

Heaven Will Be A Place On Earth

One writer put in very honest words what most Christians are a bit embarrassed to say: “Most of us find it very difficult to want “Heaven” at all – except insofar as “Heaven” means meeting again our friends who have died. One reasons for this difficulty is that [life]...tends to fix our minds on this world. Another reason is that when the real desire for Heaven is present in us, we do not recognise it.”

I wonder how many Christians feel a bit of guilt about Heaven, feeling that they should want to go there, but, in reality, they'd rather stay here. Better the devilish world you know than the angelic world you don't, they might secretly feel. I think for many of us, the popular ideas of Heaven are part of the problem. We try to understand what Heaven is, but we're told it is like nothing we know. We're told, it's beyond this earthly stuff. So we try to do some mental high jumping, but can't imagine what we can't imagine. We have been told it involves white robes, harps, and praise, so we do our best to imagine that and feel good about it. But we usually fail.

We struggle to desire Heaven, because you cannot desire what you cannot imagine. But there is no need for this. Scripture has given us more than enough truth to help us imagine what Heaven is, and what it will be like.

As we work our way in from the outside in, today I wish us to see from Scripture the truth that Heaven is a place. I want us to see where it will be, and what it will be like for us to be in that place.

I. Heaven is An Actual Place

John 14:1 "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 "In My Father's house are many mansions¹; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you². 3 "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. 4 "And where I go you know, and the way you know." 5 Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (Joh 14:1-6)

Here Jesus makes it very plain that after His death and resurrection He will leave the disciples. But He is not leaving and dissolving into some other plane of existence. He is leaving this world, and going to another place. That place, Jesus says, is so real, that it is going to be shaped and ordered in preparation for believers. That place is so real, that at the appointed time, Jesus will come back to fetch believers to be with Him, physically in that place. If we have embraced Jesus Himself as the way to the Father, then He Himself will come and gather believers to be with Him in that place.

Heaven is a place. Here Heaven is called “My Father's House”. A house is a place. A home is that place of all places we love the most. We leave to do our work, but we come back and are at ease at home.

Heaven is also called a country. *And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return.*

16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Heb 11:15-16)

A country is a place, a place with borders, rivers, mountains, forests, climate. Heaven is a place.

Heaven is a place. You have just read, and it is even clearer in Revelation 21, that Heaven is also called a city. Cities are places, places with roads, parks, plazas, libraries, buildings, beautiful architecture. Heaven is place.

Heaven is also called Paradise in 2 Corinthians 12 and Luke 23, and the word in the original meant a walled park, an enclosed garden. This was the most delightful place in ancient times, a protected, cultivated place of great beauty, luscious fruit, glorious fragrances, and delights to the eyes. Gardens and parks are places, and Heaven is such a place.

Now when Heaven is called a country, a city, a park, a house, is that Heaven borrowing from Earth to help us understand, or is it the earthly countries, earthly cities, earthly parks, earthly homes are copies, shadows of the Heavenly? Remember that according to Hebrews 8:5 that earthly Tabernacle was a shadow and a copy of the Heavenly. Heaven is the real country, the ultimate city, the truest garden, the ultimate home.

Now the skeptic says, "So where is Heaven if it's a place? Beyond the furthest star?" Well, who said the only places that exist are the ones you can travel to? I enjoy watching where science is going. I was amazed and amused to hear these unbelieving scientists say that according to string theory, they have calculated that there are probably eleven other dimensions of existence parallel to ours. Now I don't take that as fact, but I am amazed to hear the scientists say with unblinking eyes that there could be another place overlapping this place. There could be many other places that are just as real, but cannot be reached by simply travelling in our universe.

One of the problems we have with understanding Heaven is that we try to imagine some kind of non-physical place. This comes from a kind of false spirituality which sees the body as evil, and therefore physical places as somehow unspiritual, or inferior. But as we'll see, God intends to resurrect our bodies, renew the Earth, and have us be on it. Nothing unspiritual about place. We have no reason to believe that Heaven is not a time-space dimension, only that the time is never-ending.

I heard an interesting interview not too long ago on the radical displacement of modern man. We are now so mobile, so able to travel vast distances, cross oceans, communicate globally, that we are losing a sense of attachment to place, which is a very natural and good thing. We are meant to love home, city, country, and feel it is ours. Heaven will not be a non-place for non-persons. Heaven will be where all the joys of the best places find their truest incarnation.

I don't long to live in a non-place. I want to be in the place where Christ will be. I want to be in that country, in that city, in that park, in that house, with Christ.

Christ said that part of the plan of redemption is to prepare a place and then bring believers into it. The Bible tells us a little more about where that place will eventually be.

II. Heaven Will Be A Place On A Resurrected Earth.

Revelation 21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Rev 21:1-4)

Revelation records that Christ will return, a kingdom of a thousand years will follow, followed by a final rebellion, and a final judgement. Then this scene. A new Heaven and a New Earth. Heaven is

not going to be a faraway, non-physical place. Heaven will come down and unite with Earth.

A song came out in the 80s "Heaven is a Place on Earth." No it isn't, but it will be. One day, God is going to renew the Earth. Whether He undoes the very atoms of this universe and makes it new, or whether He resurrects this Earth from the ashes of a fiery judgement into a new one, theologians disagree. But the result is the same. The Earth will be new.

What sort of Earth will this be? Why the Earth you know, without the Curse. Trees, rivers, lakes, mountains, pastures, fragrances, fruit trees, temperature, wind. Isaiah 65 seems to teach there will be animals in the new earth just as there are now.

You see, when God made us, He deliberately made us from the dust of the Earth. We are connected to the soil of this world. It is our home. But then He breathed into us a living soul, a soul that could worship and love Him. So we love God who is in Heaven, but Earth is our home.

But Jesus Christ is the God-Man. He is fully God and fully man, and through His atonement He brings God and Man back together. And the ultimate fulfillment of this is when Heaven and Earth come together. Heaven is God's home. Earth is our Home. But in Revelation 21, Heaven comes to be on Earth, and the two are united.

The glory of man before the fall is that he was to reign over the Earth for God's glory. He was to subdue this Earth and through it, being in the image of God, be the clearest and most glorious mirror of God's glory in all the universe. But by falling into sin, that mirror became a distortion, a warped parody of God. But through salvation and redemption, the mirror is fixed. But the story is not over until we are back on the Earth, an Earth like Eden, and now doing what we were supposed to be doing before the Fall, only better, and with more glory to Christ. Read the first three chapters of Genesis, and then read the last three chapters of Revelation and see how they are nearly complete parallels.

For redemption to be complete, it must embrace all the victims of sin's curse. This means not only humanity, but the creation itself. Salvation must first deal with sin, then our death, then death in creation.

Again, part of the reason believers struggle to love Heaven is that they try to imagine something much loftier than Earth. But every description of Heaven describes the best things we know about Earth: trees that we eat from, music that we play and make and listen to, streets, gardens, mountains, dwellings. To imagine Heaven, we do not have to try to imagine an unearthly place. We have to imagine this Earth freed from the curse.

An Earth with all the lawful pleasures of beauty, and order, and delightful things, but without sin, without conflict, without threats, without loss, without decay, without evil, beauty and glory unmarred by evil, untainted, and undiminishing.

Don't you get tired of fixing and renovating things? Whether it's your house, your car, or your body, something is always breaking. We're always fixing what is fading, polishing what looks old, oiling what is creaking, painting over stuff. In this world, nothing is new for very long.

5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me¹, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." (Rev 21:5)

4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

(1Pe 1:4)

But the Heaven on Earth will be a place where everything is new forever. In fact, Paul tells us that the current earth exhibits a kind of longing, a pain, a groaning for this time to come, and for it to be released from the Curse.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. (Rom 8:19-22)

The first Adam brought sin, brought death, lost us Eden, brought the curse upon all creation. The second Adam, deals with sin, conquers death, brings us back to Eden, removes the curse.

III. Heaven Will Be a Place For Resurrected Believers.

One day, we will be on a resurrected Earth in resurrected bodies.

Before then, when we die, we go into the presence of God as disembodied spirits. Just as Heaven is not all that it will be, and it is not located where it will be, during this age, we who die do not yet experience Heaven as we one day shall. After death, we enter the immediate presence of the Lord (the unbeliever enters Hades immediately). What enters Heaven/Hades during this time is not our bodies, but our spirits. A human can exist in a disembodied state.

And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni; but his father called him Benjamin. So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem). (Gen 35:18-19)

Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it. (Ecc 12:7)

And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise." (Luk 23:43)

And when Jesus had cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' " Having said this, He breathed His last. (Luk 23:46)

And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (Act 7:59)

So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. (2Co 5:6-8)

Angels are spirit beings without bodies. God Himself is a Spirit without a body. There is no Scripture to suggest mankind cannot exist apart from a body. We die, and are fully conscious in Heaven or Hell. Like the parable of the rich man and Lazarus shows, both were fully awake, aware, conscious in their respective places. They even had some form of sensation – thirst, pain, pleasure. Though we have not received resurrection bodies, there is some form of temporary physicality which God grants.

There is no soul-sleep. The spirits of God's people can dwell in God's presence, the Heaven not yet on Earth. What cannot enter God's presence is an unredeemed body. It does not mean that spirits cannot dwell in God's presence. *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. (1Co 15:50)*

Charles Spurgeon: At present the saints who are with Jesus are without their bodies and are pure spirits. Their humanity is in that respect maimed—only half their manhood is with Jesus—yet even for that, half of their manhood to be with Christ is far better than for the whole of their being to be here in the best possible condition!

But what we can say is that being disembodied is not the final hope of the Christian. The final hope of the Christian is resurrection.

May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1Th 5:23)

Why is Resurrection so important?

Because the body must be freed from the curse. Final glorification only happens when the body is resurrected (Romans 8:23-24). All death must be conquered for Christ to reign, including physical death (1 Cor 15:26). We must be judged in our bodies (2 Cor 5:10). Our bodies themselves must be judged for how we used them.

In Heaven we await the resurrection of our bodies at Christ's return.

*But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's **at His coming**. (1Co 15:23)*

In Daniel 12:13 an angel looks ahead to the resurrection as occurring at the end of the age: *"But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age."*

In John 6:40 Christ declares that the resurrection will happen on the last day: *"For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I Myself will raise him up on the last day."* (See also John 6:39, 44, 54; cf. 11:24).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 he also looks ahead to the resurrection as something that will occur not until Christ comes back: *"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord."*

We don't get this resurrection body until Christ's return. *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* (1Co 15:20) Christ's resurrection is the prototype of ours. Jesus did not receive His resurrection body the moment He died. If that was the case, then the empty tomb would be irrelevant. Jesus' soul and spirit went into Heaven before His resurrection on Sunday. If He could not leave His physical body in the grave and immediately receive a glorified body, neither can we.

It's important this happen at one time, because it means that resurrection will be a corporate reality, not just an individual experience: "All Christians will be raised into glory *together*. While we all lived at different periods of time, we all came to faith at different times, and we all will have died at different times (except for those who lived until Christ returns), it is an amazing thing that God has planned things such that our glorification will occur at the same time. What a great encouragement it is to know that the believers of the past are waiting for us to finish the race ourselves so that we can all experience the great joy of glorification together." - John Piper

So what will the resurrection body be like?

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. (Phi 3:20-21)

It will be like Christ's body. Since we know quite a few things about Christ's resurrection body, we can say a few things. First, it will be a continuation from the old, only perfected. You will still be you, without any deformity. Resurrection is about continuity.

Second, Christ ate and drank with His disciples after His resurrection, so it will be a body that can eat, drink, and apparently enjoy all the same five senses you have now. Christ was still male, so the resurrection will not erase gender. It may change the biological significance of gender since there won't be procreation, but that doesn't mean we will lose the spiritual and eternal meanings of being man and woman. Christ was still a Jewish man. We will still retain our ethnic or racial appearances.

24 And the nations of those who are saved¹ shall walk in its light, and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it². (Rev 21:24)

Third, we read in 1 Corinthians 15 that it will be imperishable. It will not experience decline, sickness, diseases, or injury. *42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. (1Co 15:42)*

Fourth, will be powerful according to 1 Cor 15:43. Perhaps it will not need sleep and rest like we do now.

Fifth, it will also have abilities we do not possess now. Christ's resurrection body was able to enter a closed room without having to open the door. He was able to travel vast distances without having to walk. Perhaps even the ascension was part of the powers of His glorified body.

Sixth, it will be beautiful (Phil 3:21). It will be a beauty of a new order altogether. Our new bodies will have a glory and beauty and dignity about them which our present ones do not have.

You will have a resurrected body, dwelling on a resurrected Earth, upon which will be the Heavenly City, with God Himself.

And this is how God wraps up His grand victory. Far as the curse is found, as the hymn puts it, God's redemption goes, reclaims, restores, renews. The fallen race of Adam. The fallen and cursed Earth. Death itself. God gets His people. God casts out all sin and sorrow. God resurrects His people. God renews the entire Earth. God puts His now grace-enabled people back in the Garden, except now the Garden is in the city which is on a gloriously perfected Earth.

Listen to that Lewis quote again: One writer put in very honest words what most Christians are a bit embarrassed to say: "Most of us find it very difficult to want "Heaven" at all – except insofar as "Heaven" means meeting again our friends who have died. One reasons for this difficulty is that [life]...tends to fix our minds on this world. Another reason is that when the real desire for Heaven is present in us, we do not recognise it."

Perhaps we need to begin recognising how many of our longings here on Earth are longings for that perfection. Longings for pictures of God's beauty that do not fade. Longings for pleasures from God that do not diminish or corrupt. Longings for family love that does not end. Longings for a place, a home, a country, a city that will never degrade, or be destroyed, for it is Christ's country, Christ's city, Christ's house.