

HEAVEN – IS IT REAL?

Selected Scriptures

Introduction:

Story – Pastor preaching about heaven – waxing eloquent. Asks, Who wants to go to heaven? Everyone stands up except an old deacon. Don't you want to go to heaven? Well, yes, I do ... sometime. But it sounded like you was fixin' to get up a load to go this afternoon.

Heaven – we all want to go there. And, I don't have any facts, but if you were to poll people across N.A. I think you would find that the majority of people believe they are going there.

Everyone wants to go to heaven – well, not quite everyone. There are those who don't believe there is any heaven or hell or God or Satan. There is only this life – when it's over, it's over...

Last Monday – CrossIron Mills– Indigo Books – a large bookstore. I checked out the religion section. There were many good books. But... also noticed many books by people claiming to have visited heaven and come back to share their story. We have people today racing each other to the publishers to print their version of what heaven is like, based on what they supposedly saw during a near-death experience.

Last year, as we went through the book of Revelation, we saw something of John's description of heaven in chapters 21-22. It is a marvellous picture. But as I was considering what I would present during these next three Sundays that we have before we are away for awhile, I kept coming back to the question of heaven.

In the passage we read from John, we find the introduction these three messages I would like to preach regarding heaven. *Go to John 14.*

- The promise – there is a place being prepared – in the Father's house – heaven.
- The question – where is it? How do we get there?
- Jesus response (all in the context of talking about heaven and eternity) – I am the **way**, the **truth**, and the **life**.

There are three issues or questions regarding heaven that we are going to look at over the next three weeks. And they are all answered in the person of Jesus himself and his statement here.

- The **truth** about heaven – Is it real? Is there really anything beyond death and the grave? We'll look at that today.
- **Life** in heaven – What's it like? What will heaven be like? Jesus said he is the life. If we want to know about life in eternity, he has the answer. We'll look at that next Sunday.
- The **Way** to heaven – How do we get there? How can we be sure that we will be in heaven? Again, Jesus is the answer to that question. We'll look at that two weeks from today.

So, today we begin with the question, Is there life beyond the grave? Is heaven real? Mention book, *"Heaven is for Real"* – yes it is real, although I'm not sure it's quite like it is described in that book.

The Question of the Resurrection

One of the first things we need to deal with is the question of the resurrection. That is really the critical starting point for any discussion of the reality of heaven. Is there really anything beyond this life? Is there anything beyond the grave? If there is nothing beyond this life, if death is the end of existence, then any discussion of heaven becomes a moot point.

There are those who would argue that case. There are those who would say, there is no God, no heaven, no spirit. We are only natural beings, and when we die, it's over. That's it – done.

That argument isn't anything new. Turn with me to Mark 12. This account is very near the end of Jesus ministry here on earth. It is in the final days before his crucifixion. *Read Mark 12:18-27.*

Sadducees – part of the ruling body, the Sanhedrin. They did not believe in the spirit world or in the resurrection. Their argument – the idea of the resurrection simply doesn't make sense – *discuss the argument.*

They appeal to Moses and the law in order to make their argument. The basis for their argument is an assumed tension between the law of Moses and the idea of resurrection.

On the surface, the argument seems to be valid, but once you look a bit deeper it becomes obvious that this is nothing more than an attempt to trap Jesus or paint him into a corner where there is no valid answer.

So, how does Jesus answer their argument? He makes it clear that they are wrong. In fact, they are wrong on two counts: They don't know the Scriptures and they don't know the power of God.

Before we look at those two issues, we need to consider what Jesus says in v. 25. *Discuss the misconception that we will be married in heaven or have a renewed special relationship with the one we were married to or our loved ones on earth.* It won't be that way. Jesus says that our relationships in heaven will be like those of the angels.

This is connected to the Sadducees misunderstanding of the power of God. It seems logical, from a human standpoint, to assume that death is the end. The spirit of a person is invisible. When one dies, he or she is buried, and the body decays and essentially disappears. So how can anything further come of it? And if the body could come back to life, they assumed that it would be no different than life is now? But that is showing our ignorance of God's power.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul discusses at length the reality of the resurrection. *Discuss the argument and read vv. 50-57.* God is more than able to take our natural bodies which rot in the grave and raise them up as spiritual, imperishable bodies. The resurrection is not impossible, for with God all things are possible.

The other accusation Jesus made was that they do not know the Scriptures. Their argument appealed to the law of Moses regarding what is known as the Levirate marriage, where a brother was expected to raise up a son for his deceased brother, if he had no sons.

So Jesus also takes them back to Moses – vv. 26-27. God did not say, "I was the God of Abraham..." He said, "I am the God of Abraham..." So he was making it clear that the patriarchs lived on, and with that it was implied that they would one day be raised again.

Yes, there is indeed a resurrection, and the Sadducees were quite wrong in their understanding. So if there is a resurrection, what about the reality of heaven?

The Question of Heaven

The promise of the resurrection is our assurance of heaven. That heaven is real is assumed throughout the Scriptures. From Genesis to Revelation heaven is spoken of as a real place. In the latter chapters of Ezekiel's prophecy, he gives us a glimpse into heaven, describing the heavenly temple, and the city and its gates.

As far back as the patriarch Jacob we find a vision of heaven. In Genesis 28, as Jacob was fleeing from Esau, God gave him a dream in which he saw a ladder reaching up into heaven, and he saw the LORD and heard him speaking. He recognized what he had seen and in v. 17 he says, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

The last chapters of the Bible, Rev. 21-22 give us a clearer picture of what heaven will be like, and we will look more at that next week. But for today I just want to go back to our text in John 14 for a moment.

As Jesus is trying to prepare his disciples for his soon departure, there is something very important that he wanted them to know. The separation that was coming was not forever. He wanted them to know that He was going back to his Father in heaven. It was and is a real place. And there He would be preparing a place – for them and for us, for all who believe in Him. And one day He will come back to take us there. What a glorious day that is going to be.

Conclusion

Yes, heaven is for real. Next week we are going to look in more detail at what it will be like. But for now, I would like to close with two important challenges.

1. If heaven, as a place of joy and glory is real, then hell, as a place of punishment and horror, is just as real.
2. Is your heart right with God? Have you repented of your sin and put your trust in Jesus Christ for forgiveness? That is the only way to heaven – see John 14:6.