

Heaven in the Real World

2 Corinthians 5:1

Our hearts remember Eden. Our spirits long for Heaven.

2 Corinthians 5:1 NLT

“For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.”

There are a lot of varying opinions on heaven. Out of all of the topics in Scripture today, there are two that are being preached less in churches than ever before. One is heaven and the other is hell. We don't like to talk about hell, and we *like* to talk about heaven, we just don't like the delivery vehicle to *get* there. There are over seven hundred references to heaven in the Scriptures, just below the more numerous references to money and finances. Seven hundred references, and yet it's hardly talked about in church sermons.

We're beginning this new series about heaven, and the theology of it. That word “theology” means *the study of, logic of, or thinking about* (Greek: *ology*) *God* (Greek: *Theos*) or, simply, *thinking about God*. So truly, if you're thinking about God, you're a *theologian*, or, you're giving attention to - meditating on - learning about - studying - God. At the end of the day, we're *all* theologians, those of us who already know Christ, and have stepped over the line.

When *anyone* wonders if there's more to life than this, they too are theologians - thinking about God. But, upon hearing the Gospel (Good news) of Jesus Christ, and responding to it by giving their hearts to Christ, and then learning about practical Christianity, they can still have thoughts that reach beyond what is called death, thinking, “*There's got to be more.*”

We've all heard or seen the clichéd images or stories of angels and heaven, and those begin to inform our vision and how we view heaven, but Truth is not contingent upon what we believe. Steven Curtis Chapman wrote a song called, “More to this Life” that said, “*...there's more to this life than living and dying; More than just trying to make it through the day; more to this life, more than these eyes alone can see; and there's more than this life alone can be.*”

It's exciting when we get glimpses that there is way more to this life. Lee Strobel made a film called, "The Case for Heaven" in which he said, *"The biggest driver for humanity is not happiness, wealth, success, or peace, but the fear of death. The end-game of our life is not the here-and-now - being content - or happy - having enough for our family - but as followers of Jesus - it is the joy of what is to come afterwards."*

Scripture says that *"Jesus...who for the joy that was set before Him..."* - not the life here on earth - the crucifixion - beating - betrayal and pain - accusations - *that's* not what drove him, and it wasn't the fear of his body dying that scared or motivated him. What drove him was understanding and knowing by experience that he was going to a place that superceded what we see here - he knew he was going *home* - that this planet was *not his home* - and it's *not our* home.

We were not designed and created for the world that we live in right now. That's why we just never quite feel "right" here. Even on our best day, we always know that something's a little bit off - like the funhouse at the fair, where everything's off-kilter - where there's always *something* that keeps you off-balance. The reason is that we are not designed or created for this world as we know it.

We were created and designed for Eden - an amazing place where animals lived in harmony, and where Adam and Eve occupied their time with the glory of God, and he gave them jobs and things to do together. Our hearts - our DNA - remember Eden, and there's a longing and a pulling of something better - but right now, we're in-between - caught between two worlds and promises - stuck in this place.

After the fall of mankind when sin entered into Eden and the world, suddenly everything was tainted - what once was beautiful and flourishing, then became like a frozen tundra - under the curse - like in C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia (a type and shadow of this world). Eden is a type and shadow of heaven (*type*: as in blood type - different people - but our blood type can be the same and compatible; *shadow*: this world is a shadow of what it was meant and created to be). That's why our hearts remember, and our spirits long for heaven.

But what's beautiful is, there is coming a renewal of all things. There will be a new heaven and a new earth. As we study this together, we'll start to adjust our mental filters beyond our normal dread of death and loss to what should really be driving our lives - which is what is yet to come - the joy of it - the life of it. Our eyes will be opened to the joy of the Lord, which is our strength, because our filter is being adjusted, where heaven is coming into view and informing life in the here and now. It's not the idea of becoming so heavenly-minded and no earthly good (which is a myth that needs to be busted), but we *do* want to get heaven on our minds.

When we think and live with heaven in mind, it permeates and affects everything in our lives - every decision - every choice - every relationship - the way we worship - the way we live - the way we work - the way we play. *Everything* is affected. Everything is impacted when you have heaven in view. The word "heaven" is mentioned specifically 692 times, plus other references to "the kingdom", totalling over seven hundred times in the New King James version of the Bible.

"Nothing is more often misdiagnosed than our homesickness for Heaven. We think that what we want is sex, drugs, alcohol, a new job, a raise, a doctorate, a spouse, a large-screen television, a new car, a cabin in the woods, a condo in Hawaii. What we really want is the Person we were made for, Jesus, and the place we were made for, Heaven. Nothing less can satisfy us." (Randy Alcorn, from his book *Heaven*).

We live in this replacement-therapy mentality, where there's a hole in our soul, and we have to fill it - to find things that promise the happiness and contentment that our soul longs for, but there's a God-shaped vacuum in every human being, and the only thing that can fill that hole is God, himself.

It is innate in us - inherent in us - that our hearts long for Eden and what once was, which is a type and shadow of heaven. So, we long for it - we remember it in our soul. C.S. Lewis said, *"In the truest sense, Christian pilgrims have the best of both worlds. We have joy whenever this world reminds us of the next, and we take solace whenever it does not."*

There will be new things to do in heaven. A great renewal of all things is coming. For most people, what's happening in our world is *not* reminding us of things to come. *"The power of having an understanding - a theology - of heaven is that it literally informs and affects the way we live in the here-and-now."* (Randy Alcorn, from his book *Heaven*).

This is practical. We all need a lift every day. There is something innate about the grind in which we live that slowly sucks the life out of us, but our mind is in another place, because we know there is a restoration - a renewal coming - and we know that we are going to be where we were *supposed* to be all along - in Eden reformed - heaven - a new heaven and a new earth - where we will be as we were created, meant, and designed to be. Our bodies will function like they are supposed to.

John 3:16 NKJV

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Matthew 6:10 NKJV

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven."

We can begin living eternal life this very second - We are already there. We will be learning how to pull that into the world in which we live.

Hebrews 12:1-3 The Message Bible (John Bennett's favorite translation)

"Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed - that exhilarating finish in and with God - he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God."

Jesus had a heavenly-informed response. Imagine playing a sports game without the fear of losing - of knowing we win - knowing that the game's already been won. The joy of having fun because the game is essentially over - and *we won*. It would be amazing if we had such a strong theology - such a great understanding of heaven, that everything we did in this life became fun - became enjoyable, because no matter how hard this season is that we're in, we *know* where we're going, and what's waiting for us. We see a picture of it in Scripture - not made up - we understand and are informed by the Word of God in our passion and in our hearts.

"Jesus lived the way he did in this world, for this world, because his hope was set beyond this world; that is the secret of his life." (from the book *All Things New*, by John Eldredge). That is the secret of *our* lives as well, because we understand what's coming - the renewal of all things - the day that he makes all things new - a new heaven and a new earth - untainted and unspoiled by sin.

In heaven, we won't need all the props and everything we have now to just to survive in this world, because we weren't *designed* for this world. May God open our eyes to see what's coming - that it's glorious - and it's everything and more than we could've thought. We can only imagine what it will be like when we walk by his side. But Scripture tells us that we *won't have to* imagine. We're going to see what God's Word says about this amazing place that is our destiny, and what those who have gone before us are enjoying right now. We can look through the fog of our grief to the glory that our loved ones are enjoying today, and be informed and inspired ourselves - to press on and to press through.

Prayer

Father, thank You for Truth. Lord, we know there's a glorious resurrection coming. We're not like the Sadducees, who did not believe in Heaven or a resurrection - without hope beyond the mess that we're in right now. Lord, open our hearts.

Open and empower our sanctified imaginations, that we'll begin to see what we haven't seen - to know what we haven't known - to get excited about what is to come - and it will enliven and inspire and motivate us right here and now on this planet, and in the lives that we're living here - because we've already won.

The game has already been played, and it's already won. We win - and we win again. So, thank You for the revival that is with us now, and for the resurrection that is coming. Lord Jesus, we give everything to You. ...Open our eyes! We love You. In Jesus' name. Amen