

What Is Heaven Like

Last Things

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This Scripture lesson is taken from Revelation 6 and beginning at verse 9. That's on page 1,920.

9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?' 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

The word of the Lord.

Lord, help me to open the Scriptures, apply the Scriptures, and give us comfort and encouragement and hope through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

When I was working on my doctorate, in terms of trying to present the gospel to Muslims, I learned a lot of things. I learned that Islam isn't a religion; it's a political movement with a religious base, and that's profoundly true. How do we know that?

We know that because the date of Islam is not when Mohammad is born. It's not when he receives his visions about things outside of Mecca. It's when he establishes a political system in the city that changes its name to Medina.

(The Hijrah took place in AD 622, when Yathrib changed its name Al Madinah in Muhammad's honor. The birth of Muhammad is in AD 570.

That is 53 BH, **B**efore the **H**ijra. His death is in AD 632, or 11 AH, **A**fter the **H**ijrah. Muslims follow a strict Lunar calendar, so AD 2023 is 1445 AH, even though only 1,401 solar years have passed.)

So, Islam is a political movement with a religious foundation, and it's interesting as you study Islam, you discover its view of heaven is very much like that of people who were living in Saudi Arabia and their views of what would be really a neat place to go. And what is that? A place where you're given virgins, that each day they become virgins again, and so you get to remove their virginity over and over again. That's the Muslim view of heaven. And we're not told about what happens with women, except maybe those women that are that way. But that's the Muslim view of heaven and it's interesting, isn't it?

I'm going to say to you this, a song that was made popular by Elvis Presley is not radically different than that.

I'm satisfied with just a cottage below
A little silver and a little gold
But in that city where the ransomed will shine
I want a gold one that's silver-lined
I've got a mansion just over the hilltop
In that bright land where we'll never grow old
And some day yonder we will never more wander
But walk on streets that are purest gold

And then I think of Joseph Smith. Joseph Smith was an interesting man. He looked around and decided that all of the churches were wrong and that to Joseph Smith alone was revealed what things were really like, and it's interesting as Joseph got going in these things, he developed a great following because he was a great salesman. And there's some evidence that the *Book of Mormon* was actually written by a congregational minister as a work of fiction (Solomon Spalding 1761-1816) that somehow or another got adapted with Joseph and his merry men.

And along the way, they had moved, and there was a traveling salesman who had some mummies, and they said, "Well, you know, we have a seer right here in Joseph Smith. He can interpret these things." (This is in 1835 in Kirtland, Ohio)

And so, they had the mummies, and he begins to translate the hieroglyphics that were inside the mouth of the mummies, and do you know what he discovered, Pat, and Pat, and Tom? We can all become gods ourselves. Amazing!

You know, you remember the great original temptation in the Garden of Eden, “Ye shall be as gods” (Genesis 3:5). That’s the great longing. And what was revealed to Joseph Smith as he translated these works from the hieroglyphics that were inside the mouth of the mummy was a revelation that Adam is now God. And as God is now, he once was a man. And isn’t that nifty? You can become a god, and you can create your own planet, and you can have spiritual children you create now, who then go, and you create a world for them, and they can inhabit bodies, and they in turn can continue on this nifty deal.

And so, the whole foundation’s rooted in polygamy; however, politics sometimes gets into play, and in order to become a state in the United States, the state of Utah had to give up authentic Mormonism, and they only practiced it in the spiritual realm. (Cf. LDS President, Wilford Woodruff’s *1890 Manifesto* which officially advised against any future plural marriage in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.)

That means this, if I’m a Mormon man, and you’re a lady, and you’re not married to a Mormon man, I can take you to the Mormon temple, and we can have a spiritual marriage there so that in the world to come, though your husband doesn’t make it, you will be one of my wives, and we will produce spiritual children who then, in the world that I create, will be able to inhabit earthly bodies. Does that sound interesting?

So anyhow, I like that they are very male-oriented in one way, and so it’s interesting, however, that these mummies they thought were destroyed in the fire in Chicago.

However, they were discovered, one of them was discovered in New York, and this is after the Rosetta Stone (In 1822, a scholar named Jean François Champollion and others had translated the famous Rosetta stone, a slab of basalt, discovered in 1799, that had the same text written in three different languages: Egyptian hieroglyphics, Demotic, and Greek.)

And they were able finally to read hieroglyphics, and all those things were,

was a copy of the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, that when a person died and they mummified the person, they would stick inside the person's mouth the things they needed to say in order to have a happy landing in the hereafter. So, they were part of the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Poor Joseph Smith and his ability to translate messed up a bit. (Cf. Martha Nibley Beck (2005). *Leaving the Saints: how I lost the Mormons and found my faith*. (Crown Publishers: New York, New York, 165-176, 186)

Then I came across a woman by the name of Kat Kerr. Has anyone here ever heard of Kat Kerr? Sounds like a made-up name, "Cat" and "Cur". But Kat Kerr was privileged to go to heaven multiple times and have revelations from God about what heaven is really like. Heaven is like a wonderful version of Disneyland where you go on roller coaster rides, and one is called "The Rush," which goes on out into outer space as you fly on the roller coaster, and you get to eat pizza and other junk food, and it's just a wonderful thing. And this lady is around now, and she has pink hair, because Jesus told her to dye her hair pink, and she has a number of followers, and it's amazing because heaven for her is very much like what a little girl would imagine, "Oh, this is what I want. I want this. Yes. I want to go to the fair. I want to eat popcorn and cotton candy and this and go riding on a great roller coaster." Wow!

What's heaven really like? I want you to notice what heaven is like in our text because it indicates that heaven is not like that at all, and that's Revelation 6 and verse 9.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice. (Is heaven a happy place? Heaven is a place of war. They're aware of what's going on on earth. This battle that we've talked about for three Sundays, "Israel in Exile and the Church," in heaven, it's the same war and they are engaged in warfare on your behalf and my behalf. They're praying and interceding. They're aware of what's going on on earth and they say) How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood? (Wow. It's warfare. And they're told to wait.)

I'd like you to turn with me now to where we find that mansion over a hilltop in John 14. John 14, and we want to look here at this passage of Scripture. John 14, and we'll begin at verse 1 and that is on page 1,675. He said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms."

If you have a King James Version, they have the word "mansion," but what did the word "mansion" mean in the time of King James and his predecessor, Queen Elizabeth? What did the word "mansion" mean? It meant a place to live. It meant an abode.

If you turn over to verse 23, you see it very clearly, page 1,676. "Jesus replied, 'If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'

So, the word "mansion" that conjures up in our mind, "I want a gold one that's silver lined," doesn't seem to fit.

You are a mansion in that if you're a believer, God the Father, and God the Son, through God the Holy Spirit, lives in you. You're a dwelling place of God. You're an abode. You're a place where they stay. And that's the picture.

So what Jesus is actually saying in light of verse 23, which is the only other place in the Bible where this Greek word (*monē*, μονή) is found, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

Ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἐάν τις ἀγαπᾷ με, τὸν λόγον μου τηρήσει, καὶ ὁ πατήρ μου ἀγαπήσει αὐτόν, καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἐλευσόμεθα, καὶ **μονήν** παρ' αὐτῷ ποιήσομεν. (John 14:23)

What Jesus is actually saying is, back in verse 2, page 1,675, "In my Father's house are many rooms," many places to stay: "Ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ τοῦ πατρὸς μου **μοναὶ** πολλαὶ εἰσιν· εἰ δὲ μή, εἶπον ἂν ὑμῖν· Πορεύομαι ἔτοιμάσαι τόπον ὑμῖν." (John 14:2)

And the idea that somehow or another heaven is about whatever you really like on earth, like roller coasters—I don't care for them anymore though I liked them as a kid—or all the junk food that you eat at a fair—I don't like

that anymore because that junk food doesn't like me, instead of it being like that, it's what?

What is the heaven of heavens? It's God himself. It's being in the presence of God always. And I'm going to make a statement. **For most people who go to church, heaven would be hell.** I'll say it again, **For most people who go to church, heaven would be hell.** What's heaven really like? If you look at the book of Revelation, in every single chapter, it's about worship. It's about looking forward to being in the presence of God. It's lifting up the glory of God. It's the wonder and awesomeness of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's adoring him. It's praising him. It's praying through him to the Father. That's heaven! "In my Father's house are many places to abide, to stay," just as God the Father, and God the Son, through God the Holy Spirit makes his dwelling place in you and me.

So, what is heaven really like, going back to our text in the book of Revelation? It is a place where, page 1,920, believers who've left this world are engaged in the worship of God. They're engaged in intercession. And so, the idea that if you like to go fishing, they've got the biggest bass and the best trout in the world in these ponds that never get empty and nifty gold boats that don't sink—that's all pagan.

And it's not substantially different from Joseph Smith's nonsense or Kat Kerr's nonsense, or Mohammad for whom as an Arab male, who enjoyed taking advantage of young women, it's not substantially different. But for the believer, for someone who loves Jesus, for someone who looks forward to getting into the presence of God, who, when they have grieved the Holy Spirit or quenched the Holy Spirit, want quickly to make matters right with the Lord so they can worship with an unbridled heart and come into the presence of God again, that's heaven.

That's the joy of the Lord. The joy of the Lord is being in the presence of God and giving him his due, giving him his glory.

And this is the thing we see here on page 1,920, and that is heaven is a place where there are disembodied spirits. What is a disembodied spirit? That is a human spirit (πνεύμα, πνεῦμα) or a human soul (ψυχή, ψυχή) —the words are not identical, but they're used interchangeably—that doesn't have a body. And where are they? They are underneath the altar. And what are they doing there?

They are aware of the struggles that we face. They're aware. Perhaps you have a mother who's gone on to be with the Lord, and she's aware of the struggles you fear and the struggles you face, of the wrestling matches you're having and trouble. In addition to glorifying God and adoring him and worshiping him, she's interceding for you now, praying for you.

Lord, don't let her quit! Lord, don't let him quit! Don't let him throw in the towel! Show him the reality of Jesus here and now on the 17th day of September 2023! Show them that right now, Lord, lest they throw in the towel and quit!"

Because life is a struggle. Let's never forget it, God does hear and answer our prayers, and Sandy and I have had many wonderful answers to prayer over the years, but life is still a struggle.

We're like Israel in exile and the powers that be, whether it's the American government, the Russian government, the Ukrainian government, the Chinese government, North Korean, and so on, the powers that be are not on our side. They're not on the side of the Lord Jesus Christ. They're hostile to him, and sooner or later, "All those who will live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Timothy 3:12).

Is persecution coming to America? I think it is. And what do we do? We have to be confident in our God, who is sovereign, who "will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability to bear it, but will, along with the temptation, provide the way of escape that we might be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). And we have people in heaven pleading with God for us.

Now, this particular passage of Scripture has a particular focus, but not an exclusive focus, to the events that took place in the nation of Judea, during the Roman reign before God authorized the destruction of the temple, and this enormous persecution of believers that took place in the first century throughout the Roman Empire and took place particularly within what we call the Holy Land.

It has a particular focus on that, but it's not exclusively that because the war is still going on, and it will go on until the last trumpet blows (1 Corinthians 15:52) and the dead in Christ are raised (1 Corinthians 15:24-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). So what's going on now?

What's going on now is what went on in the first century, and they were crying out. They saw brothers and sisters, children and fathers and mothers being brutally persecuted, stoned to death, killed by both their fellow Jewish people and by the Romans in particular.

The Roman Empire was and is a terribly cruel empire. You know, it never ended. It continued on in the East until the followers of Muhammad conquered Constantinople in 1453. But in the West, it never ended. The political leadership simply passed over to the Bishop of Rome. And if you want to understand the cruelty, corruption, and crookedness of the Roman Empire, consider Italy in the high Renaissance. It was a band of brigands. It was unbelievably corrupt. And you see, you know, my wife and I, while she was not feeling good, we watched the movie "The Agony and the Ecstasy" with Rex Harrison and Charlton Heston, and that's Pope Julius II and Leonardo da Vinci.

And it's interesting, why did Julius name himself Julius, after Julius Caesar? Because he was a warrior pope, and he went out conquering and to conquer, shed much blood to defend the papal states, all founded on a forgery (the so-called *Constitutum domini Constantini imperatoris*).

And just look at history. This world is not a pleasant place. This world is a place of constant distraction, of trials and tribulation, persecution, as is the focus in Revelation 6, but also the animosity and opposition of Satan.

Where does cancer come from? Where does heart disease come from? Where do aching joints and bones come from? They come from the evil one who delights in inflicting suffering on people. And so, what I want you to see is as you struggle in life, as you struggle with the storms of life, as sometimes you figure, "I don't know how I'm going to make ends meet. What's going to happen if I die? And what's going to happen to my wife?"

As you wrestle with those questions, you need to remember not only is the Lord Jesus Christ praying for you at the right hand of the Father (Romans 8:34), and not only is the Holy Spirit praying for you within you (Romans 8:26), but those who have gone on before, who have a personal interest in you and who are aware of your life circumstances, they're praying for you. They're praying for you.

“How long Sovereign Lord, holy and true until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” (Revelation 6:10)

So, as we’ve thought about Israel in exile and trying to reconcile Jeremiah’s letter, you know, “Pray for the peace of the city where I send you, pray for the peace of Babylon because in its peace and prosperity, you’ll have your peace and prosperity” (Jeremiah 29:7). And then we saw the second sermon in that was when Jeremiah sent a curse by means of a royal courier to read it out loud and then to throw that curse into the river, a curse pronounced and enacted in ritual form (Jeremiah 51:62-23). How we reconcile that is this, what we see there in the prayer and anguish of angry people who say in Psalm 137, “How blessed will he be who takes your little ones, Babylon, and dashes their heads against the stone” (Psalm 137:8-9) —that is very much in keeping with the prayers of the saints. The prayers of the saints are warfare prayers, and they’re prayed on your behalf and my behalf because we’re in a time of struggle.

So as you feel sometimes all alone, nobody knows, nobody understands, “Nobody knows the trouble I’ve seen”—in your loneliness at night when you lie in bed and you cry out to God and say, “Lord, Lord,” remember this, there’s an innumerable host, and we see that innumerable host described in Hebrews 12, and we’ll end with that if you turn to the left. Hebrews 12. So, what goes on in heaven is warfare and praying. And he says on page 1,878, Hebrews 12:22.

You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly (in joyful assembly), to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

That’s heaven. Do you look forward to worship? I look forward to worship. Are you bothered when you can’t worship? I’ll say again, for most people who attend church, at least from time to time, in our nation, heaven would be hell. “When’s he gonna get through?” Heaven would be hell. Do you enjoy worship? Do you delight in worship? Do you look forward to coming because there’s nothing better, there’s nothing more satisfying than

worshiping God? Do you wish that somehow or another our worship would be more focused on Jesus in the power of the Spirit? Do you want to experience heaven on earth? It's in worship. But for most people, for the ones that want a mansion over a hilltop that's gold and silver lined, heaven would be hell. Heaven would be hell because it's worship. It's the enjoyment of God and it's also engaging in that warfare.

So, there's nothing more satisfying than being in the presence of God. Augustine put it this way, "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you." (*Quia fecisti nos ad te et inquietum est cor nostrum, donec requiescat in te*, Liber Primus, St. Augustine's Confessions with an English translation by William Watts (1912) (New York: The Macmillan Co., p. 2)

Do you enjoy worship? I enjoy worship. Do you wish that our worship somehow or another were more filled with God's Spirit so that as we worshiped, it could seem as if the walls disappeared, and we were in the very presence of God? That's the essence of worship. That's the essence of worship. Pray for your loved ones because for people who don't love worshiping Jesus, heaven would be hell.

May we pray.

Lord, bless us as we ponder these texts, Lord, as we ponder that in the house of Jesus' Father are many places to live, just as inside each of us are many places to live, Lord, where the Father, and the Son, through the Holy Spirit lives in Patsy, lives in Voncille, lives in Bobbie.

Lord, on Robeson Road in Texarkana, Texas are many dwelling places because the Holy Spirit, with the Father and the Son, is living in each of us who knows Jesus.

Lord, we look forward to heaven, not only as a time of relief, but also where our warfare is incredibly focused and incredibly effective, and where we're constantly comforted with the reality that our God is sovereign and in control of everything that happens. Lord, draw us to yourself for Jesus' sake. Amen.

God willing, next week we will consider how their prayers were and will be answered.