

Heaven and Hell Bible Study
Christ the King Lutheran Church
Commerce, GA

Session 5: What is Heaven Like?

In preparation for this session, read pages 21-31 in *A Simple Explanation of Heaven and Hell*

After we have studied what the Bible tells us that hell is like, we turn our attention to heaven. We have already learned why there is heaven. God's original creation was devoid of death. It was without fractured relationships with God and people. Heaven is paradise restored. Many times people wonder, "What will it be like though?". In this class we get an overview of what we can know for certain about heaven. We will also examine some questions (as well as more in the last session) that relate to heaven.

Noting a Few Important Things as We Begin

-Remember that heaven is popular. Most Americans believe in it and believe they are likely to go there. We also learned that many people's idea of heaven, unfortunately, is not rooted in Holy Scripture. Heaven is reserved for those that have faith in Jesus Christ. This is because we must be holy (perfect) to enter heaven and only through what Jesus has done and the Holy Spirit has delivered can we be righteous and thus in God's eternal presence.

-Additionally, as we have discussed before, we must understand that there is a heaven now and a new heaven to come. Once again, we can reference the chart. Death is the separation of the body from the soul. But this separation is only temporary. For Christians our bodies and souls will be reunited to live eternally when Jesus returns. Keeping this in view we can help distinguish what the Bible tells us about heaven and apply it to its current and future state.

-As noted in the previous lesson, we are told much more about the new heavens and earth in terms of specific details.

-We must also be careful not to have too much of a focus on heaven as only a future "escape". God has given us eternal life now. He has given us blessings now. From the booklet (page 22), *"It is good and right for Christians to look forward to heaven. But it's important to remember that it is good to be here on earth, serving our neighbors (including witnessing of the Gospel to them). Our bodies are not "life suits" that carry our souls around; nor are our bodies bad and our souls good (as Plato taught). Both our bodies and souls were redeemed by Jesus' dying on the cross for us; that's why He took on human flesh, so that our bodies would be saved too! So while we look forward to the rest and comfort of heaven, we should not disdain our earthly bodies and lives."* Furthermore as pages 26-28 points out, heaven touches earth right now. Especially when we receive the Lord's Supper as we are reminded of in the Sanctus and Preface before receiving Communion. We are worshipping with the angels, prophets, apostles, and all the saints (including our Christian loved ones who have passed into eternity).

Things We Know and Don't Know

While people have many questions about heaven, we must realize that we will not know the answers to some of those questions until we get there.

1. What are some possible reasons why God does not tell us every detail about heaven right now?

But thanks be to God, that He has given us some glimpses into Paradise. Sts. Paul and John, for example, were given special glimpses in the Bible. We can be assured that we know everything that we need to know right now.

2. Read the following Scripture passages and then fill in how this tells us something very important that we can be sure about regarding heaven.

-St. John 14:1-3 Heaven is an _____ place. We are "at home" with the Father and have our own mansion/dwelling/room.

-St. John 14:4-7 We get to heaven through _____. When we know Jesus we know His and our Father.

-St. Matthew 5:20 We must be 100% _____ to enter heaven. We can be so because of what Jesus has done and the Holy Spirit has delivered in faith.

-1 Thessalonians 4:17 Heaven is _____. We are with the Lord forever (see also Psalm 16:11).

-1 Corinthians 2:9 The _____ of heaven is like something we have never seen.

-St. John 3:16, Revelation 20:14 There is no _____ in heaven, we live _____.

Main Reasons That We Want to Be in Heaven

Martin Luther said, "*I would not give one moment in heaven for all the wealth and pleasure of this world*". (see Romans 8:18) We have looked at some of the bad motivations of why people want to be in heaven. What are the two main reasons that we should want to be in heaven?

4. Read Revelation 21:3, 1 John 3:2. We will _____ and be _____ God. Just as Jesus promised, He has gone to be with Father and will bring God's children there!

5. The Church is spoken of as the Body of Christ. People were created to be in relationship with one another. Unfortunately, this desired unity has been broken by sin. However, in heaven there is no sin, thus no division and strife. So all of the saints of God have perfect _____ with one another.

So the most beautiful thing about heaven is restored fellowship. The right relationship with our Father God and with our fellow people is what we experience in heaven.

What Will We Do in Heaven?

6. Write one word that would describe an activity in heaven based on the following verses:

Revelation 15:3

Revelation 15:4

2 Timothy 2:12 (also speaks of this in Revelation 2:26 and 3:21)

Isaiah 25:6, St. Luke 14:15

St. Matthew 11:28-30

In Heaven and Not in Heaven

Heaven is wonderful because of what is there. Read 1 Corinthians 13:12. We only see and understand partly now, through a glass darkened with sin. When we reach heaven, we see God face to face and our understanding is increased. The Lord is in heaven, and that is its eternal blessing!

7. Read Revelation 22:1-2. What things do we see here that go all the way back to the Garden of Eden and to Jesus' ministry? What is conspicuously absent? Why is what is there great news? Why is what is not there also great news?

8. Read Revelation 21:4. This is perhaps the most, or certainly one of the most, comforting verses about heaven in the Bible. What is absent? Why? Reflect on the implications of this for a moment, thinking about your own life and experiences.

The Resurrection of the Body

Read Job 19:25-27. As noted at the beginning of this lesson, it is very important to remember that Christianity is not only a religion of the spirit, but of the body. Some religions and philosophies seek to eliminate the flesh as inferior. Christianity, on the other hand, teaches a redemption of soul and body. When people are created they are given a body and soul. God formed Adam of the dust of the ground and then literally breathed life into him. When God came to earth (Jesus), he had a real physical body. When Jesus rose for the dead, He had a real physical body. This resurrected body was a glorified body. Peter, James, and John were given a "sneak peak" into this glorified body at the Transfiguration.

9. Do believers in Christ also have this to look forward to? Read Romans 8:11 and Philippians 3:21.

On the Last Day, when Jesus returns for the Final Judgment our bodies and souls are reunited (unless we are alive on earth when He returns). We also will have a glorified body. The exact nature of this body is somewhat of a mystery, but we do know that we can look to the example of Jesus' resurrected body for some understanding. However, this body will still be "us" and we

will be recognizable to others. We know that this body is free from the effects of sin. It will not wear out, get sick, nor ever die. It functions exactly as God originally intended.

Literal or Figurative?

In the previous lesson we took on the question of how literal are the descriptions of hell, regarding fire, etc. This is also something people wonder about in terms of heaven as well, and not all theologians agree on. This especially comes in with the vivid description of the new heaven and new earth (New Jerusalem) in Revelation 21-22:5. Here we read of a magnificent city surrounded by 200 foot thick walls, adorned with jewels, and gates of pearl. Inside of the city are streets of gold, crystal sea, rivers flowing from the throne of God. The size is immense, a 1400 mile in each direction cube (this would stretch from Maine to Florida and west to Colorado in comparison).

We must remember a few things here. First of all John is describing (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) something unbelievably amazing that human words cannot do justice. Secondly, the things and numbers used here have great significance in connecting to other parts of the Bible. So whether these things are literal or not should not cause the Christian any concern. If they are, what an amazing description of this place! If they are figurative, then the actual appearance is even more glorious!

Degrees of Reward in Heaven

We also discussed degrees of punishment in hell in the previous lesson, and we want to briefly discuss rewards in heaven here. This is not something that we don't speak of very often in the Lutheran Church. It is something the Scripture speaks of, but we must only consider carefully and with working against the sinful tendencies of our flesh. Scripture speaks in places of believers receiving crowns such as Revelation 2:10 (which may be literal or figurative) and ruling. Even God's angels have "ranks". God is a God of order and people could hold certain leadership/administrative positions in heaven (keeping in mind there are no conflicts/crimes to sort out!) The New Testament speaks of rewards coming to certain people in certain circumstances (examples 2 Corinthians 5:10, Matthew 6:4, Matthew 25:13) But we are not to seek rewards or authority over others for selfish reasons. We must always be on guard for any "whiff" of work-righteousness clouding our understanding of justification as it is completely the work of God, given by His grace. Keep in mind Jesus' teaching to His Disciples about humility and servanthood, for example in St. Mark 10:42-45.

Closing Words of Joy

Read Revelation 7:13-17.

Closing Prayer