

Heaven—Is Your Heart There?

Proverbs 15:24; Hebrews 11:24-26

July 16, 2006

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Why did God create heaven? Very simply, in order to glorify Himself: to glorify His mercy and grace. For any who enter into the everlasting delight and rest of heaven do not do so by their own merits, but by the riches of God's free grace in Christ Jesus.

If I were to ask, How many of you want to go to heaven when you die? I dare say that all would raise their voices and hands in unison. But do you only want to go to heaven because you do not want to go to hell? Heaven is the particular habitation of God—the very throne of God. Heaven is a place where holiness, love, peace, knowledge, life, and joy reign. Dear ones, heaven is only your home if Christ is your city of refuge to whom you have fled to find safety from the all-consuming vengeance of a holy God. If you believe you can live the way you want to live now and yet find entrance into the unspeakable glories of heaven at your death, you are grossly deceived. Why would one who has despised the things of God upon earth, who has turned his back upon the invitations of Christ for life and forgiveness, who has loved and embraced his sin and pleasure rather than Christ, and who has merely gone through the motions of worship here on earth, want to spend all eternity in a place of holiness where the chief joy and delight of all the saints in heaven will be the very God he has despised, ignored, and neglected?

Dear ones, if you want to go to heaven, shouldn't your life here upon earth reflect that desire? If your citizenship is in heaven (as Paul says is the case of all Christians in Philippians 3:20), shouldn't your heart ache to be in your homeland? Shouldn't your speech indicate to the people of this world that you are presently resident aliens in a foreign land? For this was the testimony of Abraham the father of all those who believe (Hebrews 11:9-10,13).

I submit that a study of heaven will reveal to each of you where your heart really is. For where your treasure is (whether in heaven or on earth) there will your heart be also. Where is your treasure today? Is your chief treasure in loved ones, pleasures of this life, work, riches, or education? Or is your chief treasure in Christ and His heavenly inheritance?

The main points from the first part of our text in Proverbs 15:24 are the following: 1) Heaven Is an Incentive To Godly Living; (2) Heaven Is the Realization of God's Promises.

I. Heaven Is an Incentive To Godly Living.

A. What is "the way of life?"

1. The way of life is that path or road by which a sinner (who stands under the wrath of a holy God) comes to know and receive everlasting life. This way of life is the means by which one who is dead in his trespasses and sins comes to be raised from the tomb of hopelessness and despair wherein his sins have buried him. Dear ones, if I could tell you a way in which you could live to be a 1,000 years old, enjoy good health and a sound mind during that period of time, wouldn't you be interested? I'm sure you would. But I have even better news. I can tell you THE way (and THE only way) in which you can live forever, enjoy forgiveness of sin, perfect righteousness, joy unspeakable, and fellowship with the one true living God.

2. THE WAY OF LIFE is Jesus Christ who is Himself Jacob's ladder and our ladder to heaven (John 1:51). Heaven is opened to man through the cross of Christ. The Lord Jesus said of Himself, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

a. Isn't it absolutely amazing how many people would flock to hear the way to live

a mere thousand years here upon the earth, but how few would come to hear how to live forever in the new heaven and the new earth?

b. Let us not be deceived into thinking that this WAY OF LIFE is broad and will find many people on it. For the Lord Jesus has stated ever so clearly that the broad way which most people in this world travel is an inclusive and comfortable way wherein people may believe whatever they want to believe and live the way they want to live. But this way leads to everlasting torment in hell below. It is the narrow way revealed by Christ in the gospel alone which few people (by comparison) find that leads to everlasting joy in heaven above. This narrow way which leads to heaven is a way of holiness. For heaven is a holy place where no sin exists. Why would one who wants to live according to his own pleasures and desires here upon the earth want to live in heaven where only the will and pleasure of God is done? How could one who despises a holy life here upon earth find any joy in heaven where only holiness reigns? This narrow way of Christ is indeed exclusive—it is God’s way not your way or my way. The narrow way of Christ is uncomfortable—you must painfully crucify your sinful desires not indulge them—you must take up your cross and follow Christ. But in the end there is life, peace, and a joy to which nothing on earth can compare.

B. Note secondly about this way of life that it is “above” to the wise. It is not beneath in hell, but is above in heaven. This is the final destiny of all who walk THE WAY OF LIFE found only in Jesus Christ. But although this WAY OF LIFE in Christ begins while we are here upon earth, this way of life leads to heaven above and is set before us by God as the promise land to which we travel.

1. Dear ones, even as Israel lived in temporary tents and moved from location to location while in the wilderness, so we do likewise while here on earth in our temporary homes and temporary bodies. And while Israel endured the trials of the wilderness, she was yet to look to the land of promise which God had made for her at which time her temporary tents and wilderness wanderings would be cast away. So we are to do likewise even now as aliens and pilgrims in this world in which we live. We are to look forward to the heavenly land of promise whose builder and maker is God—an unspeakable place of glory where you will cease to be aliens and foreigners, cease to live in temporary homes, and will take up an everlasting residence of joy never to be moved again. In other words, the Lord has set heaven before you as a reward (just as He set the promise land before Israel) which is to motivate you to walk in THE WAY OF LIFE while you are yet here upon the earth (consider how the Lord did the same with Moses in Hebrews 11:24-26).

2. It is very common for us to work very hard when we know that there is a reward that awaits us. Children, you will ordinarily apply yourselves to your work more diligently, when you are promised a special privilege or reward for a job well done. Adults, you will spend extra time at work to get a project done when there is a bonus promised at the completion of the project. Likewise, your heavenly Father knows the encouragement that a reward also provides to His weak children who become discouraged over their besetting sins, who become afraid of persecution, who become weary of trials and afflictions, and who are tempted to seek the pleasures of this life in exchange for their communion with Christ. The reward, which encompasses all that Christ has prepared for those who have embraced Him by faith alone and who evidence that faith by their love and good deeds, is designated as everlasting life or as heaven.

a. Heaven and the blessings associated with it are designated a reward: Matthew 5:11-12. Therefore, heaven and its blessings are set before the Christian as that which should ever keep before him/her in the various trials, struggles, and temptations in this life.

b. Are rewards in the Covenant of Grace offered and granted due to the merit of our works? Absolutely not!

(1) If a child does precisely what his father commands him to do, the child by his obedience does not obligate the father to give him anything. For the child has only done that which was his duty to do (“Children obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right” Ephesians 6:1). The child can make no legitimate claim to a reward from his father. However, if the father freely chooses, out of his generosity and

love, to bestow a reward upon his child in order to motivate him to a cheerful obedience, the father obligates himself (the child does not obligate him) to gladly grant the reward to the child for his cheerful and faithful obedience.

(2) Likewise, the reward of heaven is not something the believer obligates God to pay, but something which God has obligated Himself (by His own gracious and sovereign will) to give to believers in Jesus Christ. The merit that earned the reward is not the believer's obedience, but Christ's obedience. And yet the reward is related by way of God's sovereign and gracious appointment to the gospel obedience of the believer. The Lord graciously works within you to will and to do His good pleasure (Philippians 2:13), and then He graciously rewards you for what He has accomplished in and through you. Now that is grace.

(3) It is important to keep in mind that you are not rewarded "on account of" your works, but rather "according to" your works (Matthew 16:27).

3. How does the reward of heaven motivate the child of God to walk in the path of life?

a. The very weakness, sin, temptation, fear, or trial you face here upon the earth is promised to be removed forever in heaven.

(1) For example, you know your own besetting sins (whether they be lustful desires, pride and selfishness, envying the gifts and graces of others, discontentment, sinful outbursts of anger, gossiping about others behind their backs, fear of man, circumstances, or the unknown, deceit in lying or cheating, hypocrisy in going through the mere outward motions of worship, the love of money or the love of the pleasures of this life, or forsaking and neglecting Christ as our first love). How many times have you fallen into that same sin and cast yourself upon Christ in faith and repentance just to fall again and repeat the endless cycle to your grief and sorrow to almost the point of despair? Would not the contemplation and meditation upon the final destruction of that awful cycle of sin bring great encouragement and perseverance to you as you cling to the certain hope of your heavenly reward? Will not the holiness of your heavenly home work within you a greater desire to be holy here upon the earth?

(2) What about those many physical weaknesses and pains that you suffer from day to day in this life (at times perhaps despairing of life itself)? Would not the certain reward of heaven bring comfort and consolation to you that the time of your physical suffering will be no longer remembered because God will transform these corruptible bodies into incorruptible bodies incapable of suffering the slightest pain ever again?

(3) What about the many fears that plague your life: the fear of losing loved ones in death, the fear of your own death, the fear of suffering for your faith, the fear of man, or the fear of the unknown? Again taking the time to spend in glorious contemplation of heaven where you will never ever have the slightest hint of these fears again would renew your resolve to trust in Christ alone. Dear ones, you do not fear what you will gain. Rather you fear what you will lose. And the reason you will never fear again in heaven is because all will be gain to you and nothing ever again will be lost to you.

(4) What about the trials you face every day wherein your faith is sorely tested? They may not even be big trials when compared to the trials of others, but the wear and tear upon your spiritual and emotional stability is wearisome to the point of collapse. You might even feel ashamed that such trials test your faith to such a degree of anxiety. Would it not be a great encouragement to you to reflect upon the fact that in heaven faith will give way to sight? There will be no trials of faith, for there will be no trials in heaven and there will be no faith in the promises of God once you are in heaven, for all of the promises of God will be fully realized.

(5) What about the loneliness you face in this life? At times, the loneliness is so overwhelming and painful that you do not want to go on living. Oh, dear one, the fellowship and communion in heaven will never be broken. No one there will ever be isolated from perfect fellowship with

God, with the elect angels, or with the glorified saints (of all ages). Will not suffering a few years of loneliness here upon the earth (if God so ordains it) be worth the unbroken communion of God and the saints forever?

(6) This, dear ones, is how the reward of heaven motivates the Christian to walk in the way of life while he/she is still upon this earth.

II. Heaven Is the Realization of God's Promises.

A. Why is the way of life ABOVE given to the wise? Because heaven is the realization and perfection of all of God's promises made to His beloved children. Under this main point I would like to answer some questions that are often asked about the realization of heaven.

1. What will heaven be like?

a. The glory and happiness of heaven cannot be expressed in human words as we see from the testimony of the Apostle Paul (2 Corinthians 12:4). How do you explain a place so full of holiness and righteousness, so complete in joy and happiness, so perfect in peace and security, so abounding in fellowship and communion, that anything to which you might try to compare it upon the earth would only scratch the surface? "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9). Nevertheless, what God has revealed to us in His Word about heaven, makes earthly pleasures a fading and flickering match in comparison to the glory of the noonday sun.

b. God gives some descriptions of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 21:2-4.

(1) God will permanently dwell in all of His glory among His people (which was pictured in the ark of the covenant dwelling among Israel, Leviticus 26:11-12). Whereas, the Son of God became flesh and tabernacled among men for some 33 years, God will forever tabernacle among us in heaven. You will no longer have to cry out, "Lord, how long will it be until I know Thee face to face, until I behold Thy glory, and stand in Thy presence to praise and worship Thee with unfettered voice, and enjoy unbroken communion with Thee?" God is your first and chief reward in heaven, for all the blessedness of heaven is in Him, and from Him, and through Him.

(2) All the miseries of this life will forever be removed. All sin (even those besetting sins), temptation to sin, desires to sin, all hurts, heartaches, fears, and loneliness will be swallowed up in joy, peace, and contentment in the Lord. If you have the capacity to enjoy to some degree (by God's grace) that which God has created in this world amidst all of the misery that surrounds you, what will be your capacity to enjoy the eternal glories of the new heaven and new earth (which far excel the fading glories of this creation) when all misery will be abolished? The capacity of your glorified souls and bodies to enjoy the glories of heaven will know no limitations other than man's own finiteness.

2. Will heaven be nonmaterial or material?

a. Heaven is not a state of the mind, but is a place ("above" earth). It must be material if those with glorified material bodies dwell there (such as Enoch, Elijah, Christ, and after the resurrection all believers will have glorified bodies in heaven).

b. God will renovate the present heaven and earth and make paradise lost, paradise restored (Revelation 21:1). Why have a resurrected body if there is no restored material earth?

3. What will you do in heaven?

a. You will praise and glorify the Lord (Revelation 19:1-3).

b. You will commune with God, with His holy angels, and with His saints whom you shall all know (Matthew 8:11; Matthew 17:3). You will not know your redeemed family members in a fleshly way in heaven, but you will know them nevertheless. If Peter, James, and John knew Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (even though they never knew them while these prophets lived upon the earth), it is

surely the case that you will know your loved ones (and all the other saints) in heaven by a supernatural knowledge granted to you.

c. You will serve the Lord in various capacities (Matthew 25:21,23). It will never be boring. Boredom is not possible in heaven.

4. Will there be degrees of reward in heaven?

a. Yes, this would seem to be the case according to 1 Corinthians 3:14-15; Matthew 25:21,23; Matthew 20:23. These rewards are graciously bestowed by God ACCORDING TO a man's works (NOT on account of a man's works). What these rewards will be, we are not told, but no one will envy or covet the reward of another, but will perfectly rejoice in the rewards of others. You will perfectly rejoice with those who rejoice.

b. Finally, it would appear that those who receive such rewards cast them before the Lord, acknowledging that it is God who is to be glorified for such rewards so graciously bestowed upon them (Revelation 4:10).

In closing, I submit that if you spent 15 minutes a day reflecting on the glories of our heavenly reward which God has prepared for you, it would likely transform and change your day. I submit that if you would reflect upon the reward of heaven in the midst of your weaknesses, sins, temptations, fears, trials, and illnesses, your lives would be changed. I submit that if you were even to reflect upon the reward of heaven when you succeed, prosper, and gain in this life, that it would turn all pride over your attainments into humility before the Lord.

Remember Israel who did not enter into the promise land because they did not believe. They had the true religion. They had the pure worship of God. They had God's covenant. They had the presence of God. They had faithful ministers of God. They had the gospel of salvation preached unto them. But they did not by faith receive the promise of life. They not only did not enter into the promise land, they did not enter into heaven to which it pointed. Let none of us, dear ones, fall short of the heavenly promise due to our unbelief and due to our love of this world and its pleasures. What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and to lose his own soul?

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