

HEAVEN:
The Place of Everlasting Paradise!

Message 5

Scripture: Revelation 6:9-11

INTRO: In our children's story every morning we have had the children's version of John Bunyan's book, "Pilgrim's Progress" read for us. We have just seen Christian and his friend cross the river, the river of death. After crossing that river, they enter the celestial city. And before they crossed that river they asked if there was no other way into heaven than by crossing this river. And they were told, "Yes; but there hath not any save two, to wit, Enoch and Elijah, been permitted to tread that path since the foundation of the world, nor shall until the last trumpet shall sound."

Well, Christian and his friend crossed over the river of death and on the other side the angels met them and escorted them into heaven. That is precisely what the Bible teaches. And there, as the angels escorted them into heaven they told these pilgrims what they were to expect and how inexpressibly glorious it was. Here is what Bunyan says the angels told them as they went, "'There', said they, 'is the Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem, the innumerable company of angles, and the spirits of just men made perfect. You are going now,' said they, 'to the Paradise of God, wherein you shall see the tree of life, and eat of the never fading fruits thereof; and when you come there, you shall have white robes given you, and your walk and talk shall be every day with the King, even all the days of eternity. There you shall not see again such things as you saw when you were in the lower region upon the earth; to wit, sorrow, sickness, affliction, and death; 'for the former things are passed away. You are going now to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, and to the prophets, men that God had taken away from the evil to come, and that are now resting upon their beds, each one walking in his righteousness.'"

Now that paragraph captures about the sum of what we have said thus far. This morning we will go to Revelation 6:9-11. We will be deeply challenged in our thinking this morning. So, let's go.

h. What do believers do in Paradise? (cont'd)

We are continuing a subject we did not finish in the last message, and it is this: What do believers do after they enter heaven, but before the resurrection? We looked at the indications of Luke 16, and that is that believers are comforted in heaven. I thought later that instead of asking first what believers do in heaven I should have asked what is done to them. However, we move on.

-The intimations of Revelation 6:9-11

In the last message we saw that when Lazarus entered heaven he was comforted by Abraham. That glimpse into Paradise came from an event that happened in heaven before Jesus was crucified. We are going to take our next information from a time yet future known as the tribulation time. It is an event that happens after the Church age as I see it, but it is an event that describes for us what happens to believers who die during the tribulation but before they are resurrected. So I propose that what happens in this passage to these tribulational martyrs, may well be what has happened to Church age believers already, only we are not allowed to see this until we get to the last book in the Bible.

Now, there is no book in the Bible that lets us look into heaven like the book of Revelation. However, most of the glimpses we get into heaven in this book take place during the tribulation or later. So, whether these passages apply only to tribulation saints or to all may be questioned. I am going to be very daring. I am going to do something very few commentaries do, and that is express my opinion on several of these passages. You may find my suggestions difficult to accept and if so, I ask you, study all the commentaries you can find, and when you are done, you may well come back to those you will get here.

So I will ask you if you will rise to your feet for the reading of a most incredible revelation from God Almighty, Revelation 6:9-11. Prayer: Lord God, we do not take lightly the moments we will take in this passage. I pray Lord God, you would for the next moments minister to us from Your Word, and where I fail to express Your mind Lord, I pray, overlook that which I have not understood aright and teach me. And if someone would come and express to me that which is Your mind, let me learn from that person. Our one great desire is to understand what You intended in this passage, Amen."

"When he had opened the fifth seal..." Maybe some message we can talk about these seals. But when he had opened the fifth one John said, "I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held."

Now I want to see how many of you studied this passage? Now notice very carefully one word. John said, "I saw under the ALTAR..." Did you study this word? I have to take some time this morning, and I must give you a little background here. How many of you have read in the OT about the tabernacle Moses was instructed to build? Last fall, when we were in Israel we took some pictures of a copy of that tabernacle. Picture (#1)

Now, there are two altars in God's economy of things. Outside the tabernacle, the very first item you meet after you enter the enclosure is the altar of sacrifice (#2).

If you enter the holy place, on the left is the candlestick, (#3) on the right the table of shewbread (#4) and in the front, before the veil to the holy of holies is the altar of incense (#5).

Now, under which of those two altars do you think John saw these martyred souls? Well, you may say, "In heaven, the altar is probably a

different one." Well, look at Hebrews 8:1-5 (read). You see, the picture we saw was a copy of the tabernacle Moses made, but the tabernacle that Moses made, for which he got his instructions on Mount Sinai, was a copy of the tabernacle in heaven! Now notice in Hebrews 8:2 that the tabernacle in heaven is the TRUE tabernacle. The one on earth was a copy! Look at 9:24 (read). Ah, there is a tabernacle in heaven! Study Hebrews 7-10 and you will learn some incredible things!

Now I ask you, under which of these two altars did John see these souls? "Well", you may say, "I do not see much room under that altar of incense for souls and I don't see how they would be under the altar of sacrifice, because that was full of fire."

Well, let me tell you this: The tabernacle was a moveable object. They carried the whole thing in pieces through the wilderness and eventually to Israel. But when King David came along he wanted to make a temple, a big house for God and God said he could not because he was a man of war. But God gave to King David the pattern and size of the temple, which would house the tabernacle. And the Lord told David that Solomon, his son, would build the temple. So turn with me now to 1 Chronicles 28 (read 12-13).

Well, David built this temple and it was a most magnificent building. When Israel disobeyed God, the temple was destroyed by Israel's enemies. Then it was rebuilt later but it was built hastily and its size and structure made the older generation weep with sadness.

Then, many years later, the Herod who later wanted to kill Jesus came on the scene, rebuilt the Jewish temple. It was an absolutely astonishing building. The Jews said of this building, "Whoever has not seen the Holy Temple built by King Herod, has never seen a beautiful building his entire life."

A good number of years ago, a replica of this temple was made in Israel. The scale is 50-1. Between the first time I was in Israel and last fall, this replica had been moved and it now sits not far from Israel's government building and the Shrine of the Book that houses the famous scroll of Isaiah, which is over 2000 years old (Picture #6). Now let me take you to Herod's temple (Picture # 7).

In Israel today, there is an organization called, "The Temple Institute." Here is a picture as we saw it last fall (Picture #8). Twelve years ago one of the folk from our church went there and brought me a book called the, "The Holy Temple of Jerusalem" (Picture #9).

Now here is the artists conception (Picture # 10) of the holy place, the candlestick on the left, the table of shewbread on the right and the altar of incense in the middle before the holy of holies. Do you suppose John is speaking of this altar?

Now let me take you to the altar of sacrifice (Pictures 11, 12, 13, 14, last one sacrifice coming up the ramp). Now tell me which altar you think John meant? Now, you may say, "Was the altar actually that big?" Listen to 2 Chronicles 4:1, "Moreover he made a bronze altar (that is the altar of sacrifice): twenty cubits was its length, twenty cubits its width, and ten cubits its height." That is 16 feet high and 32 feet square on top. The Temple Institute book says the altar in Herod's Temple was 15 feet high and 52 feet wide and long on top.

I think that only one conclusion can be reached, and that is that John is talking about the altar of sacrifice. Now you may ask, "Why is that important?" Because the purposes of the altar of sacrifice and the of the altar of incense were so different. Their purpose must reveal why these souls are here. Incense

was placed on the altar of incense and a sweet smelling aroma arose up to God. This pictures prayer. But at the altar of sacrifice, sins were expiated. Here God's wrath against sin was satisfied. And Lange's commentary says in volume 7 page 175, that besides expiation of sins, the offerer would, and I quote, "...offer prayers and supplications at the altar in connection with the sacrifice made for sin and on the ground of that sacrifice."

Now all of that to say this, that I think that the souls under the altar indicates to us that one of the first things in order in heaven is to take care of all things unknown, hidden and that were left not dealt with in life at the time of death. This altar was a brass altar and that pictures judgment. This altar had fire under it, and that pictures judgment. Here the fires of judgment will bring to light every last bit of darkness.

Now you will say again, "Is there any indication that this may be so?" If, what I suggest is correct, note first in Revelation 6:9 that they are under the altar, or down by the altar, as I think the original word allows. Now the blood of the sacrifices was poured out at the base of the altar. Here at this altar, the blood of Christ will fully satisfy God's wrath and the one who has just entered heaven is cleaned up, so to speak. And after this, they offer their prayers to God. And maybe now, because they have been judged, they say, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood...?" You see, judgment is on their mind here at this place of judgment. How long can a sinning world get away without judgment, is their question. So, both expiation and prayer is taking place here.

Furthermore, I suggest after God is fully satisfied, they receive their white robes. It is certainly no secret that white represents righteousness. Here are these absolutely, sin-free, pure and clean believers! And it is

pictured in their white clothing! When they leave this altar, they are ready for the rest of Paradise!

And then, last but not least here, they are told in verse 11 to rest a little while until both the number of their fellow servants and brethren were killed as they were was completed. We will see later that the word 'rest' here does not mean inactivity, but more likely, joyful service.

Now go to 9:23 (read and explain 23-28). Now let me point out a verse to you that is often used in speaking to unbelievers, and though it holds true for them, it is given in the context of believers and heaven (read 9:27). Here is an indication that after we die, the judgment follows. And the judgment is given in the context of the temple in heaven! This passage is clear on that.

Now I want to raise a question here and seek to give at least a suggestion as an answer. When I was in Mexico I preached a message using a water container as an illustration. I showed how that the moment a person is born again, he or she is baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. So I had a smaller container attached to the bigger one and the smaller container filled with water, picturing what happens at salvation.

But inside the smaller container were many things that took up space such as small rocks or coins etc... These things pictured areas in this new believers life that needed the work of the Holy Spirit. You see, when we get saved, we have just begun our journey. Now God will work in us to work out such things as anger and jealousy and covetousness and so on. When a person is just saved, he or she is far from perfection, and often there are many sins that need yet to be dealt with.

Now I want to see from you if you agree with me. Tell me if you agree with this: When a

person is just saved, he or she is far from perfection and often there are many areas of sin that need to be dealt with yet. Now let me ask you another question, if that person should die shortly after salvation, do you think he or she would be saved? (Show of hands.) Now let me ask you another question: How can God allow a person who is not perfect into heaven? Let me ask you another question: Who here is perfect? And here is the next question: How do you expect to get in?

When I gave this message in Mexico, a number of people gathered around me after the message and said, "If a believer still has those things in his or her life, how can they go to heaven then?" Their senior pastor was there and I said, "I do not know the answer but it is very fortunate that your pastor is here. He will answer your question." So I said to this pastor, "How many people that you do the funeral for do you think are perfect." And he smiled and said, "I don't think there are any." And then, without expecting an answer I said, "So, how do you think they can go to heaven?"

And this pastor in all humility said, "I count on 1 John 2:1." And this verse says, "My little children, these things I write to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." And this pastor said, "I believe in heaven Jesus will stand up for us as our Advocate." If that is so, and who has anything else he can trust in, then God will be satisfied by the sacrifice of His only Son on our behalf there in heaven at the judgment!

Did you know that the blood of the sacrifices was poured out here at the base of this altar. And some was later taken into the Holy of holies, and there the righteous indignation of God Almighty against our sins was satisfied? That is the doctrine of propitiation, or as we might say, satisfaction. Praise God, glory hallelujah! Without Christ, we have no chance

at all. With Him to stand up for us, we will pass this place of judgment. He paid for our sins.

I am a preacher. I believe there is a lot of sin sitting in this place right now. I am not talking about murder and sins such as are listed in 1 Corinthians 6 or Galatians 5. Christians who willfully live in such sins, Hebrews 10:27 says, there is a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries. Sin is not OK for some day, the Bible says, everything that is hidden will be brought to light and every secret thing will be shouted from the housetops. It may well be that what is not exposed and dealt with here on earth, will meet a most painful exposure when we are judged. But oh how sweet to be able to repent and take care of things now, and have it washed in the blood of the Lamb so it will never need to come to such exposure!

In light of all this, listen to 1 Peter 4:17-18, "For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?'"

CONCL: Where have we been this morning? In heaven! We have set our minds on things above, in obedience to the Word of God! We have been in Revelation 6:9-11, and yes I know that the context is martyrs in the tribulation. But I believe it gives us a glimpse into what it has always been like shortly after entering heaven. First there is the cleansing from anything still in the life that is not right. No one with such things is fit to come into the presence of God, and God dwells just past this altar. And after a final cleansing by the blood of the Lamb of God, who entered this temple with His own blood 2000 years ago, these saints are given white robes. Oh blessed righteousness! Here is imputed righteousness in its richest form! Here to the altar, just like in OT times and in the times of the temple, came the sinner, unclean, unfit. But unlike the offerer in the OT, here his final cleansing takes place by

the blood of Christ and he walks away in white! Oh blessed
Paradise! Oh blessed altar! Oh, blessed Jesus!

I hear the Savior say,
"Thy strength indeed is small!
Child of weakness, watch and pray,
Find in Me thine all in all.

Lord, now indeed I find
Thy power, and Thine alone,
Can change the leopards spots
And melt the heart of stone.

For nothing good have I
Whereby Thy grace to claim -
I'll wash my garments white
In the blood of Calvary's Lamb.

And when before the throne
I stand in Him complete,
"Jesus died my soul to save,"
My lips shall still repeat.

Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain -
He washed it white as snow.