

What Will Heaven Be Like?

June 21st, 2020

Intro

Ed Welch wrote, “You don’t face death just once at the end of your life. Throughout your life you face what David, in Psalm 23, called “the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4). A shadow brings the looming sense that the dark is approaching. Walking through the “valley of the shadow of death” takes many different forms. Death is the ultimate loss, but many smaller losses also bring the shadow of death into your life. You have probably already faced some of these shadows:

Loss of health: Whether you are struggling with a chronic illness or a sudden catastrophic event, the losses that come with physical suffering foreshadow death.

Loss of loved ones: When death comes to those we love, we feel the shadow of death keenly. But we also experience loss when a relationship ends for any reason. When you experience betrayal in a relationship, you are getting a small, bitter taste of the alienation, isolation, and abandonment that is the ultimate experience of death.

Loss of youth: The years pile up, the hair turns white, the wrinkles form, the body starts to break down, and the memory starts to fail. It’s as though fingers of darkness are reaching out to you.

Loss of independence: As you age, you experience weakness in various forms. Old age can make you as helpless as a young child, but for children the expectation is of gain. As you age your expectation is only of loss.

Loss of usefulness: If you live long enough, you will outlive your usefulness in the workplace and watch life go on without you.

Loss of meaning: As you get older, possessions, other’s opinions, status, success, and whatever else you were striving for will lose their significance.

We should never minimize or trivialize these real losses. But what we can do is look ahead. Not with vague generalities about “a better place” but the real life that God has promised to His people. When we know our end, we can prepare for it and we can live differently now.

Randy Alcorn: We can only desire what we can imagine. If you think you can’t imagine Heaven – or if you imagine it as something drab and unappealing – you can’t get excited about it.

So what will heaven be like? What should we look forward to? If you know someone who had trusted Christ and passed away, where are they now? What is their experience like now, today?

1. **Heaven** is the place where God dwells.
 - a. Heaven is referred to 550 times in scripture.
 - i. OT Hebrew lit. means “the heights”
 - ii. NT Greek – ouranos – from which we get Uranus – that which is elevated
 - b. The Bible does use “heaven” in three different senses, which is why Paul in 1 Corinthians in describing a heavenly vision says he was caught up into the third heaven
 - i. First heaven, within our atmosphere.
 1. Psalm 147:8 – God “covers the heavens with clouds.”
 - ii. Second heaven, space or we call “heavenly bodies.”
 1. Genesis 1 when God made the stars in the heavens.
 - iii. Third heaven, is what we typically mean when we talk about “heaven” – it’s where the Lord dwells and rules His universe.

- c. Heaven is where God is.
 - i. In 1 Kings 8, Solomon repeatedly implores God to hear them “from heaven.”
 - ii. **Ecclesiastes 5:2b** For God is in heaven and you are on the earth
 - iii. It’s a place, not just a state. It’s where God dwells in a unique way, although God says He fills “the heavens and the earth” (Jer. 23:24).
 - iv. Matthew 6:9 – Our Father, in heaven
 - v. Jesus ascended to heaven in Acts 1:11
- 2. Our long-term home will be in resurrected **bodies** on a New **Earth**.
 - a. Key passages
 - i. **Isaiah 65:17** "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.
 - 1. **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.
 - ii. **Isaiah 66:22** "For just as the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me," declares the LORD, "So your offspring and your name will endure.
 - iii. **2 Peter 3:13** But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.
 - iv. **Revelation 21:1** Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea.
 - b. The timeline of events yet to come include the rapture, 7 years tribulation, return of Jesus, millennial kingdom, New Earth.
 - i. There is intramural debate about the first 4 events I mentioned among Bible believing Christians seeking to interpret scripture faithfully.
 - 1. Some don’t believe the rapture is a separate event from the return of Christ.
 - 2. Some believe the tribulation is referring to our present experience of suffering throughout this age or that it will precede the rapture.
 - 3. Some don’t believe there will be a literal millennial kingdom.
 - 4. We have a distinct teaching position at UBC on these topics but there are people who attend who hold different views, and we’re glad they’re here and we all agree on so many other critical things that the differences aren’t issues.
 - 5. However, the end of the story is the same with every end times chronology – a new earth where God dwells with His people.
 - a. MacArthur, *Biblical Doctrine*, “. . . the new earth will be a tangible place where believers actually dwell. . . The destiny for which believers are headed is no fairy tale and will be as real as the current planet that humanity now inhabits.”
 - b. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, “Christians often talk about living with God “in heaven” forever. But in fact the biblical teaching is richer than that: it tells us that there will be new heavens *and a new earth* – an entirely renewed creation – and we will live with God there.”
 - c. The physical creation will be renewed and we will continue to exist and act in it.

- i. Will there be trees, mountains, homes, food, activities, weather, etc.?
 - 1. In calling it a “new earth” we should expect that it is similar to what we think of as “earth.”
 - 2. Imagine explaining to a young child that you are moving into a new home, a better home. They are worried because they can’t picture this new home. What should they expect? It will be a *home* – it will have walls and a roof to keep them safe, warm, and dry; it will have a kitchen, bathrooms, and bedrooms. It will have a living room in which you can gather together. If it doesn’t have those things, you wouldn’t really call it a home in the way we use the word.

- d. The Bible uses many terms we are familiar with to describe what life will be like on the New Earth.
 - i. A lasting *city* whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:10; 13:14; Rev. 21:2)
 - 1. Rev. 21:2 ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.
 - ii. A better *country* (Heb. 11:16)
 - iii. Revelation 21-22 describes *trees, rivers, mountains, and people*
 - iv. We’ll have resurrected *bodies* (1 Cor. 15:40-44)
 - 1. Will they be different than our present bodies? Yes, they will no longer be affected by the curse. They will be patterned after Jesus’ resurrected body. But they will still be *bodies*.
 - v. We’ll *serve Christ* with undivided hearts and do meaningful work (Rev. 22:3)
 - vi. The New Jerusalem will be made out of precious *stones* (Rev. 21:19-21)
 - vii. There will be *homes* prepared for us (John 14:2)

- e. It will be similar but different. In what ways will it be different?
 - i. The curse will be rolled back.
 - 1. **Rev. 22:3a** There will no longer be any curse;
 - ii. “The curse” refers to all the consequences that came when humanity sinned in Adam.
 - 1. **Genesis 2:16-17** The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; ¹⁷ but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."
 - a. Death
 - b. **Revelation 21:4** and there will no longer be *any* death
 - 2. **Genesis 3:8** They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.
 - a. Hiding from God’s presence
 - b. **Revelation 21:3** "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

3. **Genesis 3:17b-19** Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life. ¹⁸ "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."
 - a. Effects on the earth – toil, weeds, death
 - b. **Romans 8:21-22** that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption . . . ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.
 4. Fractured relationships, injustice, physical sickness, and on and on. Everything that we look at and say, "This is not the way its supposed to be."
 5. "Whatever sin has touched and polluted, God will redeem and cleanse. If redemption does not go as far as the curse of sin, then God has failed. Whatever the extent of the consequences of sin, so must the extent of redemption be." Steven J. Lawson
 6. Martin Lloyd-Jones: Everything will be glorified, even nature itself. And that seems to me to be the biblical teaching about the eternal state: that what we call heaven is life in this perfect world as God intended humanity to live it. When he put Adam in Paradise at the beginning, Adam fell, and all fell with him, but men and women are meant to live in the body, and will live in a glorified body in a glorified world, and God will be with them.
- f. Randy Alcorn: The biblical doctrine of the New Earth implies something startling: that if we want to know what the ultimate heaven, our eternal home, will be like, the best place to start is by looking around us. We shouldn't close our eyes and try to imagine the unimaginable.
- i. We spent a couple days in a place of great beauty at the beginning of last week. We rode our bikes between green trees and a tumbling river. We Canoeed on a clear lake with snow covered mountains surrounding it. There are such remnants of beauty on our earth, even as it has been tainted by the fall.
- g. New Earth is the long-term place where glorified believers will dwell with God.
- i. Our fascination with the current state of believers is like someone who plans a vacation and spends their time wondering what the airport lobby will be like!
 - ii. Because it is where we will be with God, it's appropriate to refer to this as "Heaven" because that's where God is.
3. Believers who die now go to be with Christ in an ***intermediate*** heaven.
- a. We say "intermediate" because we recognize that it isn't our long-term home.
 - b. We will be with Christ.
 - i. **2 Corinthians 5:8** we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.
 - ii. **Philippians 1:21-23** For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain, ... having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better;
 - iii. **Luke 23:43** And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."
 - iv. **John 14:3** "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also.

- v. **Acts 7:59** They went on stoning Stephen as he called on *the Lord* and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"
 - vi. [They are with Jesus] and that is enough, because Jesus is what makes heaven special. If heaven by itself is so much better than earth, Lazarus would have been annoyed when Jesus raised him from the dead. "Thanks for nothing," he would have said. "I was really enjoying heaven, and you brought me back here? How is that supposed to make me happy?!" Wittmer, Michael. *The Last Enemy*
- c. Revelation 6:9-11 gives us some insight into what that is like. (Adapted from Alcorn and MacArthur)
- i. They died on earth and relocated to heaven
 - ii. They are individuals with self-awareness
 - iii. They have knowledge of world events and circumstances
 - iv. They remember their lives on earth
 - 1. They know that they were murdered for the faith while on earth.
 - 2. They are remembered for their lives on earth as well.
 - v. They don't have complete knowledge of everything
 - 1. They don't know when the Lord will bring justice
 - 2. But they are free to ask Him questions
 - vi. They see God's attributes in a way that makes his judgment of sin more understandable. ("holy and true")
 - vii. They have some body-like form.
 - 1. They can be seen, heard, wear clothing, they are aware of the passing of time (a little longer)
4. The souls of unbelievers go immediately into eternal **punishment** to await the "second death."
- a. Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)
 - i. Immediately taken to different locations
 - ii. No opportunity to cross between
 - iii. No opportunity to communicate with those on earth
 - iv. No second chance
 - b. Never a second chance.
 - i. **Hebrews 9:27** And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this *comes* judgment,
 - ii. A second chance is not consistent with the emphasis on sharing the gospel in this life and missionary zeal of men like Paul.
 - c. Revelation 20:11-15
 - i. The dead – great and small (no one escapes this – not Hitler, Kim Jong-un, not someone overlooked)
 - ii. Two books are described – One that lists all our deeds, one that has the names of those who are saved.

1. All are guilty in the first book. Those in the second book are forgiven.
- d. God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.
 - i. **Ezekiel 18:23** "Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked," declares the Lord GOD, "rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?"
 - ii. **1 Timothy 2:4** who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
 - iii. **2 Peter 3:9** The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.
5. Conclusion – more beyond
 - a. Near the end of the 15th century Spain controlled by sides of the Mediterranean Sea at the Straits of Gibraltar. Spanish coins had a picture of the Straits with the Latin motto, *ne plus ultra* – no more beyond. It had been the idea for centuries that there was “no more beyond” the Straits of Gibraltar to explore. Of course, we know now how wrong they were. In the 16th century they changed it to just “*plus ultra*” – more beyond because they began to realize how short sighted they were and how much more there was to the world beyond their coasts.
 - b. I think many are hesitant to consider their own mortality because they think there is “no more beyond,” or at least, nothing beyond that captures their interest. What we see in the Word is that there is definitely “more beyond” this life that we can anticipate.



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Loss of independence
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Loss of meaning

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A better *country* (Heb. 11:16)
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3. Believers who die now go to be with Christ in an *intermediate* heaven.

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2 Corinthians 5:8 we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

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