

Reality of Heaven

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When our hearts are bowed down with sorrow over the loss of a loved one, our hearts and minds reach out to heaven. That is why we will now consider what the Bible teaches about this very simple but very wonderful idea, namely, heaven.

I suppose that everyone of us has heard and thought about heaven. We have no doubt given sober thought to the time when we too would leave this world. At such times our thoughts turn naturally to heaven.

It is both wise and sensible to think of heaven when you are healthy and strong. Then when the time comes you are in need of assurance you will be able to face your future with confidence.

In Luke 16 we find recorded a story in which our Lord Jesus Christ refers to heaven. This familiar story begins with a description of a fortunate person:

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day (Luke 16:19).

This is the picture of a man surrounded by all the benefits of this world with everything he could desire.

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores (Luke 16:20-21).

This is the description of someone who is in distress, someone who had nothing – a poor person.

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom (Luke 16:22a).

Now these words, "Abraham's bosom," are an old expression among the Jewish people denoting a place of supreme bliss, what we commonly think of as heaven.

And so Lazarus was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom, i.e., he was taken to heaven.

The rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame (Luke 16:22b-24).

Our Lord Jesus Christ is telling this parable to set before us certain truths.

It becomes obvious that people who pass out of this world will know things that are happening on earth. They will remember things and recognize them just as they did in this world; only, I am sure, with much better clarity.

The people who go to hell will remember things and recognize them just as they did in this world but, I am sure, with a great deal worse unhappiness.

The rich man in hell lifted up his eyes to Abraham and asked for help.

But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented (Luke 16:25).

The life you experience in this world is no indication of the life you may experience in the world to come.

I might in this world have a life of ease and plenty, and find in the world to come a life of sorrow

and grief. That is the way it happened here with the rich man.

On the other hand, I might in this world know sorrow and pain and trouble, but in the world to come enjoy comfort and ease and plenty. That is the way it happened here with the beggar.

And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence (Luke 16:26).

Here the great solemn truth is brought out that there is no travelling between heaven and hell. There is a great gulf fixed between them. So if you are among the people who will be shut out of heaven, you can now in this life move over and be among the people who are going to heaven. You can make that change here and now. After you have died it will be impossible to make that change.

Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment (Luke 16:27-28).

Again, we see that this man who was in hell was conscious. He had a memory and he thought of his brothers, and his family. He actually was concerned for them. He wanted to make sure that they would not come to the place of torment where he was.

If we have any loved ones we most certainly hope that they will be in heaven. Whenever we talk about heaven we think of them and want them to be there.

Do you have a child? I am satisfied that you want that child to go to heaven.

Whenever hell is mentioned the same thing is true in reverse. It has such a fearful meaning that not one of us wants to go there. I know something more than that: I know with certainty that none of you would want your folks to go there.

It may be that deep down in your heart, whether you can help it or not, and whether you are foolish or not, you have a fear that you may go to hell. It would be even worse to fear that your folks would go there.

This man felt the same way. He was already in hell, and he said, "Send back home and warn my five brothers so that they will not come here where I am."

Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them (Luke 16:29).

Do you recognize that "Moses and the prophets" refer to the Bible? Let your folks listen to it. The Bible will tell them exactly what to do that they will never go to hell. The Bible will hold out before them exactly what to do to be sure of going to heaven. Your brothers do not need any other messenger. They have Moses and the prophets. They have the Bible.

And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent (Luke 16:30).

This brings several things to our minds. Some people think that if they only had more information, then they would believe. This is not true.

Other people think that the information they have is not adequate. They want something more than the Bible before they will believe. This also is not true.

There was One who went into death and , He was raised from the dead. There was One who had been in the grave and who had come back from the grave on His way to heaven.

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ are the words of that One, who had risen from the dead. Yet people do not listen to Him. So it follows that people who do not listen to the Bible will also not listen to the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, even though He arose from the dead.

This is exactly what we read in the last verse of this passage.

And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead (Luke 16:31).

As far as you and I are concerned, One did rise from the dead, namely the Lord Jesus Christ, but people who will not believe the Bible will not believe in the One who rose from the dead.

Here are several great truths. *Heaven is real!* There is no question in the world that Jesus here definitely implies that both heaven and hell are real.

Also of interest to us is the fact that heaven is a state of conscious awareness. When you are in heaven, you will know and you will have ideas!

Another thing that we can see from this story is that heaven is a definite place far removed from this earth.

Every now and again some well-meaning person will say to us, "You can have heaven while you are here in this world." This is not what the Bible teaches. You will recall that the rich man lived and died; the beggar lived and died. It was after they had died that this whole thing unfolded.

Now heaven is not a new idea to believing people. The idea of heaven is implicitly defined in the gospel and is accepted in believing thought and godly expression.

I am sure that everyone of us will remember certain old hymns and gospel songs that speak of our confidence about heaven.

Do you remember the song, "There's a land that is fairer than day, and by faith we can see it afar?" This is referring to heaven.

Did you ever sing "In the sweet bye and bye we shall meet on that beautiful shore?" That is referring to heaven.

"When we all get to heaven what a day of rejoicing that will be." Have you ever sung these words?

These songs were written by people expecting to go to heaven. "Face to face shall I behold Him." That is another song that speaks of the experience of being in heaven.

Perhaps you have heard this song, which may not be familiar to everyone, "When they ring the golden bells for you and me." That is going to be in heaven.

I am sure that at some time or other you have all sung, "Shall we gather at the river, where bright angel feet have trod?" That speaks of getting to heaven.

When I was just a boy a song which meant a great deal to a lot of people was "Tell Mother I'll be there in answer to her prayer." If you have ever heard it sung by someone who had been blessed with a praying Mother, you will have found this song to be deeply moving.

All these songs reflect our common confidence in heaven. One song that is particularly dear to me is the "Glory Song":

When all my labors and trials are o'er
And I am safe on that beautiful shore.
Just to be near the dear Lord I adore
Will through the ages be glory for me.

Remember that? Remember the lines: "Friends will be there I have loved long ago." To us, whose hearts have been stirred by these songs, the idea of heaven is not new.

But are we actually looking forward to it? Are we concerned that our families join us there? As we live day by day, if anything should happen to a member of our family would we confidently expect that one to go to heaven?

Sometimes people will raise the question about what heaven is like. The Bible does not tell us precisely what will appear to our wondering gaze. It does tell us that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is! (I John 3:2).

We are all familiar with the expressions or figures of speech which set forth the wonders of heaven: the streets of gold, the gates of pearl, the crystal sea, and others. We know and love these words. More than that, we know that in heaven there will be personal, conscious fellowship with God. We shall be face to

face with Him there. To be where He is is to be in heaven.

Remember the Lord's prayer: "Our Father which art in heaven . . ." Surely anyone who comes into the presence of God is actually coming into heaven itself.

While we may not be able to describe what heaven is like because there is nothing in this world with which to compare it, we do have some idea what we will experience there.

If you stop to think about it, when any of us talk about heaven, the most common word we use to refer to it is "home." We speak of our heavenly home, and so we say our home in heaven.

When you have a home you have fellowship with loved ones. The people that you love and that love you make home. It is the people that make the home. A feeling of mutual esteem and love, caring for one another, being thoughtful of each other, doing for one another; all that goes into making a home. And that is what heaven is like.

In trying to help people understand about heaven, I often ask, "Do you recall a time when you had a personal experience of joy with some loved one? Do you remember how it was a joy just to be together? If you will take that moment of happiness and multiply it to the nth degree, and just keep on like that, you will be getting near heaven. That is what heaven is like." Heaven holds out before us the prospect of having every proper desire and need filled, particularly with reference to friendship and love.

If there is anyone thing true about heaven, it is that God will be there; and God is love. Everybody who is there will care for everyone else who is there. There will be mutual esteem and love. That is the prospect that is before us.

Actually, the troubles of this world are easier to bear for those people who are going to heaven. It is easier to endure the hardships they go through here if they are sure about going to heaven. (Romans 8:18).

I know from my experience as a pastor that when death and bereavement strike a family there is nothing more comforting than to feel confident that the loved one who is absent from the body is present with the Lord.

We need heaven in our thinking. We need the prospect of heaven, if for nothing else than a vindication of all that is true and pure and innocent and gentle.

You see, in this world the worthy ones do not always win. In this world the people who are really the good people oftentimes suffer. If there were no future time when these things would be set straight, we could very well be unhappy.

On the other hand, if we have in mind that one day God will reveal His purpose to those who put their trust in Him, it will mean a great deal. It will mean that it is worthwhile walking with the Lord in this world, if the world to come is ours.

The Apostle Paul emphasizes this in a negative way when he writes: "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable" (I Corinthians 15:19).

We need to keep in mind that the scope of the Gospel actually leads into eternity.

When we urge people to turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and to turn to God we have in mind that while they are in this world, they can have fellowship with God, and God will deal with them. More than this, we have in mind that when the time comes to stand before God with their eternal destiny at stake, those who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, those who have fallen asleep in Him will find that He, Himself, will stand with them and take them safely through.

In heaven there will be a realization of faith, and all of life's most precious values. If there is anything in this world that you have appreciated it would be your loved ones. In heaven you and your loved ones will never part. They will be yours in heaven.

When I speak about heaven, I often have it in mind to ask parents: "Do you care whether your children go to heaven? Do you assume that everyone is going there? If this is your thought, why do you think it?"

You may answer, "Well, God will do it." What do you know about God? Would you admit that God has revealed Himself in the Scriptures? Let me gently just say to you that nowhere in the Bible do we read

about everybody going to heaven. The Bible speaks of people expecting to go to heaven and not getting there. The Bible speaks of people who will knock on the door of heaven, and it will not be opened to them.

Someone may say, "Well, I think that is awful." I know it is awful, and for that reason we talk about it; because it does not need to be awful for you. There is no one who is not invited: "Whosoever will may come." But when you hear, "Whosoever will may come," you must know that all who ignore this invitation will naturally not enter in.

While serving as pastor in different churches I have met people whose confidence in heaven has been their guide and strength in their hour of need.

Many years ago while serving in a church in Winnipeg, Canada, I had an experience which I will always cherish.

In this congregation was a very fine woman who had come to a new understanding of the Gospel. Very suddenly she was stricken with a disease that was to take her life. Knowing that she would die within the next few days, I was asked to go and talk to her. I had never faced a person who was going to die. I wondered what in the world I would say to her. What could I say to one who is going to leave this world within the next twenty-four hours? What could I say that would be meaningful?

I went before her in fear and trembling, feeling as helpless as a child; and found that I did not need to say anything. Her heart was quiet and her spirit was at peace. There was a smile on her face, so that I began to wonder if she had been told of her condition.

I more or less asked her this and she assured me in such a sweet way that I remember it to this day. She said, "You taught me to say, 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want'." She recited the 23rd Psalm and came to this line: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Such is the experience of believing people. I can recall a woman who was a member of my church in Dallas, Texas, while I was pastor there. She had a heart condition of such a nature that she could have passed away at any time. Yet she was at peace and seemed cheerful and content. I wondered what her source of strength was. So one day I talked to her about it. I said, "I do not wish to make you uncomfortable or uneasy, but I understand that you might be gone at any time." She asked, "Do you mean I might die at any time?" I said, "Yes." She said, "It is true. I might die at any time, but, of course, you might too."

"Well, yes, but I did not think of it that way." I asked, "Why are you not disturbed? Why does it not distress you? Would you mind telling me so that I can tell and help others?"

She replied something like this: "When I came into this world, I did not know anything about this place, but God had arranged for loving, tender hands to take care of me and minister unto me while I was a baby, and as a child. They took care of me and helped me when I could not take care of myself. I know that if God prepared hands to take care of me here, He will certainly take care of me when my time comes to go over there."

She was expecting to go, and was at peace, trusting in His tender mercy.

I have found that such an experience is common among believing people when they are expecting to go into the presence of God. They believe God and their hope of heaven is their comfort, as it is the comfort for those who are left behind.

Does the reality of heaven mean something to you? Have you personally faced it in your own heart and soul? Are you going there?

May I tell you and assure you that you could. The Lord Jesus Christ died for you so that you might expect to go to heaven.

If you expect to go to heaven, thank God for it. Think about it from time to time. It will make a difference in your daily life and work, if you know that you are going straight on through from this world into the very presence of God!