

We're Not Home Yet

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If you have your Bible with you, would you turn to the very back of it? We are going to read from the next to the last chapter of the Bible, Revelation 21.

I would just like to read the first seven verses.

The apostle John said:

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. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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. 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."

Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."

And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son."¹

May God bless this portion of his Word to our hearts.

Let us pray.

Father, now as we turn our thoughts to our eternal home, we ask for your Holy Spirit to apply these truths to us, to write them deep upon our hearts. Lord, as we are reminded of what your Word says, may it bring us comfort and encouragement and joy? May it

¹ Revelation 21:1-7.

inspire us to faithful service, to zealous, faithful service? May you be glorified this day from your holy Word? We ask it in Christ's name. Amen.

Our modern society has provided us, as you know, with wonderful technological marvels and with scientific advancements that have made our lives much improved in many ways. But those advancements have brought with them some negative side effects. Not the least of them is that we are tempted to become preoccupied with the kaleidoscope of daily events around the globe. We are bombarded with information about this world through newspapers, magazines, billboards, radio, the internet and through nonstop news channels even in public places.

And one effect of this information overload is that even Christians can tend to focus too much on this world and not enough on the world to come. It seems to be only when we lose a brother or a grandparent or a mother or a dear friend that we devote time to thinking seriously about the next world.

Joseph Stowell of Moody Bible Institute suggests that things were different for first century Christians. It is precisely because their hearts were focused on heaven, rooted in eternity that the early church effectively prompted a redemptive revolution so powerful that it formed and framed the entire western culture for 19 centuries. Because they were keenly aware that heaven was their home, Christians were willing to suffer, to share and love without thought of return. They were faithful to God without earthly reward, unconcerned with possessions, willing to die, to be brutally martyred and able to express without intimidation a confidence and courage that the threats of a fleeting, already condemned world could not quell.

It has been several years since we have devoted a message to considering our eternal home and with the recent loss of two members of long standing, Lucille and Blanche and Carl's brother, Angela's grandfather and with other members, parents, grandparents nearing the end of their journeys I think it would be helpful to simply remind ourselves of what life will be like for the believer after that final breath here on earth. Not because we don't know these things, but because we don't think of them often enough.

Our culture's preoccupation with the here and now and our general ignoring of life to come runs counter not just to our Christian heritage, but to a desire for and a belief in immortality that seems to pervade all of world history.

You know, of course, that the ancient Egyptians were quite successful in developing techniques to preserve the body after death. But we sometimes forget that it was because they believed that body would be needed in the afterlife.

Norsemen would provide their fallen hero with both a horse and armor for his triumphant ride, notes theologian Loraine Boettner.

And in Greenland a deceased Inuit child was provided with a dog to act as his guide.

Some native Americans would place in the grave of the departed warrior his bow, his arrows and sometimes his pony for his use in the hunting grounds to come.

Boettner notes in his book *Immortality* that the belief in life after death seems to be instinctive for mankind.

“There never has been a tribe discovered that did not have a belief in a god or gods,” he writes. “a moral sense of right and wrong and a belief in the future life or immortality of the soul.”

C S Lewis, you may remember, writes about our life long nostalgia, as he calls it, our longing to be reunited with something in the universe from which we now feel cut off, to be on the inside of some door which we have always seen from the outside. He says, “It is no mere neurotic fancy, but the truest index of our real situation, at last to be summoned inside would be both glory and honor and also the healing of that old ache.”

Of course, even knowledge that seems to be innate or intuitive may still be dead wrong. Were it not for God’s special revelation we would have no idea what the afterlife was like, nor any certainty of its existence at all.

For the believer, after God’s sovereign election, his determination to graciously set his love upon a sinner who deserves hell, after God’s effectual call, calling us, the sinners, out of darkness into light, after our regeneration when he opens our eyes and breathes life into us, after our repentance and our justification when we are declared righteous because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, after the process of sanctification by which we are enabled as we go through life more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. Eventually the time arrives, sometimes very suddenly, sometimes after a long preparation period, for our glorification.

“Whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.”² Romans 8:30.

So this morning let’s think about our glorification, the entrance of the believer into that blessed estate that the Scripture calls heaven or paradise. I would like us to consider the subject by attempting to answer some questions that are commonly asked about it.

First of all and perhaps most obviously, is heaven an actual place? Is heaven real?

Well, this question wouldn’t even have to be asked in a Christian church if not for the modern Sadducees who present eloquent little homilies every Sunday that effectively chip away at the simple faith of the believer.

I have mentioned before a devotional on heaven that was printed in the local newspaper in Orchard Park, New York during my first pastorate when I pastored there south of Buffalo.

² Romans 8:30.

In his article, one of the Presbyterian ministers in town quoted the old camp song, “No, you can’t get to heaven on roller skates because you roll right past those pearly gates.” And the minister wrote, “The silly song is silly not because it suggest novel forms of transportation, but because it pictures heaven as a place. As long as we think of heaven as a spatial location to which we arrive, shoe leather, a railroad train or a spaceship are all possible methods of travel. Pure levitation might work, too, except that heaven is not a place. Neither is it only by and by. Heaven is a loving relationship now with God and with others. If it works now, then you are certain that these relationships have a place in eternity. Heaven is any experience that keeps us open, caring, sharing, forgiving, reconciled with God and with other people. And, you guessed it. Hell is broken relationships with God and people that issue in apathy, hate, war, coldness, rejection.”

Well, all I can say is it is a pity that Jesus didn’t have the benefits of this minister’s insights. You see, Jesus had the outmoded idea that heaven was a real place. He said, “In my Father’s house are many dwelling places, many abodes.” μονη (mon-ay’) is the word he uses from a word meaning to abide.

“If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 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,”³ John 14.

Jesus, your problem is that you are still thinking of heaven as a spatial location to which we arrive. Heaven is not a place. Heaven is loving relationships.

Well, I don’t know about you, but I am going to side with my Creator on this issue. Yes, heaven is a real place.

Secondly, where, then, is it located? Well, the Scriptures describe it as above us. Jesus ascended into it. Angels descend from it. Although it is above us, it is quite probably not in the same sphere of space and time in which we now dwell. This is suggested by the fact that there were times in history the Scriptures tell us that God removed the veil and permitted humans to see the angelic world that was evidentially there all along.

You will remember that Benhadad the Syrian king sent a great host with horses and chariots to surround the prophet Elisha. Elisha’s servant was terrified, but the prophet encourages him, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.”⁴

Elisha prayed that the Lord would open his servant’s eyes. The Lord did so and the servant saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha, 2 Kings six.

³ John 14:2-3.

⁴ 2 Kings 6:16.

The angelic host was there, but the angels were not visible because they were evidently in a different sphere and could not be seen until the Lord opened the eyes of Elisha's servant.

Consider the birth of Christ. An angel announces Christ's birth to the shepherds and suddenly, we read, "there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."⁵

The angels were evidently already there, but the shepherds were not able to see them until the appointed time when the Lord permitted them to peer into a sphere that they could not normally perceive.

Johnny Erickson Tada wrote, "Heaven is close, perhaps closer than we imagined. It is a little like saying to an unborn infant in his mother's womb, 'Do you realize that you are about to be born into a great big world full of mountains and rivers and a sun and a moon? In fact, you exist in that wonderful world right now.'

"Wait a minute, the unborn baby might say. No way. My world is the one surrounding me. It is soft and warm and dark. You will never convince me that just outside this uterus exists this place of rivers and mountains and a sun and a moon and whatever that stuff is."

She continues, "Dear baby. There he is safe in his little world, ignorant to the fact that a more glorious world is enclosing and encasing his," she writes. "A world for which he is being fashioned. Only when he is birthed into it will he comprehend that all along his warm dark world was within it. This other place of wonderful beauty was present all the time, only inches away."

The biblical evidence is that heaven is quite real and it is, in fact, a place where believers will soon be although it is evidently not in the sphere in which we presently dwell and pleasantly dwell and we cannot now perceive it any more than an infant in the womb can perceive all that awaits him on the other side.

Who is there in heaven? Well, of course, God the Father in some manifestation of his person. It will be a glorious sight. God the Father will be there in some manifestation of his person, some life or something that will clearly indicate his presence.

"The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men,"⁶ Psalm 33:13.

Yet, of course, God the Father is not limited to heaven.

"But who is able to build Him a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him?"⁷ 2 Chronicles 2:6.

⁵ Luke 2:13-14.

⁶ Psalm 33:13.

The Holy Spirit of God will be there, the third person of the trinity.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.⁸

Psalm 139.

The Lord Jesus is, of course, there.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”⁹

Cherubim and seraphim are there. What are they? Well, the seraphim are mentioned only in Isaiah six. The word means burning ones.

“Above [the throne] stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.”¹⁰

The cherubim described by Ezekiel in his first chapter seem to be similar to these seraphim. They are exalted creatures, perhaps, representative of all created beings who give praise to God without ceasing.

Angels are in heaven, of course.

“Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones,”¹¹ Jesus said, “for... in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven,”¹² Matthew 18:10.

“But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels,”¹³ Hebrews 12:22.

An innumerable company of angels is there.

When the apostle John was taken up by the Spirit into heaven he also saw 24 elders around the throne, apparently representing the Old Testament and New Testament believers. And, of course, heaven is occupied, as you know, by all believers who have left this earth. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. All believers who have left his earth.

⁷ 2 Chronicles 2:6.

⁸ Psalm 139:7-8.

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:16.

¹⁰ Isaiah 6:2.

¹¹ Matthew 18:10.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Hebrews 12:22.

“Behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!’”¹⁴ Revelation seven.

The question is often asked. Will we recognize our loved ones in heaven? The Old Testament saints who died are described as being gathered unto their people or their fathers which, of course, suggests recognition, Genesis 15:15 and 35:29.

Theologian Boettner puts it this way. “The most distinctive feature about home is that it is where our loved ones are.”

In Jesus’ story of the rich man and Lazarus, Lazarus was recognized by the rich man. And there is every reason to think that we will recognize one another in glory with a knowledge, perhaps, which here we would call innate or intuitive. I think the Scriptures suggest that in that remember when the apostles were with the Lord Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, that is Peter, James and John, and it says, the Scripture says they saw Moses and Elijah talking with Jesus. They evidently recognized Moses and Elijah though, of course, they had never seen them. And Moses and Elijah had, in fact, not been yet clothed with their ultimate resurrection bodies.

Johnny Erickson Tada writes, “You will recognize the ones you love. On earth you only half recognize them, but in heaven you will discover the rich wonderful things about the true identity of your husband, your wife, your daughter, son, brother, sister or special friends, things that were only hinted at on earth. What is more you will know them like you never knew them on earth. You will exclaim to your loved one, ‘Wow, so this is what I loved in you for so long,’ for you will see him or her as God intended all along.”

Somewhere along the line our pop culture got the idea that Christians believe and teach that when we die we become angels. We are issued a harp and a set of wings, maybe like Clarence Oddbody we have to do something to earn our wings. And until we do we are second class angels. But the fact is, you won’t stop being human in heaven. Our Lord Jesus knows what it is like to be human and all the things that make this life rich and meaningful will be present there, only to a much heightened degree.

Joe Stowell writes, “Heaven, in a very real sense is a continuation of all that was begun on this side, a continuation of the same soul that is me,” he says, “in a body reengineered for eternity.”

What will heaven be like? Well, it will be a place of incredible beauty. We know that, a place of incredible beauty.

There is, as you know, great beauty, stunning beauty on this earth even in this world tainted by sin. Much of it we only know through photographs and films, south Pacific

¹⁴ Revelation 7:9-10.

islands, the Swiss Alps, the Mediterranean Sea, tropical jungles, glacier lakes, the beauty of autumn colors, the beauty of flowers, the beauty of sunsets.

As you know, we return to... some of you know we returned on Tuesday from a trip to the Pacific Northwest to visit our son and his family. One afternoon we drove to Mount Ranier National Park and as you enter the park, as we entered this particular day it was raining as it pretty much always does up there and as we entered the park it started to get colder and colder. We went in about four miles and there was snow falling and snow on the ground about, probably six or eight inches at that point just a few miles into the park. And the snow was flocked on these beautiful fir trees and spruce trees. It was just a gorgeous sight, probably one of the most beautiful things that earth shows us is this kind of snow flocked on beautiful evergreen trees and mountains behind snow capped mountains. It was truly gorgeous.

But this world is only a foretaste of the beauty that God has in store for his children.

Listen to the apostle John as he tries to describe the celestial city.

He says her light was like a precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. The city, he says, was pure gold like clear glass, Revelation 21:18.

Heaven is going to be a place of incredible beauty, indescribable beauty. Heaven will be a place of no sorrow, no pain, no death.

“God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall be no more death nor sorrow nor crying and there shall be no more pain for the former things are passed away,” Revelation 21:4.

Think about that. No more sorrow. No more crying. No more heart wrenching arguments. No more loneliness. No more abused children, broken hearts, divorce, betrayal. No more pain. No more migraines. No more arthritis. No more crutches, canes and wheel chairs. No more emphysema. No more heart attacks, cancer, strokes. There shall be no more pain. There shall be no more death, no more policemen knocking at a parent’s door at one in the morning. No more children at the bedside as their mother’s life ebbs away. No more war. No more refugees. No more bombings. No more starvation. No more terrorism. No more murder.

“The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death,”¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:26.

Heaven will be a place of fulness of joy.

“In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore,” Psalm 16:11.¹⁶

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:26.

¹⁶ Psalm 16:11.

But now can heaven be a place of unmitigated joy if some that we dearly love here on earth are not only not there, but enduring God's wrath in hell?

God does not tell us how this can be so. But he tells us that it will be so, because heaven has no sorrow but only joy. We must assume that our love for God and our appreciation of his justice, his goodness, his holiness, our understanding of his providence will be such that we will cry amen to all his doings.

Nineteenth century theologian R L Dabney has written, "To love is to be happy. Our terrestrial objects of affection have taught us that if the heart could always be exercising its affection towards some worthy object this would constitute happiness. But the object being earthly, we are constantly liable to be separated from it by distance or to have it torn from us by death and our affection becomes our torment. Or else being imperfect, it may wound us by infidelity or injustice. Or else fleshly wants drive us from it to labor. But now let us suppose that the soul endowed with an object of love wholly worthy and suitable is never separated by distance nor torn away by death, incapable of infidelity or unkindness. Is it not plain that in the possession and love of this object there would be perpetual blessedness? Such an object is God and such is the blessedness of heaven springing from the perpetual indulgence of a love that never cloys, that is never interrupted and never wounded and that expresses its happiness in untiring praises."

What will we do in heaven?

Revelation 22:3.

"And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him."¹⁷

His servants shall serve him. We will be serving the Lord in some way, in some capacity. We will have interesting, meaningful activity just as Adam and Eve had in the Garden of Eden before the fall. God designed our minds and our bodies and our desire has been placed within us. A desire has been placed within us for meaningful activity.

As Sproul says, "We humans can't do nothing."

We will be reigning with God.

"There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever,"¹⁸ Revelation 22:5.

You will remember in the parable of the talents we read that the king said to his servant, "Thou hast been faithful over a few things,"¹⁹ or the mast said to his servant, "You have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things."²⁰

¹⁷ Revelation 22:3.

¹⁸ Revelation 22:5.

¹⁹ Matthew 25:21, 23.

Other creatures, other worlds. I don't know if you notice, but it is a big universe.

We know that our position in God's kingdom will be determined by our faithfulness here.

“And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work.”²¹

I believe it is quite likely that those who will be most honored there will be people who were relatively unknown here, men and women and young people who labored faithfully in relative obscurity like that old missionary couple you may have heard me speak of who arrived at their home port after years of difficult labor. They arrived to find a great crowd and a band and photographers and flowers. But they were not for them. They were for a returning ambassador and his wife who were on the same ship.

The ambassador spoke of serving his government. And as flash bulbs went off the missionary couple walked unnoticed through the crowd. With hot tears streaming down her face the wife wondered aloud to her husband, “Why is it that we have given our whole lives to Christ and yet there is no one here to honor us and welcome us home?”

And her husband put his arm around her and reminded her, “Honey, we are not home yet.”

And God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty,”²² 1 Corinthians one.

But as some Christians receive more honor than others, won't that breed disappointment and dissatisfaction in heaven? If some Christians receive more honor than others, won't that breed disappointment and dissatisfaction?

Well, not in a place where there is no pride or envy or selfishness. Furthermore it has been said well, “Like vessels of various sizes cast in a sea, some receive more water and some less, yet all shall be full, none shall want. Even so in heaven some will receive more glory, some less, but all without exception shall be full of glory.”

So what will we do in heaven? We will serve the Lord. We will reign with him and, of course, we will worship him.

The apostle John wrote:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice:

²⁰ Matthew 25:23.

²¹ Revelation 22:12.

²² 1 Corinthians 1:27.

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"²³

We are going to be worshipping the Lord, glorifying him with the glory that is due unto his name.

What will our resurrection bodies be like?

1 Corinthians 15 says our bodies are sown, that is planted in corruption, but raised in incorruption. They are planted in dishonor. They are raised in glory. They are planted in weakness. They are raised in power. They are planted a natural body, but they are raised a spiritual body. They will be incorruptible, glorious, powerful and spiritual, that is, under the control of the Holy Spirit, incorruptible, glorious, powerful, spiritual, that is, under the control of the Holy Spirit without either evil inclinations or carnal appetites.

I suspect they will be something like Jesus' resurrected body. He was our predecessor in the resurrection. He is the first fruits of the harvest.

But the question may arise: Why does God bother to raise up our bodies at all? Why not just allow us to continue as some sort of a spiritual being unencumbered with a physical body as the angels and unless and until the angels must appear to us and take on some sort of form?

Now along the same lines, why does Revelation 21 speak of God bringing heaven down to earth?

John says, "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."²⁴

There was a new heaven and a new earth. And then he describes this city. Why? Why heaven on earth? Why raise up these bodies that have already decayed and for most of us, no doubt, turned into dust? Why raise them up again?

I think it is so that Satan is not in the end successful at disrupting God's original design. God had a plan for us. He created us. He put us in a paradox and we had physical bodies. And Satan is not going to get the victory, not even there. He is going to raise our bodies again. And God had a plan that we would dwell in paradise on this planet. And so he is going to create a new heavens and a new earth. And we are going to live here you might say in this recreated sphere.

This planet was fashioned to be man's heritage and a part of it, at least, was adorned with the beauties of a paradise. Satan sought to mar the divine plan by the seducing of our first parents. For long ages he has seemed to triumph and he has filled his usurped dominion with crime and with misery. But his insolent invasion is not to be destined to obstruct the

²³ Revelation 5:11-12.

²⁴ Revelation 21:1.

almighty's beneficent design. The intrusion will be in vain. God's purpose shall be executed.

R L Dabney.

How does it benefit us to think about heaven? Well, first of all it encourages us to be faithful.

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life,”²⁵ Revelation 2:10.

This was the impetus behind Jim Elliott and his fellow missionaries who were killed by Ecuadorian villagers, the very villagers they were trying to reach in the middle of our last century. The loss of these young men was viewed as a great waste and a great tragedy and, no doubt, many thought they were on a fool's errand to attempt to reach a savage tribe with the gospel. But Jim Elliott was right when he wrote in his journal, “He is no fool who loses what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose. He is no fool who loses what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.”

How does it benefit us to think about heaven? It gives us strength in times of suffering.

Paul said, “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,”²⁶ Romans 8:18.

“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”²⁷

It gives us strength in times of suffering. It brings us great comfort when we lose a loved one, when we know that he or she was redeemed.

Boettner illustrates it.

“Suppose your dear relative or friend were to be given an all expense paid trip around the world. It would be temporary separation, but you would be thrilled for your friend's good fortune and you would look forward to hearing all about it after the trip was over. The experience of death is somewhat like that, the breaking of personal ties, temporary separation and then permanent reunion in that better land.”

And then it gives us courage when facing death ourselves. Thinking about heaven, meditating upon heaven gives us courage when we face death ourselves.

The non Christians in the early days of the Church were amazed at the way Christians faced death and we bring dishonor to our Savior if we harbor to great a fear of it.

²⁵ Revelation 2:10.

²⁶ Romans 8:18.

²⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:17.

John Calvin said, "It is monstrous that multitudes who boast themselves to be Christians are filled with such a dread of death that they tremble whenever it is mentioned as if it were the greatest calamity that could befall them."

Well, one remedy for such inordinate fear is meditation on the glories of heaven.

Isaac Watts puts it well in one of his many hymns that are seldom sung today.

There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign;
Eternal day excludes the night,
And pleasures banish pain.

There everlasting spring abides,
And never withering flow'rs;
Death, like a narrow sea, divides
This heav'nly land from ours.

Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood,
Stand dressed in living green,
So to the Jews old Canaan stood,
While Jordan rolled between.

But timorous mortals start and shrink,
To cross this narrow sea,
And linger shivering on the bank
In fear to launch away.

Oh, could we make our doubts remove,
Those gloomy doubts that rise,
And see the Canaan that we love,
With unobscured eyes.

Could we but climb where Moses stood,
And view the landscape o'er,
Not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
Should fright us from the shore.

Christian, when you have a clear view of heaven you need have no fear of death. The greatest calamity that can befall you is not death. It is sin which brings us to the question: What are the best things about heaven?

Well, for one thing, we will be completely without temptation and completely without sin. Think about that. We will no longer be tempted to lie to escape punishment, to blow up when we are angry, to worry about the future, to speak harshly to a family member, to hold a grudge against another, to take God's holy name in vain, to be proud of our

attainments. Imagine doing something kind without being tempted to self congratulations. Imagine seeing others exalted without being tempted to envy, being more concerned for the glory of God and the good of others than you are for your own comfort, pleasure or reputation. Imagine being absolutely, finally, completely, fully free from every sin that so easily besets you here. Can you imagine?

Surely this will be one of the best things about heaven. But better still and best of all, our Lord Jesus will be there and we will be with him. Amen?

The bride eyes not her garment,
But her dear bridegroom's face;
I will not gaze at glory,
But on my King of grace:
Not at the crown He giveth,
But on His pierced hand:
The Lamb is all the glory Of Immanuel's land.

A closing word to unbelievers.

There is one more important question about heaven that we haven't answered yet. And that is: How do you get there?

In Mount Ranier National Park there is a point called paradise. You know, there is an inn there and they serve meals at certain times of the year and you can lodge there and it is like the highest point, I think in the park. And it is the base from which people then climb the mountain.

It is the highest point you can get to, I meant, by car and, therefore, serves as the base for those who then want to climb the mountain.

On the road that leads to the park entrance there is a Baptist church and it is called Faith, Faith Baptist. And they have written in bold letters on their church building, "To get to paradise you must come by faith."

And they are quite right. Jesus said, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."²⁸

He has the keys. To get to paradise you must come by faith. Repenting of your sins and laying hold upon him.

No, you can't get to heaven on roller skates, but, ironically, you must come as a little child, humbly, meekly. And the way to get to heaven is on your knees.

God, I have sinned against you. I have done it and I feel it and I am it. I am a sinner by birth and by practice. Forgive me and save me. I believe that Jesus lived that sinless life

²⁸ Revelation 1:18.

and died on the cross. I believe that he rose again from the dead, that he is coming again one day. I want him as my Savior.

You come to God that way. You pray that prayer and mean that in your heart. God promises you everlasting life. All those sins you have committed he will lay them upon his own dear Son and all Christ's righteousness he will place on your account so when he sees you now he sees you not as a sinner, but as a sinner saved by grace, as one clothed in Christ's righteous white robe. You can come to him today. Now is the accepted time. Today is the day of salvation.

Finally, a word to believers here. Soon and very soon for some of us we will be ushered in to Christ's presence.

Let me ask you to do something I rarely ask you to do. Let me ask you to close your eyes for a moment, a few moments. I know it is fearful, but just humor me here and close your eyes and imagine with me that you are there right now, that you are in glory. Think about this. Everything you once thought so urgent, so important, your business affairs, all your financial matters, none of those things are going to matter to you five seconds after you are in glory.

Let me suggest some things that you may be wishing in that hour. You may wish that you could back even a tenth of the time that you wasted on things that didn't really matter. You may wish that you had spent more time praying with and for your family. You may wish that you had invested more time building into the lives of your children, your grandchildren, your nieces, your nephews. You may wish that you had viewed your job not as something to pay your bills and get you to the weekend, but as a calling, as a ministry in which God placed you. You may wish that you had invested more of the money God gave you into advancing his kingdom on earth. You may wish that you had realized that what you called your house and your land is actually God's. You were just a caretaker of it. You may wish you had complained less and praised more, that you had served Christ more faithfully, more zealously with the gifts that he gave you, that you had made the gospel clear to the people you rubbed shoulders with every week on earth. You may wish, in short, that you had laid up treasure in heaven instead of on earth.

Now if you would please open your eyes.

God has given you more time. He has not called you home yet. But the sands of time are sinking. They are sinking in the hourglass. And we will soon stand before the Lord. And may we live in service to Christ and to his sheep so that we will hear our Good Shepherd say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant... enter thou into the joy of thy lord."²⁹

Let's pray.

Father, we acknowledge that we don't think enough about the next world. We are too much involved in this one. This world is too much with us. Lord, forgive us for this. Help

²⁹ Matthew 25:21, 23.

us to set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For we are death and our life is hid with Christ in God. Help us to view ourselves as citizens of heaven. We are just passing through this Vanity Fair. Please, Lord, speak to hearts and, Lord, if there is anyone here still dead in sins we pray that you would graciously draw that soul to saving faith even as you graciously drew many of us. Lord, we pray that your Word might accomplish eternal things in hearts. And we ask it in Christ's name. Amen.