

## **A Taste of Heaven, Part I** **Heaven: A Place of Rest!**

Revelation 14:12-13- "Here is the patience (steadfastness; perseverance) of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'"

### **Introduction:**

The first time you hear of the whole concept of "rest," in Scripture, is with reference to God, when He "ceased" from His creative labors on the seventh day. On the sixth day, following the creation of man, God looked, and He beheld everything that He made, and He saw that it was all, indeed, "very good." There were no cracks, defects, scars, deformities, and certainly there was no moral compromise as well. There was no chaos or disharmony or contention or struggle or violence or fear or death. Everything was absolutely perfect, beginning to function, in accordance with the perfect design of the Designer. And so, the seventh day came, and He rested. He looked upon, and enjoyed, all that He had so marvelously done! And the glory of God beamed forth, in every corner and crevice of creation; the sky and its inhabitants (living and non-living), the earth and its inhabitants (living and non-living), the ocean and its inhabitants (living and non-living), all sang together, in perfect harmony, to the tune of God's praise and glory!

It was a creation, which was itself, at rest, with its Creator, as it were. And the capstone of that creation, the first man and his wife, were placed, at rest, in the Paradise Garden of Eden! What was it like for our first parents, in those early times of innocence? On this side of heaven, we can only but taste it, in a tiny measuring spoon. We can smell a hint of its fragrance, enough to drive us onward, toward the full course, but for now, we live in the trenches of an all-out war, against the world, the flesh and the devil! But, at the same time, we have this sure and certain "hope," indeed, the anchor of our souls, motivating us forward and onward in the battle, providing us with every bit of encouragement necessary, as we draw nigh to the eternal rest in glory, already secured for us in Christ!

For the duration of these speaking sessions, brethren, I *hope* to emphasize that "hope" for us, from a host of different angles. By the grace of God, I aim to give us all, even but "a taste of heaven," with the intention of encouraging us all, forward in the battle, so that we might press on to the end of our race, and enter into the joy; the unspeakable joy, which awaits us, right around the corner! The topic of this week is "A Taste of Heaven," and we begin this evening, with the first subtitle, "Heaven: A Place of Rest!"

## **I. Rest Lost**

It wasn't too long before peace and order and tranquility, transformed into unrest and disorder and chaos. The woman and the man were both naked, and the whole concepts of shame and fear and perversion, were unknown. No lifeless animal lay rotting on the ground, from some disease, some accident or as the remains leftover from some predator. There was no death, and everything was well nourished, and abundantly satisfied, with the food, which the earth provided.

But, standing before the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil," looking into the eyes of the cunning, deceitful and convincing serpent, Eve laid hold of the fruit, and bit into it. And then she brought it to her husband, and like her, he took and ate of it, as well. And then their eyes were opened. And they knew good and evil. They knew guilt and shame and sorrow and fear and anxiety, for the first time. They knew unrest! The secured sense of calmness, which they once *only* knew, was now gone! One of the first signs of this, was that they grew ashamed of their nakedness, leading them to sew fig leaves together, as a covering. And the God, whom they once saw as their eternal joy and comfort and provider, became a threat to them. What a horror to imagine those moments, when God walked through the Garden, calling for them. And they were compelled to hide from the One, who had formed them, and who had provided them with all things to enjoy, in His presence, forever!

And following the confrontation; having brought their sin out in the open, the curse of death was pronounced upon them. And the rest; the peace and tranquility; the fearlessness, which they once only knew, was replaced by unrest, pain, sorrow and toil. The man would work the ground, but no longer would the ground, easily yield fruit for him. He would continue to

provide for his family; he would reap nourishment from the earth, but not without toil; not without much strain and vigor and loss of energy. By the sweat of his brow, he would provide for his home, and that, while having to contend with thorns and thistles, new growing plants, which would hinder, and often frustrate his labors. And the woman; the woman, given the glorious privilege of child bearing, would bring forth children, but not without great pain and sorrow. Every child born, right from the outset, would be a painful reminder of the contaminating affects of sin, which man would carry with him, throughout all of history, until God should permanently make things right.

And the once absent and unknown reality of death would now plague the whole earth, the first of which, would be two innocent animals, used as an atonement, for the sins of Adam and Eve. In the slaying of two animals, God stripped the dead corpses of their skins, and replaced the fig leaves, worn by our parents, with them. Only the shedding of innocent blood, could ever, truly, cover their shame. And then, they were expelled from the Garden, the place of comfort and familiarity, which they knew so well, where they walked in sweet fellowship with their God, without any threat or cause for shame. And they walked out, into a now dark and cursed world, the beginnings of great trouble and unrest for mankind! Rest was lost!

And brethren, it is right here, at this scene, that we ponder the world in its present state of chaos and corruption and sorrow and perversity. As our parents walked away from the sweet and perfect fellowship, they once had with their Creator; as their backs were forcibly turned away from the Paradise rest they once enjoyed, we are introduced to a world gone wrong; a creation, existing at enmity with its Creator! Every branch of sorrow, of depression, of fear and anxiety; every branch of pain and wickedness and defilement and bitterness; every tear, every flake of unrest and toil; every turned down smile, every murdered human being, every lust-filled compartment, every godless, self serving, God and man hating vibe, finds its root, right here in this moment of time, when innocence and rest were lost!

## **II. A Traveling Hope!**

However, right from the outset; immediately following the fall of man, God left mankind with a glorious promise; an undeserved and precious hope, that the curse brought about by our first parents, would be reversed, restoring rest and peace to all, who embrace this Promise, by faith. For, a Seed, would come from the woman, and this Seed would crush the head of the serpent, removing the curse, in the bruising of his own heel.

And this promise traveled throughout all of "BC" history, with more and more divine light, being shined upon it, the whole way through, right up until its fulfillment in the advent and incarnation of the Christ! The torch was carried early on by Abel, and then Seth, and those who began to "call upon the Name of the Lord." And it glittered in the hope presented in Enoch, indicating that, in the midst of looming death, there was hope to be found among those who "walk with God," like Enoch, who was taken up by God, never to experience death. It then found its lamp in the soul of one man, who with his family, alone escaped the great judgment, which came upon the entire world. "Noah," whose very name means "rest," represented the safe passage granted those, who enter into the ark of God's protective grace in Christ, sparing them from the much deserved judgment, set to come upon all of those, who remain on the "outside." And as he and his family eventually rested in the "new world," as it were, when the waters of judgment had receded, God put His covenant bow in the sky, as a reminder of His design to do good, even to fallen men, who come to Him by faith. The promise, never again to destroy the world by flood, in spite of man's wickedness, was a glimmer of hope, for the greater grace to come in Christ!

And the promise traveled through Abraham, giving all nations, which have just been judged in the separating of their languages at Babel, the hope, that once again, when the Messiah comes, He would call His people out of all nations, leading them to the promised rest, which was lost at the beginning. And it worked its way through Isaac and Jacob and the Twelve Tribes of Israel, pictured most evidently in the redemption of God's people out of Egypt. Egypt became a great bondage to the people of God; it was toil, it was slavery, it was suffering, it was harsh treatment, it was unrest! It was a clear picture of man's broken condition, and his bondage to sin. But when God brought them out with an outstretched arm; when He redeemed them, even under

the celebration of the Passover, where the blood of an innocent lamb, smeared upon their doors, spared them from the angel of death; and when He led them by the hand, as it were, through the Red Sea, and into the wilderness, with the Promised Land in sight, all of this, pictured the great eternal rest to come, for all, who are united to Christ, the Son of God! And in the giving of the Law, in the Sabbath Day, in the entire bloody sacrificial system, in the office of priests and prophets, in the giving of judges and kings, in the several holy days to be celebrated year after year; indeed, in all of God's dealings with His Old Covenant people, God transferred and carried the Promise; the Promise ultimately meant for the whole world, of eternal rest; of undoing the curse brought about by our first parents, in the coming of the Christ!

### **III. Rest Won!**

And then, He came! And the way was prepared for Him by John the Baptist, calling all to repent of their sins; to wash themselves by the confession of their sins and embracing the symbolic rite of baptism, preparing to lay their confidence and hope in the One sacrifice that would truly remove sin forever..."Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Here is your rest! "Come to Me, all you who are weary and heavy laden. Take My yoke upon you, for my burden is light...and you will find rest for your souls!" The peace, the rest, the grace, the forgiveness, the tangible hope, comes in the likeness of men, so that He might forever deal with that which has kept man in a state of unrest, at a great distance from God...our sin! And He taught! And He lived righteously, perfectly, fulfilling the Law, which we could never keep, while providing us with an example of that, which we would ultimately become! And He was arrested. He was taken into custody. He was beaten and whipped and marred and mocked and abused. And He was crucified. And He bore the wrath of God, in His own body, on the tree. And He died. And He was buried. And He rose again three days later! And He later ascended to the right hand of God, having accomplished His mission, on our behalf, and for the glory of God! The curse is undone in Him! Death has lost its sting, and a place of eternal rest is secured for all who embrace Him by faith. And because of this, brethren, we look to glory with eager anticipation, recognizing that Heaven is a place of rest!

## **Rest Anticipated!**

In the midst of our present trials and battles; in the very process of our bearing these decaying and dying bodies, the Revelation reminds us, in the very certain light of all that God has promised, and all that Christ has already accomplished, in accordance with these promises; it reminds us, in the midst of the present battle and toil, of this:

Revelation 14:12-13- "Here is the patience (steadfastness; perseverance) of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, 'Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them.'"

Here, through the Apostle John, we are given a window into the future, as it were [Ill. Ebenezer Scrooge, carried to look through the various windows of time]. We are brought to look upon a certain group of people. A large group, and yet, a minority, compared to the whole of all who ever existed. And the description is given to us, first, describing who they are. These are the ones who persevered. These are the ones who patiently waited for their Lord to call them home. These are the ones who endured. These are the ones who remained faithful to the end. They toiled, they suffered, they agonized, they persevered, they stood fast in their confession, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus! It was not easy for any of them. Indeed, they suffered deeply, some of them, beyond comprehension.

But here, that suffering is gone. There is nothing but constant elation and joy and peace! they have been borne up on eagle's wings, and brought to this place. These are the blessed ones! And such is the case for all, who die as they have died...remaining faithful to the end! And here is the highlight of their present reality and condition: They rest from their labors, and their works follow them! The toil, the suffering, the pain, the sorrow, the tears, the agony, the fear, the constant watching out for traps and pitfalls...those things are no more! They are at rest! They are eternally undisturbed from even the remotest of threats or potential hazards. There are no weapons in their hands. There are no weapons anywhere to be found. They are not needed any longer. They have reached the blessed safe haven! And their works; all that they have invested in the Kingdom of God, though seemingly overlooked in their life on earth; they have traveled

with them here, radiating in the glory of their appearance, holding eternal weight, as those things accomplished for Christ, and by Christ, in them!

Brethren, this is not some manmade, wishful thinking, Disney "Dream a Bigger Dream" concept. This is reality! Our rest has been secured in Christ! We have a sense of that peace now. We have been granted peace with God already, and we have received the downpayment of the Holy Spirit already, such that we can call God, "Our Father!" But, the full package is yet to come! We still suffer! We still agonize! We still battle! We are still in a constant war, having to continually shield ourselves from living, present enemies, both seen and unseen! But we are almost finished! The race is almost done! The war is almost over! Our eternal rest is already prepared for us! It awaits us, at this very moment! So, let's go out fighting, brethren! Let's leave a mark for the glory of Christ, in this fallen soil; let's labor hard for the Kingdom *now*, while we can; let's exhaust ourselves for Christ, in the expending of these temporary, earthly bodies, holding onto nothing here, as we prepare to "enter into the joy of our Lord!"

AMEN!!!