

MESSAGE — Heaven Is Closer Than We Think

Last Thursday night, Amanda, Morgan and I went out for dinner at Rolled Cold Creamery.

We were celebrating Morgan's Adoption Day.
We've been there several times...
But this time something happened...
And I do have permission to share this...

Amanda ordered cookie dough as a topping for her ice cream.
But when she got it, she looked... no cookie dough.

So she asked the guy behind the counter about it...
And after they talked about it for a while...
She realized the cookie dough was right there on top all along!

It was scooped and dropped on top...
But it was the same color as the ice cream...
And she just didn't see it!

And that made me think about today's sermon...
Because sometimes we don't see what's right in front of us.

So over the past several months I've been thinking about heaven.
I've been diving into scripture in my spare time,
And looking at what the Bible *actually* says about heaven.

And what I've noticed is that...
Maybe I've not been seeing what's been right in front of me this whole time?

Because — judging from Scripture...
It seems to me that...

[SLIDE 1] Heaven is a lot closer than we think.

I talked about this a little bit in the BIC Life Podcast episode
that comes out tomorrow...
but I wanted to take some time to really walk through this together with you.

Because we've been on a journey together as a Church.
I believe God has been showing us just how near He is.

So back in January of 2025 we started our Sermon on the Mount series...
And in Part 2, we talked about what Jesus meant when He said...

[SLIDE 2] Matthew 5:4 - Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Jesus was showing us that even in seasons of grief...
We experience the strength of His presence as He comforts His people.

Those who mourn are *blessed* because...
That's often where we feel the nearness of God even more.

We saw this with Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 and 2.

Hannah prayed... and in her grief...
She discovered the nearness of God.

That's the blessing in the mourning...
It's the comfort in the pain.

And for those who've experienced loss...

**Heaven often feels closest when we grieve...
because that's when we become more aware of God's presence.**

That's why I'm saying Heaven is closer than we think.
Because...

[SLIDE 3] Heaven is where God is. It's where His presence is fully known.

Maybe you've felt this before...
But when we become more aware of God's presence...
It's as if heaven breaks into our world.

Isaiah talks about this.
He said that we're living in darkness.

He calls our world: “the land of the shadow of death.”¹ (Isaiah 9:2)
 But he also looked forward to a “great light” coming...
 That light was Jesus.

And when Jesus began to preach...
 His main message was this:

[SLIDE 4] Matthew 4:17 - “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

But He’s not just talking about His arrival on earth.
 It’s deeper than that.

Think about when He taught His disciples to pray.
 He said...

**[SLIDE 5] Matthew 6:9-10 - “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
 your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”**

Notice that heaven... is “near.”
 And that God’s will involves *both* earth *and* heaven.

Heaven and Earth are two different realms...
 The divine and the physical...
 But they overlap.

**And what’s done in heaven impacts earth.
 And what happens on earth matters in heaven.**

Jesus put it like this in Luke 15...

[SLIDE 6] Luke 15:10 - In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

This means that when someone puts their faith in Jesus...
 Heaven notices... and rejoices!

So... on some level...
There’s a heavenly awareness of what’s happening on earth.

¹ Isaiah 9:2; Matthew 4:16

And those who are with the Lord are part of that reality.

In fact, Hebrews 12:1 says...

[SLIDE 7] Hebrews 12:1 - we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...

This tells me that those who went to be with Jesus aren't sleeping...
They're closer than we think.

And as we live our lives for Jesus...
They're cheering us on!

**But if *heaven* is so close...
Then why can't we see it?**

Well...
This is where it's best to go back to Genesis.

[SLIDE 8] (Picture) Genesis & the Garden of Eden

In Genesis, at the Creation event...
Heaven and earth were united.
They were together as one.
They overlapped.

This was the ideal situation.

Adam and Eve didn't need to pray like we do.
They literally walked and talked with God.

But then Adam and Eve sinned.

That sin disrupted their relationship with God.
And for the first time...
They found themselves separated from His presence.

**This is when heaven and earth
became two distinct realms...**

Still overlapping...
but no longer *fully* united like they were before.

In other words...

[SLIDE 9] Sin changed the whole heaven and earth dynamic.

God no longer walks with humanity in the same way.
His presence is still here...
But sin gets in the way.

**This is why heaven can feel distant...
and yet... it's right in front of us.**

Sin numbs us to God's presence.
It's like a drug that keeps us under the influence.

And because God is holy — He's completely sinless...
Sin not only separates us from His presence...
It makes His presence *dangerous*.

So how do we come near to a holy God?

Thankfully He already had a plan for that...

In the Old Testament, God's people set up a Temple.
In the early days, it was a huge tent...
Later it would be made out of wood and stone.

Either way...

In the back of the Temple was a room called the Most Holy Place
where only the high priest could enter.

In fact, look at Leviticus 16...

[SLIDE 10] Leviticus 16:2 - The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron [the high priest at the time] that he is not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die. For I will appear in the cloud over the atonement cover."

This was the place where the high priest went to meet with God.
It's where the overlap between heaven and earth was thin...
Because God's presence was in the room.

It makes me think of that 80's Belinda Carlisle song—
'heaven is a place on earth.'

The Holy of Holies room was a thin space
between the divine and physical realms.

And the only thing separating this room from the rest of the Temple...
Was a thick curtain.
It was a physical representation of what separated God from His people.

Now... the Hebrew people were expected to visit the Temple every year
To worship the LORD.

And as they got closer...
They would begin ascending...
Because the Temple was on a hill.

**And as they made their way up,
They would sing the Psalms of Ascent.**

Psalms like...

[SLIDE 11] Psalm 121:1-2 - I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

[SLIDE 12] Psalm 123:1 - I lift up my eyes to you, to you who sit enthroned in heaven.

Once they arrived...
They passed through the Temple gates...
Walked up the steps...
and entered the Temple Courts.

And in a symbolic way...
The higher up you went...

The closer to heaven you came...

Because in a very real way...

This is where God chose to reveal His presence.

And like Hannah...

This is how the LORD's people came near to Him.

But there was still the sin problem.

Even though people could come near to Him...

There was still the curtain.

There was still the barrier of sin between heaven and earth.

But God's plan wasn't finished.

Because ever since the Garden of Eden...

The plan was always for Him to come near to us...

And when John tells the story of Jesus...

he takes us right back to Genesis...

[SLIDE 13] John 1:1-2 - In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.

The "Word" John's talking about...

That's Jesus.

Look at verse 14...

[SLIDE 14] John 1:14 - The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

One of the songs we sang this morning talks about this.

Verse 2 of What a Beautiful Name says:

[SLIDE 15] What A Beautiful Name

"You didn't want heaven without us,

So Jesus **You brought heaven down.**
My sin was great, Your love was greater.
What could separate us now?"

I love the imagery behind Jesus bringing heaven down.

Because of Jesus...
Heaven is near.
Sin can't separate us from His love...
And His presence.

Think about it like this...

[SLIDE 16] Jesus became the thin space between heaven and earth

He's literally the presence of God...

Who stepped into human space and time...

And walked among us again.

Look at John 1 again...

[SLIDE 17] John 1:14 - The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

The Greek behind "made his dwelling among us" means
Jesus "pitched His tent among us."

In other words...
Jesus is the Temple.
He's not just where we go to meet with God...
He is God's presence among us.

He's the thin space where heaven and earth meet.

And because of Him...
The distance between heaven and earth isn't what it used to be.

God's presence isn't behind a curtain anymore...
He's standing right in front of us.

This is why Heaven is a lot closer than we think.

But it doesn't stop there.

Look at what the Apostle Paul said...

[SLIDE 18] Ephesians 1:13 - And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

So the moment we choose to believe in Jesus...
The moment we put our faith and trust in Him...
We are marked with the Holy Spirit.

In other words... the Spirit *dwells* in us.
He lives in us.
And His presence in us is the sign that we belong to God.

In fact...

[SLIDE 19] 1 Corinthians 6:19 - Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

So now...
the place where heaven and earth meet...
isn't just in a temple...
it's in Jesus.

And now, through Him...
it's in His people.

When we receive the Holy Spirit...
Our bodies become a thin space between heaven and earth...
Because God's presence is in us.

But God's Spirit doesn't come to kick back and relax in us.
He's here to work.

He's ready to empower us to do the LORD's will...
On earth as it is in heaven!

And so...

[SLIDE 20] Whenever we participate in the LORD's will, we're helping others see how close heaven really is.

This means that...
When we love our enemies...
When we pray for those who persecute us...
When we refuse to condemn others...
When we take the plank out of our own eye first...
When we choose to be peacemakers...
When we let the light of Jesus shine through us...

Heaven is a whole lot closer than we think.

Because we're participating in God's will being done...
on earth, as it is in heaven.

I read a quote this week that captured this idea of heaven's nearness so well.

It's from Reverend S. Joseph Exell.
He preached in England in the late 1800's and early 1900's.

Listen to what he said about how close heaven is...

[SLIDE 21] "Christians, there is only a veil between us and heaven! A veil is the thinnest and frailest of all conceivable partitions. The veil that conceals heaven is only our embodied existence, and though fearfully and wonderfully made, it is only wrought out of our frail mortality."²

In other words...
what separates us from heaven...
isn't a wall...

It's a veil.

² Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Hebrews*, vol. 1 (London: James Nisbet & Co., n.d.), 530.

It's thin.
It's fragile.

For those who trust in Jesus...
Death is just stepping into the presence of God.
It's a mere lifting of the curtain.

This is why I've been saying heaven is closer than we think.

It's right in front of us.
It's all around us.

Remember...
We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses...³

And if we're paying attention...
When we see God at work...
We're watching heaven break into our world.

And the best part is...
We don't just stand back and watch.
We get to participate in the Lord's work.

And when we do...
All of heaven rejoices around us.

Still...

**When I think about heaven and how close it is...
I can't help but want a clearer glimpse behind the veil.**

Sometimes God allows that.
In fact, there have been times when God pulled back the curtain...

- Like when He revealed heaven to the shepherds in the field...⁴
- Or when Jesus met with Moses and Elijah on the mountain...⁵
- Or when the heavens opened up for Stephen as he saw Jesus...⁶
- Or for Peter on the roof as he prayed...⁷

³ Hebrews 12:1

⁴ Luke 2:13-14

⁵ Matthew 17:1-3

⁶ Acts 7:55-60

⁷ Acts 10:9-11

- Or when Paul was caught up to heaven and heard things he couldn't put into words...⁸

And if you remember Kevin's story that I told the other week...

When Kevin's dad passed away...

His mom, who was blind, saw Jesus in that moment.

Kevin didn't see Jesus... but he felt the presence of God.

He said he felt pure joy in that moment.

And while these kinds of moments might not happen everyday...

[SLIDE 22] God is *still* breaking into our reality.

The question is...

Have we been seeing what's right in front of us?

Are we living as if heaven really is close?

Are we watching for how Jesus is working in our lives?

Will we feel heaven rejoicing as we participate with Jesus...

Because our present reality is this...

**The only thing that separates us from heaven...
is a veil.**

This is why scripture says we don't grieve like those without hope.

Our hope of heaven isn't just our future destination.

It's a present reality that's already near us.

Heaven isn't in a galaxy far far away.

It's right in front of us.

Maybe that's why Jesus said to His disciples...

⁸ 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

**“Blessed are your eyes because they see,
and your ears because they hear.”⁹**

May we have eyes that see...
And ears that hear...

That God is present with us now...
He is near...
And heaven really is closer than we think.

Let's Pray.

⁹ Matthew 13:16