

- ***READ II Corinthians 12:1-4*** Heaven....just saying the word can bring a sense of calm or relaxation over a place. Heaven is that place that people of faith often speak of and look forward to being in one day in the future. We talk about the beauty of heaven. We sing the song, "*How Beautiful Heaven Must Be.*" We speak about the peace that will be there. "*No Tears In Heaven*" we sing aloud to one another. We often express these beautiful imagines about heaven, but don't we already experience some of these things here on earth?
 - Many a person has probably found themselves in a relaxing place with a cold drink in their hand, and thought to themselves, "*this is heaven on earth.*" Have you ever found yourself thinking something along those lines? Maybe you've had a rough few weeks at work or in school and it is time for a nice vacation on the beach or in the mountains, and you find yourself relaxing there without a care in the world and this thought crosses your mind. You think to yourself about how beautiful and relaxing of a place you are currently in, and you might even say that this is just a little taste of what heaven will be like once you get there one day.
 - However, if heaven is just a beautiful place of relaxation and peace, then how is it different from what we can experience here on earth at times? Couldn't we just created heaven here on earth ourselves? Just as we talked about what makes hell hell, last week...this week we are going to consider the happier side of that coin by seeking to answer what makes heaven...heaven? People often have these and other ideas of what heaven will be like in their minds because of what is seen on TV or what man's finite mind conjure up, but what does God's Word actually teach us concerning what heaven will be like? What sets heaven apart from what we might experience here on earth? What makes it the place that each of us ought to strive so strongly to reach when this life is over? Let's consider these things this morning together.
- I. Heaven will be a place vastly different from what we might experience here on earth.**
- A. If asked what heaven will be like, I think there is a general idea that most people have about what heaven will be like.
1. When describing heaven, many people's minds automatically go to a place that is up in the sky. It looks like the ground is made out of clouds. The sun is shining nice and bright. The pearly gates and streets of gold are glistening ever so brilliantly. People are all walking around with wings (because they're angels now, you know) or at least a shimmering glow about them, and they might even have a halo on their heads. Everyone is smiling and in a perfect state of mind because everything is just peaceful and serene.
 2. All of these ideas are well and good, but often descriptions such as these go far beyond what is revealed to us in Scripture concerning heaven. We might not have a greatly descriptive foretelling of heaven for us in the Bible, but we can know for certain that heaven will be an awesome place. When Paul, presumably, was called up into Paradise, he said that he heard things that no man to express. (**II Corinthians 12:1-4**) Later on in **Revelation 21**, we see John having his own visions of heaven. His descriptions of heaven certainly do paint a beautiful picture for us, but we must remember that Revelation is a book of figurative language. If we are going to hold to the figurative language earlier in the book, then we would probably need to be consistent and not take everything said by John about heaven literally, simply recognize that it will be a place of immense beauty. What exactly will heaven be like down to some of the tiny details? I honestly don't think we can say based on what has been revealed to us in Scripture, but that doesn't mean that we haven't been given at least some hints as to what heaven will be like.

- B. We can know this about heaven from the writings of Scripture.
1. Firstly, I think we can say with some confidence that heaven is a spiritual supernatural place. What I mean by that is that heaven is not just like another earth, but it is on an entirely different plain than where we currently are. We might hear others talking about heaven just being in the sky and maybe we could reach it one day if we fly high enough into space, but that just isn't the case. Thinking back to Paul's description of where this man was taken to, he calls it the "*third heaven.*" (**II Corinthians 12:2**) We might be able to fly in the heavens of our skies and of space, but we cannot fly to where it is that God dwells.
 2. Not only will this place be different from what we experience here on earth, but we will also be different. Our bodies will be changed into something different according to what Paul says in **I Corinthians 15:51-54**. What does that mean exactly? What will we look like? What type of bodies will we have? I honestly don't have the answer to those things. I don't know what we will look like. I don't know how exactly we will operate, but I just know that it will be different.
 3. Maybe one way that we know it will be different is that it will be different in regards to the relationships he have here on earth. When questioned and tested by the Sadducees concerning marriage in the next life, Jesus response "*for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.*" (**Matthew 22:30**) Does this mean that we won't know each other in heaven? I don't know for certain, but I don't think it means for certain that we won't. It is just that things will be different. Marriage will no longer be needed for procreation or support like it is here on earth. Therefore, we can know that our relationships with one another will be different in at least this regard.
 4. Again, I don't believe we can know exactly what heaven will be like from what is given to us in Scripture. I couldn't tell you what our day to day activities will be for certain. It can be extremely difficult for our finite minds to comprehend and fully detail spiritual things such as this, but there are at least a few things that we can know from what is revealed to us in the Bible. However, this still doesn't give us a solid answer of what truly makes heaven heaven.

II. Heaven is heaven because:

A. it is where God is.

1. In **John 14:1-4**, Jesus says, "I go to prepare a place for you...I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am there you may be also." What makes heaven, heaven is the fact that God is there. Now, that isn't to say that God is seen everywhere. Certainly He is omnipresent in and through all things, but heaven is where God resides. It is where He has His home, His throne, and His Son sitting by His side ruling His Kingdom.
2. In **Acts 1:9-11**, Jesus is ascending into heaven after giving His last words of direction to His disciples. As He is rising into the air, those present were left staring at Him as He slowly disappeared. Two men suddenly appeared and asked why it was they were staring at Him. They remind the disciples that just as He has left them that He will come again. But why were they staring? Certainly to see a man miraculously ascend into the sky is a sight in and of itself. However, might we also consider that they were staring and probably thinking that they wish they could be going away with Him. The disciples wanted to be with their Master and Savior. They wanted to experience glory with Him and be where He was!
3. I believe that their thoughts were probably similar to what was said by Asaph in **Psalms 73:25**, "Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You." Asaph's greatest desire was to be with his God. He knew that he couldn't truly experience that here on earth for God is not here as He is in heaven. This is what makes heaven what it is. It is that place where God truly resides. It is the place where the sun is not needed because the light of God illuminates all things. (**Revelation 22:5**) Heaven is heaven because God is there.

B. it is where God is the only focus.

1. We often proclaim, and rightfully so, that God is our sole focus in this life. We say that everything we think, say, and do is only done because it is according to the will of God, and that certainly ought to be the case. However, let's take a moment and be honest with ourselves and admit that there are times when we fail to focus on God fully. There might be times where temptation confronts us, and for just a moment we take our focus off of God and we give in to Satan and his influence. Or it might be that life simply causes us to take our focus off of God. Our jobs, families, and other things cause us to lose focus and we get side tracked.
2. This is just a reality about this life. Here on earth, we have numerous things competing for our attention and focus, and it is up to us to work hard and give great effort to not allow the distractions of life to get us away from our true focus of God. We would probably all have to admit that, at times, this can be exhausting work. This reminds me of why those of old held so firmly to their faith. Those in **Hebrews 11:13-16** lived this life in faith while also firmly focused on getting to that place where things would be better and the distractions and difficulties wouldn't be present. They sought for that better country that had been prepared for them by God.
3. When we finally get to this better country...in that place we will be able to focus fully on the God who has strengthened us to be there. We won't have to worry about providing for ourselves or for others because God will be in our presence and our only desire will be to worship and glorify Him as the heavenly hosts were seen doing by John in **Revelation 4:8-11**. Heaven is heaven not just because God is there, but because in that place we will be free to focus solely on Him without any distractions that this life might throw before us. Certainly our mindset should be like that of Paul and John when they say "*come, Lord Jesus.*" (**I Corinthians 16:22; Revelation 22:20**)

C. it is the place where temptation and sin are not.

1. This truly is the greatest separating factor between what this life is and what life will be like in heaven. I have heard some argue that we can't say that temptation and sin will not be in heaven, but I would disagree on the basis that the great tempter (**Matthew 4:3**) will not have any power or influence over us in that place because he will be somewhere else entirely. Remember from our study last week, that Satan has his own place especially prepared for the devil and his angels. (**Matthew 25:41**)
2. If Satan will be far away from us in hell, then who will there be to tempt us? Who will there be to try to draw our desires away from God and His will? I know some might try to turn this into a discussion about free will and whether or not that will be a thing in heaven, but I think it is moot point considering that the tempter will not be there to work on any desires that we might have. Remember, Adam and Eve were doing well until Satan showed up...why would we think that things would be any different, especially considering us being in the very presence of God.

D. it is the place where the consequences of sin will not be present.

1. Therefore, if God is there and we are able to focus on Him entirely because Satan is not there to tempt us into sin, then we can also infer that heaven is heaven because the consequences of sin will also not be present. While hell is referred to as the "*second death*" (**Revelation 2:11**), we can rejoice in knowing that heaven is often referred to as "*life.*"
2. We know from **Romans 5:12** that all men suffer in this life, and they ultimately suffer death because of sin that has been committed. But if there is no temptation because Satan is not present, and if sin is only committed when there has been temptation placed before man (**James 1:14,15**)...then we can conclude that the lack of presence of Satan, temptation, and sin allows for us to truly live forever in this place with God without the fear of death.

3. Our willingness to hear, believe, and obey the words of Jesus in this life allows us to inherit eternal life in the next. (*“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.”* **John 5:24**) Sure we will still suffer the death of this body, but we will be raised to life anew in heaven without the fear of sins consequences ever again. Heaven is heaven because God is there, and not only is He there, but Satan is not there. Temptation and sin will no long be thorns in our sides and we will be able to focus for eternity ever more on our God and His glories. That is truly what makes heaven what it is, and why we will never have it in this life on earth.

III. Heaven will be God’s perfect realization of what He has wanted for man since his creation.

- A. God originally created man for this purpose of being close to him in the garden.
 1. Think about the garden of Eden. Go back to **Genesis 1 and 2** and think about what Eden was. It was a place where many walked with God in a literal sense. They would walk with one another in the garden. They were in perfect fellowship and harmony. Every one of man’s desires and needs were fulfilled in Eden. They were in need of nothing, and God designed Eden to be that exact kind of place.
 2. I would venture to say that Eden would’ve continued to be that exact kind of place for as long as God would’ve wanted it to be had sin not come into the picture. Sin ruined Eden, but it did not completely ruin God’s relationship with man. He continued to have fellowship with man through covenants, sacrifice, and obedience of man to God. Yet, it just wasn’t ever the same as it was back in **Genesis 1 and 2**.
 3. So we know that God set in motion this plan for man’s redemption that would ultimately culminate in the death and resurrection of Jesus so that all of the faithful of all time could one day be gathered together in heaven for all eternity. It is God’s desire that all men repent of their sins so that they can experience the new heavens and the new earth which are being prepared for the faithful by our Lord Jesus. (**II Peter 3:9,13; John 14:1-4**)
- B. Once we get to heaven, God will have with man what He wanted all along and what He originally created in Eden.
 1. In heaven we will have a closeness to God that could only be rivaled with what Adam and Eve had when they were in the garden with Him in the beginning. The different, again, being that there will be no tempter to cause us to forsake our God and sin. With these things being so, we can look to that place in anticipation of what is said in **Revelation 21:1-7**.
 2. That perfect fellowship with God is further seen in **Revelation 22:1-5**. In that place, we will be with God forever because of our access to the water and tree of life that will be in that place. We will be in the presence of God and serve Him forever more. But even more than that is the fact that we will reign with Him forever and ever! We can experience that! We can be there!

I don’t know if any of us can truly contemplate within our minds and full grasps what heaven will be like from the standpoint of the perfect fellowship with God being apart from temptation and sin. The thought alone should fill us with such joy accompanied by an overwhelming desire to actually be in that place once this life is over. I want to be there because I know that this life has nothing for me in reality. This life will only ever bring difficulty and strife, but I want to overcome so that I can be in that place with my God forever more. I hope that each of us will live in such a way that heaven will be our home, and we won’t just think and fantasize about what makes heaven, but that we will each experience that beautiful place prepared for the faithful. ***PRAYER***