

Week 3, Jan. 29

## Exploring Heaven

*What Is There To Do In Heaven?*

Write down in your own words in one or two sentences:

1. What you think Heaven is, and
2. Based on your answer to (1), what you think keeps the redeemed busy in Heaven?

(Please, take your answer to church next Sunday and if you wish email it to me no later than Friday, for my own preparation)

Before answering (1) you might want to read the 4 statements about Heaven below and CS Lewis' on what he thinks the Bible means by Heaven, see Week 2.

Perhaps you agree with one or more of these statements about what Heaven is, and can then say what you think the redeemed keep busy with. Perhaps you do not agree with any of these statements, then, what *do you* think Heaven is, and what the redeemed do there.

If you answer (2) with "Praise and honour God", try to say in what way. For example, does it mean Marion will play the piano and Ernst sing solos forever while others polish harps and sweep the streets of gold? Will the redeemed be in one long, long church service, and if not, what does it mean to praise and honour God?

Here are 4 statements about Heaven written in the last 10 years by some of our US cousins.

- "The thought of Heaven puts all trouble and grief in perspective" Mark Buchanan, (Christian author)
- Heaven is the "ultimate playground, created purely for our enjoyment" Anthony Destefano (Catholic priest)
- "You may not have known the reason at the time, and that is what heaven is for. For understanding life on earth" Mitch Albom (author, journalist)
- "God will supply us with everything we'll ever need to make us happy in heaven" Billy Graham

What do these 4 statements have in common?

What images does the Bible give?

What according to CS Lewis is the "rhythm not only of all creation but of all being"?

CS Lewis asked about keeping his library in Heaven. What books remained?

Lewis says in Heaven people still have to deny themselves and serve others. Does that sound like Heaven to you?

Will the redeemed be all the same, and equal?

### **Main Thought:**

- Week One: Heaven gives hope, purpose and meaning to life on earth.

- Week Two: The Redeemed will not be disembodied spirits, but redeemed spirits, in redeemed bodies, in a redeemed universe.
- Week Three: ????

### Handout

CS Lewis, *Problem of Pain* excerpts

I am considering why He makes each soul unique. If He had no use for all these differences, I do not see why He should have created more souls than one. Be sure that the ins and outs of your individuality are no mystery to Him; one day they will no longer be a mystery to you. Your soul has a curious shape because it is a hollow made to fit a particular swelling in the infinite contours of the divine substance, or a key to unlock one of the doors in the house with many mansions. Your place in Heaven will seem to be made for you and you alone, because you were made for it.

This may seem a perilously private and subjective notion of the pearl of great price, but it is not. The thing you long for summons you away from yourself... it lives only if you abandon it. This is the ultimate law – the seed dies to live, the bread must be cast upon the waters, he that loses his soul will save it. Hence, it is truly said of Heaven “in Heaven there is no ownership. If any there took upon him to call anything his own, he would straightway be thrust out to hell.”

“To him that over cometh I will give a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” What can be more a man’s own than this new name which even in eternity remains a secret between God and him?

And what shall we take this secrecy to mean? Surely, that each of the redeemed shall forever know and praise some one aspect of the divine beauty better than any other creature can? And this difference so far from impairing floods with meaning the love of all the blessed creatures for one another, the communion of the saints. Heaven is a city, and a Body, because the blessed remain eternally different: a society, because each has something to tell all others – fresh and ever fresh news of “My God” whom each finds in Him whom all praise as “Our God”. Union exists only between distincts; and, perhaps, from this point of view, we catch a glimpse of the meaning of all things.

But the eternal distinctness of each soul will never abrogate the law that forbids ownership in Heaven. Each soul will be eternally engaged in giving away to all the rest that which it receives. We need not suppose that the necessity for something analogous to self-conquest will ever be ended, or that eternal life will not also be eternal dying. For in self-giving, if anywhere, we touch a rhythm not only of all creation but of all being. For the Eternal Word also gives Himself in sacrifice.

From the highest to the lowest, self exists to be abdicated and, by that abdication, becomes the more truly self. This is not a Heavenly law which we can escape by remaining earthly, nor an earthly law which we can escape by being saved. What is outside the system of self-giving is not earth ... but simply and solely Hell.

CS Lewis, *Mere Christianity* p 189

Most of what I call ‘me’ can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.

Kreeft, *Everything you ever wanted to know*, excerpts

One reason I must develop my unique personality is to add my unique angle of vision to each other. We are not only members of the same Body but also, as Paul insists, “members of one another.”

For there is no more effective method of religious education than the presence of the saints. Sanctity is an extremely contagious infection. We often forget this dynamic, propagating aspect of sanctity. We think of it as merely “following Christ”, or “imitating Christ”. But “imitating” is monkey business; we are to *be* Christ, incorporated in his living, growing Body. Communion of persons entails personal recognition, thus immediately answering the oft-asked question: Will we recognize our friends in Heaven? In fact, *only* in Heaven will we really know our friends, from within.

Excerpts Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) *Sermon Fifteen* (compliments Pastor Jed)

Heaven is a world of love. God dwells in Heaven. Heaven is the palace, or presence-chamber, of the Supreme Being who is both the cause and source of all holy love. Everyone and everything there shall conspire to promote love, and promote the enjoyment of each other’s love. All... show forth the beauty and loveliness of God and Christ, and have a luster of divine love upon them. We know not particularly how the saints in heaven shall be employed; but in general we know they are employed in praising and serving God. And we have reason to think that they are employed so as to be subservient to each other’s happiness under God; because they are represented in Scripture are united together in one society, which can be for no other purpose but mutual subservience.

*Elizabeth Stuart Phelps (1844-1911) wrote this at age 24:*

“There was something about adoration, and the harpers harping with their harps, and the sea of glass, and crying “Worthy the Lamb!” And a great deal more than that bewildered and disheartened me so that I could scarcely listen to it. I do not doubt that we shall glorify God primarily and happily, but can we not do it in some other way than by harping and praying?”

*(Elizabeth goes on to portray Heaven as an intensification of the beauties of nature, an extended 19<sup>th</sup> century family with children playing rosewood pianos and adults listening to learned discourses. This vision of Heaven stresses the continuity of individuals, relationships, and environments between this life and the next. NL)*

Nathan Bierma, *Bringing Heaven Down To Earth* p. 58

The purpose of Heaven is not to make us happy but to make things right, to win back *shalom* and usher in the return of rightness and wholeness.