

HEAVEN IS A REAL PLACE

- A. Introduction: The Bible tells us that we are to be heavenly-minded. Col 3:1,2--Risen, then, with Christ, you must lift your thoughts above, where Christ now sits at the right hand of God. You must be heavenly-minded, not earthly minded. (Knox). We have begun a discussion of what it means to think about heaven.
1. Heaven is the place where God and His angels dwell and the place where Christians go when they die. Deut 26:15; I Kings 8:30; Matt 18:10; Matt 28:2; II Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21; etc.
 - a. Lack of information combined with misinformation about heaven has robbed Christians of what ought to be one of the greatest sources of encouragement for us. We are going to heaven!!
 - b. If you have an accurate picture from the Bible of what heaven is, an accurate picture of what is ahead for those who know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, you'll have no trouble fixing your thoughts on heaven.
 2. Because heaven is the home of God and His angels and is presently invisible to us, it seems wispy, ethereal, and unreal to us. But heaven is a place -- a real place.
 - a. We have a number of accounts in the Bible where the "veil" that separates the invisible from the visible was pulled back. Luke 2:9-15; II Kings 6:17; Matt 17:3
 - b. Heaven clearly has physical properties to it. Jesus is living there in His physical body, the same body He walked the earth in, the same body that was raised from the dead. His body could be seen and touched. Luke 24:13-15; 39-43
 - c. Elijah and Enoch are both living in heaven with physical bodies because both were taken to heaven without seeing physical death. II Kings 2:11; Gen 5:24; Heb 11:5
 3. The physical, material realm reveals some things about the invisible heaven. Consider these points.
 - a. Paul (who went to heaven before he died--II Cor 12:1-4) said that physical, material creation is based on a pattern of heavenly things. Rom 1:20
 - b. When God told Moses to build the Tabernacle God showed Moses a pattern that he was to use -- a Tabernacle in heaven. There is a temple in heaven after which the earthly tabernacle and temple were patterned. Ex 25:40; 26:30; 27:8; Num 8:4; Acts 7:44; Heb 8:5; Heb 9:23
 - c. The word paradise is used in the New Testament to mean the place where those who have died in Christ dwell (II Cor 12:4; Luke 24:43; Rev 2:7). The word paradise comes from a Persian word meaning "walled park" or "enclosed garden".
 1. In the Septuagint the Greek word PARADEISOS is used for the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:8; Ezek 28:13). The Greek word for paradise means a park, an Eden.
 2. The Garden of Eden gives us an idea of what heaven is like. According to Gen 2 it was a beautiful place of full provision. There were trees, plants, and animals. There were rivers, gold and minerals, and food. There was interaction with each other and with God. There was meaningful work. In the midst of the garden of Eden was the tree of life (v9).
 4. In this lesson we want to continue our discussion of the fact that heaven is a real place with real people who do real things.
- B. As with every subject in the Bible, we must understand it in terms of "the big picture". God made man for sonship, relationship, fellowship (Eph 1:4,5; etc., etc.). God's intention was and is to dwell with men.
1. The Bible begins and ends with God on earth with His people (Gen 3:8; Rev 21:3). Earth before sin occurred shows us the kind of home God wants for His family because He made it for His family. God made it a place to live, work, and enjoy. God walked in Eden with man before sin.
 - a. After Adam and Eve sinned they were driven out of Eden and away from the tree of life. Gen 3:24
 1. Eden or paradise was not destroyed, but man could no longer live there because of sin. Man was cut off from access to Eden and access to the tree of life. The way to the tree was guarded by Cherubim. God in heaven is enthroned between Cherubim. II Kings 19:15; Ps 80:1; etc.

2. Eden didn't cease to exist. It remained and remains a real place with physicality. But, at some point, it became invisible, imperceptible, to man. Rev 2:7 tells us that the tree of life is currently in paradise or heaven -- the place that is not now visible to men.
- b. Invisible doesn't mean nor real. It just means you can't see it. Eden (paradise, heaven) is only invisible to us because of sin.
 1. Matt 4:17--Jesus began His public ministry with the good news that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, has arrived (Phillips), is upon you (NEB).
 2. Jesus came to earth to open the way to heaven, to Eden, to paradise, by dying on the Cross for us to pay for and removed our sin.
2. Jesus said that when He left this earth He was going to a place called heaven to prepare or make ready a home for us (John 14:1-3). Place in the Greek is TOPOS. It means a region, a locality, a location. Place in the dictionary means a location in space.
 - a. Jesus knew the kingdom of heaven was a real place. He came from heaven. John 3:13;31
 1. Jesus said that people sit, eat, and drink in the kingdom of heaven. He said people laugh and leap for joy in heaven. Matt 8:11; Luke 6:20-23; Luke 22:30
 2. There are feasts in heaven. Luke 14:15--"Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" was said in the contest of an actual feast with eating and drinking (v12-14).
 - b. Do people eat in heaven? Yes they do. How do we know that (besides what Jesus said)?
 1. Eating is not sinful. Eating preceded sin (Gen 2:16). It is possible to eat and drink and bring glory to God while you are doing it (I Cor 10:31).
 2. Eating is more than a physical function. Eating is relational. Feasts (eating and drinking) are relational. We could do a whole lesson on this, but as we study the Old Testament, we see that God called His people to feast with Him and with each other. Lev 23; Deut 14:22-26; etc.
 3. The Bible uses words which describe eating, meals, and food over 1,000 time. The English word feast is used another 187 times.
 4. What about I Cor 6:13? Paul isn't saying we won't have stomachs in heaven. He is saying that our physical body will die so we shouldn't let its desires dictate to us.
3. Heaven is referred to in scripture as a garden (Luke 23:43; II Cor 12:4; Rev 2:7), a city (Heb 11:10; 12:22; 13:14), and a kingdom (Matt 4:17). All of those terms denote places that are familiar to us, suggesting that heaven is a real place with qualities and attributes we would recognize.
 - a. What image come to mind when you think of a city? Buildings, streets, homes, walls, goods and services, events, culture, music, art. If that is not part of life in heaven then why would the Holy Spirit use the term "city" in connection with heaven?
 - b. The word paradise (garden, park) is used for heaven. What images come to mind when you think of a garden? Trees, flowers, vegetation, animals, water, rocks, If that is not part of life in heaven why did the Holy Spirit use the term "garden" for heaven?
 - c. The Book of Revelation tells us that, in connection with the return of Jesus to this earth, the heavenly city, God's dwelling (tabernacle), will come to earth. Rev 21:2,10
 1. We will talk in more detail about the city in an upcoming lesson, but consider these points.
 2. The city has walls and gates which means an inside and an outside or dimensions (v12). The city is measurable, meaning it exists in time and space (v15). The city has things in it made of precious stones, the same kind of stones that can be found on earth (v18-21).
4. Heaven is a real place with real people who do real things. Earth is patterned after heavenly realities. Based on that fact and based on other things the Bible tells us, we know that people in heaven interact with each other in loving relationships. We know that they engage in meaningful and satisfying work and activities. We know that they enjoy life to the fullest as they interact with the Lord. (Lots more to say about that in upcoming lessons.)

C. We have a lot of erroneous ideas about heaven which undermine its reality to us. We want to spend the rest

of the lesson considering a few such ideas: We won't be ourselves in heaven -- no more male and female. We won't know each other in heaven. We won't remember our past lives and relationships once we get to heaven. Consider these points.

1. Death relocates people from earth to either heaven or hell. It doesn't turn them into someone else.
 - a. People say Gal 3:28 is proof that we will not be ourselves in heaven. "Neither male nor female" does not mean we lose our gender. It refers to the equality of men and women in Christ.
 - b. Jesus was still a man, still recognizable, after His death and resurrection (Luke 24:39). When Jesus was raised from the dead he picked up right where He left off with memories and relationships. He went to see Peter (Luke 24:34; I Cor 15:5). Mary Magdalene recognized Him, and He remembered her and His disciples (John 20:15-18).
 - c. In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus gave an account of two men who died about the same time -- Lazarus the beggar and the rich men. Even though they were separated from their physical bodies they recognized each other. That means they were still themselves, still looked like themselves, and they still had memories of each other and their life on earth.
 1. The rich man remembered his father and brothers and was concerned about their spiritual condition. v27-31
 2. v25--The rich man in hell was unhappy about his situation. Abraham told him to remember that he is here because of things he did while he was on earth. (Note, Jesus told this story in conversation with the Pharisees about covetousness -- one of their "issues").
 - d. I Thess 4:13-18--Paul was addressing concerns the Thessalonians had regarding loved one who died before the return of Jesus to this earth.
 1. Paul assured the Thessalonians that Jesus would bring those people with Him at His return.
 2. If it's not the same people, still recognizable, how could that information be a source of comfort to the Thessalonians?
 - e. Scripture is clear that there is coming a day of giving account for things we did on earth. (II Cor 5:10; Matt 12:36; etc.) You can't give an account of what you don't remember.
 1. YOU go to heaven with YOUR memories and history. YOU remember YOUR life on earth.
 2. Our ultimate destiny is: WE (you and I) will be transformed, WE (you and I) will be fully conformed to the image of Christ. WE (you and I) shall be like Him. Rom 8:29; I John 3:2
2. We get a lot of information about heaven from John, another apostle who visited heaven (Rev 4:1) and wrote about what he saw.
 - a. Rev 6:9-11--John saw people in heaven who had been martyred, killed, for their faith in Christ.
 1. Souls doesn't mean only a nebulous part of them is in heaven. It means "them".
 2. Souls is PSUCHE in the Greek which is used elsewhere to mean a whole person, a physical being, as opposed to a disembodied spirit. Rev 12:11--Lives is the word PSUCHE.
 - b. Notice, these people remember that they were killed for their faith. They have a concern for what is going on on the earth. They have a desire to see righteousness prevail.
 1. There is continuity of identity. The same people who were killed on earth are in heaven remembering their life and history. They can talk and raise their voices in an expression of emotions.
 2. They refer to those on earth who are going to die as they died as fellow servants and brethren. There is a connection between those in heaven and those on earth. Eph 3:15
3. Luke 9:28-31--When Moses and Elijah were visible with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration they were discussing the coming crucifixion of Jesus in Jerusalem.
 - a. They were aware of and observers of the final events leading up to mankind's redemption.
 1. That sounds like Heb 12:1,2 where Christians are told to live their lives with the awareness that the Old Testament men and women mentioned in the preceding chapter (11) watch us.
 2. The use of the word race would have brought to mind Greek athletic competitions where crowds packed stadiums and watched the races in progress.

- b. God's plan and God's work involves much more than what is going on now in the world and it involves many more people than just we who are living on earth now.
 - 1. God gave His first promise of redemption from sin to Adam and Eve in Gen 3:15. We could do a study from Genesis to Malachi and trace out the promise of God through the words of the prophets concerning the coming redemption of the human race and all of God's creation.
 - 2. The prophets knew salvation was coming although they didn't know fully how or when. It wouldn't happen in their life times, they were told, but they still longed to know. I Pet 1:10-12
 - 3. Heb 11:13--These men of faith I have mentioned died without ever receiving all that God had promised them; but they saw it all awaiting them on ahead and were glad...(Living Bible)
 - c. Moses and Elijah who appeared with Jesus on the mountain that day were part of this group.
 - 1. Moses was the one who recorded Gen 3:15. God used Moses to write about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the first covenant (Gen 12:1-3; etc.). He was given the revelation that the Lord would raise up Jesus, a prophet greater than him. Deut 18:15,18,19
 - 2. Malachi 4:5 said that the Messiah would be preceded by the coming of Elijah. John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand (Matt 11:14; Mark 9:11; Luke 1:17).
 - 3. Now, here they are, Moses and Elijah (in heaven which suddenly became visible to Peter, James, and John) talking with Jesus about the upcoming events in Jerusalem -- the fulfillment of the words of the prophets. They have not lost interest. They have not lost information.
 - d. God wants His people involved in and excited about His unfolding plan of redemption whether they are on earth or in heaven.
4. Consider some other examples of people in heaven who know what is happening on earth.
- a. Luke 15:7,10--There is joy in heaven when a sinner repents. Notice, the rejoicing is done not BY the angels, but in the presence of angels. By who? By God and the people in heaven .
 - b. Angels (whose home is heaven) know what is happening on the earth. Why not men? Matt 2:2; Mark 16:5; Luke 2:13; I Cor 4:9; I Cor 11:10; Eph 3:10; I Tim 3:16; I Tim 5:21; I Pet 1:12; etc.
 - c. Rev 18:20--An angel tells people in heaven to rejoice over events taking place on the earth just prior to the return of the Lord to this earth.
 - d. Rev 19:1-5--People in heaven are praising God for events happening on the earth when He judges the antichrist system.
 - e. Rev 19:11-14--At the Second Coming Jesus comes out of heaven with armies of His people (Jude 14,15). It makes no sense that those saints (people) coming out of heaven have no idea what is happening or why.
- D. Conclusion: The invisible heaven is not wispy and ethereal. In each of the examples we have considered the people in heaven are not ghostly and transparent. They don't float around. They stand, they walk, they talk, they remember -- in a realm that, even though it is invisible to us now, has a physicality, a reality, to it.

More next week!!