those who have died will be resurrected and reunited with their soul and spirit (read v. 16). Then in verse 15 he says that those who are physically alive at the time of the rapture will be caught up together with those who have just been resurrected in the clouds to a meeting place in the air.

So, here is the order of events. God gives to Jesus all the Church age believers who have died and they come down with Christ to a meeting place in the atmosphere. Then the bodies of those whom Christ has brought with Him are resurrected and they go up first to be reunited with their soul and spirit. Do you have loved ones who were Christians when they died? If the rapture should happen right now, their bodies will be resurrected before the living believers go up.

So after those who have died go up, then something incredible happens to living believers. Go with me to 1 Corinthians again (read 50-54). Now Paul reveals to

the Corinthians a mystery here. If you would read the Bible from Genesis 1:1 to here, you would not learn the truth he reveals here. It is a mystery until this point, and it is this. We, Christians, will not all die before the Lord comes. But when He comes we will be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye! And just what is this change? It is when this corruptible body becomes incorruptible! It is when this mortal body becomes immortal! And for these people, death is swallowed up in victory!

Now there is no way I can tell you how incredible this moment will be on earth! In a nano second, or a pico second, or a milli second every believer who has died from Pentecost until that time will be resurrected! If it were not for the trustworthiness of Scripture in so many other points, I would not be able to believe this. But not only will every believer who has passed away during the Church age be resurrected, every living believer will be changed in a milli second as well!

What will happen here on earth when this happens? We are told very little about that. Now you need to know before I read this next passage that very few agree with me that the passage we are about to read refers to this very time, but I am persuaded it does. Turn to Matthew 24 (read 40-42; Luke 17:34-36). All kinds of speculations have been done as to what it will be like on earth when this event happens. We simply do not know. One thing I do know, I want to be in that number of those who are caught up.

Now one of the major reasons I believe that this even will take place before the tribulation is that as I understand Scripture it forewarns that Christ could come at any time. That can only be true if He comes before the tribulation. If Christ is to come in the middle of the tribulation, then one thing you know, He is not coming for at least 3 ½ years yet. If He is to come at the end of the tribulation, can it could not possibly be later than that, then you can know with certainty that He will not come for another 7 years.

And though even most pre trib believers would disagree with me, I believe that is what Matthew 24:36-44 is all about (read). What is the warning? Be ready at all

times! What is the reason? You do not know when He is coming. It could be at any time!

CONCL: And so, I want to bring this message to a close. Our subject has been the resurrection. And we have seen that there are two resurrections; one of the righteous and one of the unrighteous. And we have further seen that the first resurrection, or the resurrection of the righteous does not all happen at the same time. I have also proposed to you that the very next part of the resurrection may happen at any moment. The warning is to be ready at all times. In Mark 13 Jesus said to His disciples, "What I say to you, I say to all. Watch!"

Some years ago I preached on that subject. Let me close by reading the illustration I gave. It is a quote from Billy Graham's book, "The Four Horsemen Of The Apocalypse." He writes:

"Mt. Saint Helens belched gray steam plumes hundreds of feet into the blue Washington sky. Geologists watched their seismographs in growing wonder as the earth danced beneath their feet. Rangers and state police, sirens blaring, herded tourists and residents from an ever-widening zone of danger. Every piece of scientific evidence being collected in the laboratories and on the field predicted the volcano would soon explode with a fury that would leave the forests flattened. 'Warning!' blared the loudspeakers on patrol cars and helicopters hovering overhead. 'Warning!' blinked battery-powered signs at every major cross-road. 'Warning!' pleaded radio and television announcers, shortwave and citizens-band operators. 'Warning!' echoed up and down the mountain; and lakeside villages, tourist camps and hiking trails emptied as people heard the warning and fled for their lives.

"But Harry Truman refused to budge. Harry was the caretaker of a recreation lodge on Spirit Lake, five miles north of Mt. Saint Helens smoke-enshrouded peak. The rangers warned Harry of the coming blast. Neighbors begged him to join them in their exodus. Even Harry's sister called to talk sense into the old man's head. But Harry ignored the warnings. From the picture-postcard beauty of his lakeside home reflecting the snow-capped peak overhead, Harry grinned on national television and said, 'Nobody knows more about this mountain than Harry and it dare not blow up on him...'

"On 18 May 1980, as the boiling gases beneath the mountains surface bulged and buckled the land-scape to its final limits, Harry Truman cooked his eggs and bacon, fed his sixteen cats the

scraps, and began to plant petunias round the border of his freshly mowed lawn. At 8:31 A.M. the mountain exploded.

"Did Harry regret his decision in that millisecond he had before the concussive waves, traveling faster than the speed of sound, flattened him and everything else for 150 square miles? Did he have time to mourn his stubbornness as millions of tons of rock disintegrated and disappeared into a cloud reaching ten miles into the sky? Did he struggle against the wall of mud and ash fifty feet high that buried his cabin, his cats and his freshly moved lawn - or had he been vaporized (like 100,000 people at Hiroshima) when the mountain erupted with a force 500 times greater than the nuclear bomb which leveled that Japanese city?

"Now Harry is a legend in the corner of Washington where he refused to listen. He smiles down on us from posters and T-shirts and beer mugs. Balladeers sing a song about old Harry, the stubborn man who put his ear to the mountain but would not heed the warnings."

When Jesus spoke to the disciples about what was to come in Matthew 24 He plainly stated that there would be signs in the earth indicating that He was coming soon. He said, "Put your ear to the events around you, and you will know the signs." First He said many deceivers would come. Deception has grown to unknown proportions. Second, He said there would be wars and rumors of wars and kingdoms and nations would be divided against each other. And then He said there would be famines and pestilences and earthquakes.

Every area He mentioned screams warning today, but we are flying headlong in oblivion while at the very brink of disaster. Warning, says the increase in false Christs. Warning, calls the increase in wars. Warning, cries the increase in famines. Warning blares the increase in AIDS epidemics etc... Warning Screams the fast increase in earthquakes.

With all those warnings millions will go to a Christless eternity. They will not be vaporized. They will not be covered in mud. They will not simply die. They will go to an eternal, infernal hell fire.

If You are not saved today is the day! If you are a Christian and are afraid to face Jesus Christ today is the time to get right with God.





3. The two witnesses
4. OT and tribulation saints
5. The millennium
6. The new heavens and new earth

CONCL:

Judgment seat of Christ

[[Where the following? [[But, second, there is the idea of victory. Every believer who comes to this point has gained the victory, and here, I propose, he or she is rewarded! I propose that this is what the NT refers to as the judgment seat of Christ, and here the believers are rewarded for what they have done in life. The Romans conquerors wore garlands of palm branches as a sign of victory. The Greeks contestants were rewarded with a palm branch for their victories. Any one seeing this branch recognized a winner.

Now there are two kinds of judgments. The first is judgment for evil doers. This judgment determines how bad the sentence will be. The other, is the judgment of rewards, like in the original Olympics. This judgment determines what rewards a contestant receives.

I propose to you that this is what Paul referred to as the judgment seat of Christ. Listen to these verses: Romans 14:10, "But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your

brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." And then 2 Corinthians 5:10, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

Now let us go together to another passage in 1 Corinthians (read 3:10-15). You see, this is a judgment of believers. And each one's works are up for judgment, not to see if he or she will go to heaven or hell. No, this is for rewards. Now notice that these works are tested as fire tests between gold, silver, precious stone and wood, hay and stubble. We are not dealing in this passage with sin. We are dealing with Christian works. For example, we may do fine Christian things for the wrong reasons. Our motives may be bad. You can even do soul winning with the wrong motives. You can pray with the wrong motives or go to church or get baptized and on and on, and all of these may be done in the flesh. God's fire will show all that up for what it is.

But, I want you to notice that these are all saved, but they are saved, yet so as by fire. Let me repeat 1 Peter 4:17 here, "For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?'"

So, no matter what their rewards will be, all will cry out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" In other words, "We do not deserve to be here. It is only because of God's goodness and the work of the Lamb of God that we can be here!" If I am correct that this pictures the judgment seat of Christ, read with me now verses 15-17. No matter what else some Christians may receive, these promises are good for all. Well, when these believers give glory to God for His great salvation, all heaven breaks out in the hallelujah chorus again (read 11-12).

Now, I feel I must take this moment to exhort us, with regard to this judgment. I want you to go to that great sermon on the mount, Matthew 6 (read 19-21). Now we are exhorted not to lay up treasures on earth. Jesus own words to us are, "Don't do it." Now there is a reason why we are not to do this. Here on earth, the laws of thermodynamics set in and everything rusts or corrodes or corrupts. That new car, that new dream house, all of it waxes old. I overheard a lady not too long ago, and I cannot tell you who it is or I might have to buy lunch for her; but she said the house we have now is not exactly her dream home. Is it not fortunate not to have a dream home? If we had our dream home here, it would by now not be quite as dreamy as it was when we got it. And all the time it would be getting worse. But now it doesn't matter. It's just a house to live in.

I ask you, what are you after? When I began on this message I went to Randy Alcorn's book, "The Treasure Principle." He tells a story of when he was the pastor of a large church in 1990, making a good salary and earning book royalties. They took in a troubled teenager, and helped her give up her baby for adoption rather than having an abortion. Through this experience he began to help save babies from our North American butchers, known as doctors. He entered efforts of non-violent rescues at abortion clinics and he was arrested and put in jail. He told the judge he would pay anything he could but he could not give money to those who would use it to kill babies.

Then the church was told to garnish one fourth of his wages for the abortion clinic. To help the church from defying court orders he resigned from the ministry. Then another court judgment followed and they were sued for 8.2 million. And he says, "For all appearances, and certainly by the world's standards, our lives had taken a devastating turn. Right? Wrong. It was one of the best things that ever happened to us."

Well, from that he learned God's treasure principle and wrote the book, "The Treasure Principle." I recommend that book to you. But he gave one

illustration I want to pass on to you. He writes: "Imagine you're alive at the end of the Civil War (this is in the USA years ago). You're living in the South, but you are a Northerner. You plan to move home as soon as the war is over. While in the South you've accumulated lots of Confederate currency. Now suppose you know for a fact that the North is going to win the war and the end is imminent. *What will you do with your Confederate money?*

"If you're smart, there's only one answer. You should immediately cash in your Confederate currency for US currency - the only money that will have value once the war is over. Keep only enough Confederate currency to meet your short-term needs" (pgs. 13-14).

He also tells this about John D. Rockefeller. He was one of the wealthiest men who ever lived. After he died someone asked his accountant, "How much money did John D. leave." And the answer he got was, "He left it all." I heard of a man who found a very good deal on brand new suits in a second hand store and he bought a bunch of them. When he put one of them on, he couldn't put his wallet into it because these suits were made for a funeral home. You see, you don't need real pockets on suits made for the dead. They are not taking anything with them.

What can we learn from this? For me, well, I'm OK in one sense. If I should die, somebody else will have to pay what is still left on my mortgage. But if we lay up a big bank account for ourselves here on earth, that is Confederate money. Very soon it will have no value. So, if while we are here, we use our money for those things that have eternal value, it is like exchanging Confederate money for US money in the civil war. After the war is over, the Confederate money will only be good to start a fire. When we die, our bank account will have lost all its value. But if we used it aright in time, we could send it ahead and it will last for eternity. It is not how wisely we can save our money, but how wisely we invest it for the Lord that really

counts. It will show up at the judgment seat of Christ.

Now you may well say to me, "I think you are mixing things up a bit here. Look at verses 13-14. Those who stand before the Lord here are not the Church, but the martyred saints of the tribulation." You are right. I mentioned to you earlier that we are not given a window like this into heaven with regard to the Church. But I recommend to you that the Church has gone through this experience earlier already. I only used Revelation 6:9-11 and 7:9-17 to show us what happens in heaven to these people. Here we are given a window into heaven as to how God processes those who enter there. I am suggesting that the Church also has already gone past the brazen altar and has already come to the throne to be rewarded, and that this window into heaven during the tribulation gives us a picture of what happens when people enter heaven.