

WHAT EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO KNOW

Lesson 29

Heaven And Our Resurrection

In November of 2010, the story of Colton Burpo, a child not yet 4 years old, gripped the collective hearts and imaginations of the reading public in a book called "Heaven is For Real". Upon emerging from an emergency appendectomy, Colton gradually began to describe his visit to Heaven precipitated by a near death experience during the course of the operation. Such stories are often looked upon askance, but, Colton's descriptions of the after life so paralleled revealed Biblical truth concerning Heaven, that the effect was profound and long lasting, topping the New York Times best seller list for many, many months.

Heaven and the nature of the afterlife has piqued man's curiosity ever since the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Deuteronomy 26:16 describes Heaven as God's "holy habitation" and it is followed by brief, but profound references to the Kingdom throughout the Old Testament, on into the New Testament, elaborated upon by Jesus, and culminating in John's great apocalyptic vision recorded in the Revelation.

Just to mention a few:

"Our Father, which art in Heaven . . ." (Matthew 5:9)

"In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would have told you."
(John 14:2)

"The Lord has prepared His throne in the heavens; and His Kingdom rules over all".
(Psalm 103:19)

"And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever." (Revelation 22:5)

"And he (Stephen), being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadily into heaven and saw the Glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right had of God". (Acts 7:55)

"Around the throne were twenty four thrones; and upon the Thrones I saw twenty four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads."
(Revelation 4:4)

"And I saw the holy city New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband". (Rev. 21:1)

“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal clear jasper. It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel . . . and the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” (Rev. 21:10-14)

“I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the Kings of the Earth will bring their glory into it. In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed.” (Rev. 21:22-26)

Paul in II Corinthians 12:2 makes reference to “the third heaven” and our discussion needs to begin with an understanding of what this means.

- I. The Three “Heavens”
 - A. The atmospheric heaven
 - B. The celestial heaven
 - C. The dwelling place of God

When the Bible speaks of Heaven, it is of supreme importance to know of which one of these it is referring.

- A. The atmospheric heaven is the space surrounding the earth to a height of about six miles known as the troposphere. This is the area of Earth’s weather and the clouds and the domain of the birds.
- B. The celestial heaven is the location of the sun, moon, stars, and the planets. The Hubble telescope has revealed that this “heaven” is far more vast than man ever imagined.
- C. The Heaven that is the eternal home of the redeemed of all time is most accurately described as the dwelling place of God. In chapter 4 of the Revelation, the Apostle John is invited to this realm and he describes it’s glories. It is where God sits enthroned and from there He renders judgment and dispenses blessings. Old Testament saints did not have to wait for Jesus’ ascension to gain access to Heaven because Moses and Elijah came from there to participate in Jesus’s Transfiguration. In this present age scripture asserts God’s Kingdom will know no end and Daniel reveals it will be an “everlasting dominion . . . which will not be destroyed.” John asserts Christ will reign “forever and ever.” (Rev. 11:15)

While there is much we do not know about Heaven and we won’t until we experience it for ourselves, these are some basic facts about Heaven that can be known.

1. Heaven is a place, not a state of mind.
Jesus ascended into Heaven bodily and He did not go into a “state of mind”. (Acts 1:9) The angel said he would return the same way. During Stephens stoning, he looked into Heaven and saw Jesus standing at God’s right hand. Stephen saw a spiritual reality which is currently hidden from us. In John 14:2, Jesus said “I go to prepare a place for you”.
2. In that passage in John 14:3, Jesus also tells us that He will receive us to Himself. When a believer dies he (his soul/spirit) immediately goes to be with the Lord. Jesus told the thief on the cross, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise.”(Luke 23:42-43) See also 2 Corinthians 5:6-8; Philippians 1:21-24.
3. God’s physical creation will be restored and we will continue to exist and act in it.
There is a division of thinking in Protestant circles if the earth will be completely destroyed and replaced or just changed and renewed. It is unlikely with as much love and care as God put into the creation of the Earth that He would allow it to be totally destroyed by Satan as a result of man’s sin. It is more likely the surface of the earth will undergo change rather than a loss of the entire creation.
4. Our resurrected bodies will be part of the new creation.
In the new order our bodies will be free from disease, decay, and death. Man was originally created as “very good”, but sin changed all of that. The new creation will revert to God’s intended purposes. There will be eating and drinking in the new order as indicated by the description of the marriage supper of the Lamb. Also, after Jesus was resurrected, he ate fish in the presence of the disciples. This brings up the issue of elimination and one suggestion is our resurrected bodies may have a different physiology, but that is in the domain of God.

The greatest aspect of the anticipation for Heaven is the impact it should have on our present earthly existence. It changes every relationship and every desire of man. I John 3:3 tells us: “Everyone who has their hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

Perhaps a 19th century hymn, “There is a Happy Land”, sums up the anticipation and blessings of Heaven best:

There is a happy land, far, far away,
Where saints in glory stand, bright, bright as day.
Oh how they sweetly sing, worthy is our Savior King,
Loud let His praises ring, praise, praise for aye.

Come to that happy land, come, come away;

Why will ye doubting stand, why still delay?
Oh, we shall happy be, when from sin and sorrow free,
Lord, we shall live with Thee, blest, blest for aye.

Bright, in that happy land, beams every eye;
Kept by a Father's hand, love cannot die.
Oh, then to glory run; be a crown and kingdom won;
And, bright, above the sun, we reign for aye.

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