Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

What Heaven Is
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-12

As I mentioned to you this morning, we're going to start a series tonight on a new subject. The subject is heaven. And this is not going to be a like a sermon series, in many ways, but more like a class, at least tonight will be. I want to teach you what the Bible has to say by way of introduction to the subject of heaven. As I pointed out a couple of weeks ago, we live in a society of instant gratification, a society where people want to delay and defer absolutely nothing except payments. They certainly don't want to defer the gratification. They just want to defer the pain that goes with it. We live in a time when everybody wants what they want now, and we have the credit cards that allow us to buy what we don't have the money to buy, to go where we don't have the money to go, to do what we don't have the money to do. And then we pay from then on, hopefully. The indebtedness sometimes mounting up to the point that we cannot pay our bills and then people get themselves into deep problems.

It's reflective of an attitude that says, "I want what I want and I want it now." And I had mentioned to you a couple of weeks ago how we used to sing songs about heaven, and we don't sing songs about heaven anymore, rarely if ever. I can't remember a song about heaven being written recently because we're not into delayed gratification, and heaven is delayed gratification. We're not into anything being put off into the future. We're into instant gratification. We want it now, and we are glad to sacrifice the future on the altar of the immediate. We don't want to wait for anything. As a result of living in a society of instant gratification, a society of materialistic indulgence, the church has fallen prey to that, and we no longer have set our affections above, as Colossians 3 calls us to, but we have set our affections on things on the earth.

We really are not interested in some nebulous future, some place in space, as some people have chosen to call it. We are not committed to laying up our treasure in heaven as Jesus told us to, but rather laying up our treasure here. Certain television and radio preachers and ministries are having a great amount of success by promising people that Jesus wants them rich now, healthy now, wealthy now, successful now. We call it "the prosperity gospel," and it's very popular because people want all of the goodies now.

I was very curious when I was recently in a conversation with Jerry Falwell and asked him, "What do you think the future of the PTL Club is now that you've stepped down." He said, "It's my conviction that Jim and Tammy Bakker will be back." It's interesting that the underlying reason for that is that the creditors believe that Jim and Tammy can come back to the PTL Club and effectively raise all the

money needed to pay off all the creditors. It's almost inconceivable to me that people like that could come back into the public limelight and occupy a place of quote-unquote ministry in the Christian church. It's just inconceivable except for the fact that we live in a day when people want the prosperity gospel, and they'll give the money to whoever is selling it. People will buy into something they think will make them wealthy, successful, prosperous in this life, and that's what's being promised to them.

The church in America in general doesn't have heaven on its mind. And as a result of that, it tends to be indulgent, and selfish, and self-centered, and weak. It is consumed with its own indulgences. It desires to be comfortable with only passing thoughts of heaven. Contrast that with the fact that just about everything that's precious to us is in heaven.

Let me just give you a little bit of an insight into that. In Matthew's gospel, chapter 6 and verse 9, you have a very familiar verse that all of you know, "Pray then in this way," Jesus said, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name." And may I remind you, to begin with, and you don't need to try and follow me in all these verses, I'm going to cover many of them, but first of all, your Father is in heaven. In a very real sense, the One who is the source of everything for us, God Himself, is in heaven. Furthermore, in Hebrews chapter 9 and verse 24, "For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." Not only is our Father in heaven, but our Savior is in heaven as well. In Hebrews chapter 12, and verse 23, it says, "To the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven." Not only is our Father in heaven, and our Savior in heaven, but our brothers and sisters in the faith are in heaven. Old Testament saints are there, New Testament saints are there, everyone who has died in faith in Christ or faith in God in the Old Testament is in heaven. In Luke chapter 10, we find a most interesting statement in verse 20, and what it says ought to give hope to all of our hearts. It says, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this that the spirits are subject to you" - referring to His disciples who were casting out demons - "but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven." Not only is our Father there, and our Savior there, and our brothers and sisters there, but our name is recorded there. What does that mean? That means we have a title deed to some property there. We are citizens of that place.

Our inheritance is there as well. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to obtain and inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." Your eternal inheritance is in heaven. What do you mean by that? All the riches of God's glory and grace are set aside for you and for me in heaven. Our Father is there, our Savior is there, our brothers and sisters are there, our name is there; that is, we hold title to a place in that land, and our inheritance is there. We could sum a lot of that up in Philippians 3:20 where the apostle says, "Our citizenship is in heaven from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." Our citizenship is there. We are citizens of that place, we belong there.

In Matthew 5:12 Jesus said, “Blessed are you when you’re persecuted, for great shall be your reward in heaven.” Your eternal reward is there. In Ephesians 6:9, Paul reminds the believers in Ephesus that their master is there, their master is there. And in Matthew 6:19 to 21, Jesus said the only treasure you’ll ever possess forever is there, too.

So, when you think about heaven, you’re identifying the place where your Father is, your Savior is, your brothers and sisters are, your name is there, your inheritance is there, your citizenship is there, your reward is there, your Master is there, of course, being God and Christ, and your treasure is there as well. To sum it up: heaven is your home. We are strangers. We are pilgrims. We are aliens in this world. We are like space travelers who are on a planet not our own. We don’t belong here. Every time somebody in this world meets us, they’re meeting alien beings. We are the aliens, folks. We have arrived here, but our home is somewhere else. Everything we love is there. Everything we cherish is there. Everything valuable is there. Everything eternal is there. And yet, here we are in the church of Christ in the United States in this century, committed to indulging ourselves in this alien land.

Self-indulgent Christianity is the kind of Christianity that’s lost its heavenly perspective. The church today doesn’t hope for heaven, they hope they won’t go to heaven. They don’t want to go to heaven until they’ve had all that earth could possibly deliver them. And when that’s exhausted, and they finally are too old to enjoy it or too sick to enjoy it, then they’ll be glad that heaven is there to receive them. “But please, God, don’t send me to heaven yet. I haven’t been to Hawaii. I haven’t gotten my new car. I want to go to the Bahamas. I want to get a raise. I want a new house. God, please, no, not heaven.” What a jaded perspective.

John says in 1 John 2 that all that is in the world is passing away. And “if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” I think there are many people who claim to love Christ, but the fact that they love the world so much means that they’re not heavenly citizens at all. And like the old spiritual said: “everybody talking about heaven ain’t goin’ there.” But everybody goin’ there ain’t talking about heaven either. And that’s the other side of it. And we need to learn to live in the light of heaven. That hope should fill our hearts, should change our lives, filling us with the joy of anticipation that loosens us from this passing world. We can get so tied down to this world. We consume things in this world that will perish, instead of laying treasure in heaven.

Now, I know that some people think heaven is an imaginary place. Some people think heaven is a human dream for little children. Some people think it’s a wish. Some people think heaven is a state of mind. Some people think heaven is a projection of all that is good in humanity. Others think heaven is the immortality of truth and beauty. And you can read all kinds of things like that. But the Bible says heaven is a place. I want you to grab that, all right? It is a place, and all the people who love God are either there already or going there. Now, that’s pretty simple. Heaven is a place and all the people who genuinely love God are either there already or are going there to live forever in complete

perfection and glory. Now, we have to live in the light of heaven.

Now, let me give you a perspective on that. Turn in your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 5. Second Corinthians chapter 5. And let's see if we can't catch a little of the heart of the apostle Paul. Now, he's under a lot of persecution. If you go back - let's go all the way back to chapter 4 and verse 8. He says, "We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus that the life of Jesus may also be manifest in our body." In other words, we have it tough here. Afflicted, persecuted, perplexed, struck down, always carrying, as it were, the death of Christ around in our bodies, constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, verse 11; death works in us in order to make a life work in you. And he says in verse 16, "We do not lose heart" - we do not lose heart, in spite of all of this – "though our outer man is decaying, our inner man is being renewed day by day, for momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comprehension, or comparison." In other words, whatever we endure in this life can't be compared with the glory that it's producing in the life to come. The more you suffer here, the more glory will be there.

It's like what Jesus said in Matthew's gospel, when He said, in effect; James and John and their mother said, "Can we sit on the right hand in the kingdom?" And He said, "That's not for Me to give but the Father." And then, the implication was He'll give it to the one who suffered the most here for His name. The more you suffer here, the greater exaltation there. That's the way the Lord equalizes that. So he [Paul] says "our momentary light affliction is simply producing an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison." So, whatever you go through here is being compensated for eternally. A little temporal trouble for eternal glory.

So, he says in verse 18, "We don't spend our time looking at the things that are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things that are seen are temporal, the things which are not seen are eternal." We have an eternal perspective. We endure whatever the world has to give because we know it causes that we shall have a greater weight of glory in the eternity to come. We keep our focus on that. And here he comes into verse 1 of chapter 5 and says, "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down," that is if we die, "we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." We have another life. We have another form, another house.

Now, our earthly tent is in the process of being torn down, is it not? Sure. Somebody asked John Quincy Adams one time how he was. He gave an interesting reply. He said, "John Quincy Adams is well, sir, very well. The house in which he has been living is dilapidated and old, and he has received word from its maker that he must vacate soon. But, John Quincy Adams is well sir, very well." Well, that's just how it is. The outer man is decaying all the time, and the earthly tent is being torn down and when that's gone, we know we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, in the heavens. So, we look to heaven where we will have that eternal weight of glory,

that new house from God. He says, verse 2, “For indeed in this house we groan.” We groan in this house. I know we do. You do, I do, we all do. We groan because of the infirmities of our physical being. We groan because of the sin that reigns, as it were, in our flesh. We groan because we cannot be what we ought to be and do what we ought to do. We’re debilitated continuously in this human form, and so we groan along with all the rest of creation, as Romans 8 says. “Groan,” waiting for the glorious manifestation of the sons of God, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven. We want our heavenly body.

Now, do you feel that way? Can you identify with Paul? Can you say, “Oh, how I long to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven?” Or is your prayer more like, “Lord, how I long to get to the mall so that I may be clothed with whatever’s on sale at Nordstrom?” I mean, just where is your, you know, where is your desire? Where is your longing? I mean, if you look at the church today, we would have to say there are very few people wandering around pining their hearts away because they’re so deeply longing to be in the presence of God in heaven. That’s sad. But he says we long “to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, shall not be found naked.” Why do you want that, Paul? Why are you so anxious to not be unclothed but clothed with that eternal body? Verse 4, “For indeed while we are in this tent we groan, we are burdened.” Burdened by sin, burdened by sickness, burdened by death, burdened by tears and sorrow and sadness and pain and all the rest. We do not want to be unclothed. In other words, it’s not enough just for us to have our spirits go into the presence of God; we want our bodies as well. We want “to be clothed in order that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”

So here is a man who is literally longing for his heavenly form, longing to be in that eternal place. And now, “He who prepared us,” he says in verse 5, “for this very purpose is God who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.” Now, what did he mean by that? “The Spirit is a pledge,” as Paul calls Him in Ephesians 1, He is an earnest or an *arrabon*. That’s a Greek word that means “an engagement ring.” When God gave you His Holy Spirit, that was an engagement ring indicating that someday you’re going to be His bride and you’re going to be married to Him when you get to heaven. The Holy Spirit is the down payment; *arrabon* means “down payment, engagement ring, first installment.” It’s like earnest money, to borrow that old phrase.

So, the Holy Spirit is the pledge of our immortality, the pledge of our new form in the glories of heaven. Therefore, verse 6, “Being always of good courage and knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord for we walk by faith, not by sight. We are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be home with the Lord.” Now, can you say that? I mean, that’s a pretty straight statement. Can you say that the deepest desire of your heart is to be absent from the body and present with the Lord? And that’s hard for us to say because we hold so tightly to this life because it’s all we know. And because we experience love and the meaningful relationships that life brings to us, we become captive to this life. But, we need to be transcendent. And my purpose, I trust, in God’s grace over the next few weeks as we study heaven, is to loosen us

all up a little bit in terms of our holding so tightly to this life.

Imagine saying, “I prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” Notice the phrase, “at home with the Lord.” That’s home for us, with the Lord, that’s our home, that’s where we belong. As I said earlier, everything we love is there, our Father is there, our Savior is there, our brothers and sisters are there, our name is there, our inheritance is there, our citizenship is there, reward is there, and our treasure is there. That’s our home, and we long to go home. You all can identify with that. When you go away for a prolonged time, there’s something in your heart that longs to go home.

Now, we’ll come back to that text at a later time in our study but I wanted to introduce it to you because I wanted you to see the kind of heart attitude we’re after. We want to get to the point in our own hearts where we groan to be clothed with our heavenly form, where we long to be absent from the body and present with the Lord, where we are more concerned about the eternal weight of glory than the light affliction here, where we are conscious of laying aside all our treasure in heaven so that we can enjoy it forever, rather than laying it aside on earth and leaving it here. Some very rich person died, and someone asked a friend of his, “How much did he leave?” And the friend said, “All of it.” And that’s exactly what you’ll leave, all of it.

Now, let’s talk about some basic things regarding heaven to help us kind of get a start. First of all, heaven is referred to in Scripture about 550 times. If we’re going to be heavenly-minded and we’re going to long for heaven, we’ve got to know a little about it so we’ll have something to kind of pull us that way. The Old Testament’s key word for heaven is *shamayim*. It literally means, it’s a plural, it means “the heights,” “the heights.” The New Testament key word is *ouranos*, from which the planet Uranus was named. It literally means “that which is raised up.” So, it’s a general term in the sense that it means something that is high and something that is raised up. Now, when we look up in the sky and we look at the night sky or the daytime sky, we’re looking at heaven. Our eyes, however, can only go so far. Let me just give you this thought from the apostle Paul. In 2 Corinthians, he says, chapter 12, verse 2, “That I was caught up to the third heaven,” okay? Second Corinthians 12:2, “Caught up to the third heaven.” Now, that is very clearly an indication that there are three heavens.

So, let’s talk about the three heavens, all right? The first one is what we could call the atmospheric heaven, the atmospheric heaven. That is the space immediately above the earth. That is the air we breathe. That is generally called the troposphere. Sometimes when the Bible talks about heaven, it is referring to that first heaven. The atmosphere around the earth, it’s the air we breathe, it’s our environment in which we live. And when the Scripture refers to that, it’s pretty clear that that’s what it has in mind. For example, there are several places, but I think in Isaiah 55, verse 9, “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts, for as the rain and snow come down from heaven.” Yes, the first heaven. The first heaven is the atmospheric heaven where the rain and the snow come down. It says they don’t return there

without watering the earth and making it bear and sprout, and furnishing seed to the sower and bread to the eater. The hydrological cycle, which is the water cycle, occurs in the first heaven. It's the atmosphere around the earth. There are several references in the Psalms to that atmosphere as well. It says, for example, in Psalm 147:8 that God covers the heavens with clouds, provides rain for the earth. Again, that's the atmospheric heaven.

The second heaven - and Scripture refers to this as well - and that is the planetary area, the area where the stars and the moons and all of the planets move about. Scripture also refers to this heaven. In fact, way back in the first chapter of Genesis, God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens." "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens." And what He meant by that, He goes on to say: "Lights, two great lights, the greater light to govern the day, the lesser light to govern the night. And He made the stars also. And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth." And again, heaven there is the heaven of the planets, the heaven of the stars and the moons. The psalmist refers to that as the heaven as well. That's the second heaven.

Then, the third heaven, moving beyond the second heaven, is the divine heaven. Now, that's where God dwells. And that's where He dwells with His holy angels, and that's where He dwells with all the saints of all the ages who have been redeemed. That's the heaven we want to concentrate on: the heaven where God lives, where the holy angels dwell, where all the redeemed of the ages dwell and will dwell forever and ever.

Now, I want to give you one reference so that you will not be confused. Turn for a moment to 1 Kings 8:27. 1 Kings 8:27. It says, "Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee." Solomon says, "How much less this house which I have built?" Now, here the Scripture says that on the one hand, and even the highest heaven, or literally in the Hebrew, "the heaven of heavens," can't contain God. How can we say on the one hand that the heaven of heavens can't contain God, and on the other hand that the heaven of heavens is His abode? I'm not sure. I'm not sure how we can say that, but that's what the Bible says. There is a sense in which the heaven of heavens can't contain God, and yet there is a sense in which that's His abode. I don't think it's too difficult to understand. You can understand it from a simple human illustration. I have a place where I live, but there's a sense in which my house cannot contain me. It cannot contain me bodily at all times, and it certainly cannot contain the effect of my life, the effect of my influence and so forth and so on. So, in a very crass way, a very common way, we can understand that God can dwell in heaven. And yet heaven, in a sense, cannot contain God.

But there is a heaven of heavens where God dwells. It is His place. It is His home. It is His dwelling. In Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the High and Exalted One who lives forever, whose name is holy, I dwell on a high and holy place," He said. God has a place where He lives, a real place, a dwelling place. In Isaiah 63 and verse 15, "Look down from heaven and see from Thy holy and glorious habitation." That tells us where the place is, it's in heaven. He says in chapter 57, God has a place;

and in chapter 63, God, he says, “look down from Your place,” and he calls that place “heaven.” That’s the heaven of heavens where God dwells. In fact, in Psalm 33:14 it says that God looks from heaven, verse 13, “from His dwelling place He looks out.” So, there is a place where God dwells, and that place is called “heaven.” It’s the heaven of heavens, the third heaven.

In Psalm 102, just another reference. We could give you many, but here it says in verse 19, “He looked down from His holy height, from heaven the Lord gazed upon the earth.” In the New Testament, just so that you’ll have a New Testament reference, in Revelation 3:12, “He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, he will not go out from it anymore; I will write upon him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from out of heaven from My God.” And again the New Testament identifying God with heaven. God lives in heaven.

Now, let me give you a little bit of a quick trip through Matthew, just to kind of solidify this thought in your mind. All right? Open your Bible to Matthew 5:16 and let me see if I can’t nail this thought down and show you how important a thought it is in the New Testament. Now, follow, Matthew 5:16; get your Bible ready and see if you can’t pick up the obvious trend. “Let your light so shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who’s” - Where? - “who is in heaven.” Verse 34, “But I say to you, make no oath at all either by heaven for it is the throne of God.” Verse 45, “In order that he may be, that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” Chapter 6, verse 1, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them, otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven.” Verse 9, “Pray then in this way, ‘Our Father who art in heaven.’” Chapter 7, verse 11, “If you then being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him?” Verse 21, “Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.”

Jesus keeps repeating this. Chapter 10, verse 32, “Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess Him before My Father who is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.” Chapter 12, verse 50, “For whoever shall do the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother, and sister, and mother.” And over in chapter 16, and even in verse 17 there: “Blessed are you, Simon Barjona” - son of Jonah – “because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven.” Chapter 18, verse 10, “See that you do not despise one of these little ones” - a believer – “for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually behold the face of My Father who is in heaven.” Verse 14, “Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.” Verse 19, “Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they may ask, it will be done for them by My Father who is in heaven.” Verse 35, “So, shall My heavenly Father also do to you.”

Now, you get the feeling that Jesus wants us to understand that God's in heaven, don't you? Over and over and over He repeats it. In the sixth chapter of John, in identifying God and heaven, Jesus says in verse 33, "For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven." Obviously, the one who came from heaven was the Lord Jesus Christ, again indicating that that was the place where God dwelled. Verse 38, "I have come down from heaven." Verse 41, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." Verse 42, "I have come down from heaven." Verse 50, "This is the bread that comes down out of heaven." Verse 51, "I am the living bread that came down out of heaven." Verse 58, "This is the bread which came down out of heaven."

Now, what I want you to understand is that heaven is a place, and God lives there, and Christ came from there. It is not a figment of imagination, it is not a feeling, it is not an emotion. It is a place. It is God's place. It is the place where God lives. In fact, now watch this thought, it is so much God's place, follow this, this is a key to interpreting the New Testament. It is so much God's place that heaven became a synonym for God. And you find that in the New Testament.

Let me show you it. There are several illustrations. I'll just give you one or two. In Matthew 23:22 it says, and Jesus speaking, "He who swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by Him who sits on it." Heaven there is synonymous with God. You swear by heaven, you're swearing by God. They're really one and the same. Heaven is the place where God is, and it is so much His place that you can refer to one or the other and mean both. In Luke 15, verse 7, "I tell you in the same way there will be joy in heaven." What does that mean? Joy on the part of God. Verse 18, I love this. The prodigal son comes back, now listen to this, and he says, "Father, I have sinned against" - What? - "heaven." What does he mean? I've sinned against God.

Now, listen carefully. Whenever the Scripture refers to the kingdom of heaven, what does it mean? Kingdom of God. It's just another way to express God. You say, "Well, why did they substitute the word 'heaven' for God?" It's interesting to note that. The New Testament writers are not necessarily bound by that; they'll refer to the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven. Jesus refers to the kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven, but they mean one and the same. In the period between the Old and New Testament, there's a 400-year gap called the intertestamental period. During that period the Jews really highly developed the tendency never to use the name of God. That tendency had been there even at the end of the Old Testament era. They didn't like to use the covenant name of God because they thought it was too holy to come through their lips. And so, they began a process of substituting things for the name of God. And one of the things that came in the intertestamental period which they substituted for the name God was heaven. Instead of saying "I worship God," they would say "I worship heaven." Instead of saying "call upon the name of God," they would say "call upon the name of heaven." Since God's name they thought was too holy, they substituted the word "heaven." And by the time the Jewish culture of the New Testament is settled, any reference to the kingdom of heaven in their ears is simply a reference to the kingdom of God. It's the same reality. It's the place where God dwells, the place where God rules. So, to enter the kingdom of heaven is to

enter the kingdom of God. Heaven is a place.

Now, let me take it a step further. The apostle Paul says something very interesting in Ephesians chapter 1. Look at it for a moment. Verse 3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” - Now follow this; verb tense past - “who has—in the past—blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ.” Now, look at chapter 2, verses 6 and 7. It says that God in His mercy loved us, and when we were dead in transgression, verse 5, made us alive together with Christ. That’s our salvation by grace; you’ve been saved. “And,” past tense, “already raised up with Him and seated us with Him in heavenlies in Christ Jesus.” Now, listen to this, we aren’t in heaven yet. That’s a place. We’re not there. Though we’re not in heaven, we are in the what? The heavenlies.

You say, “What does that mean?” I’ll tell you what it means. Heaven is where God is; heaven is where God rules; heaven is where God dominates. We’re not in the place called heaven, but we are presently under the dominion of the King of heaven. So, we’re not in heaven, but we’re in the heavenlies in that sense. And what the writer is trying to say is, we’ve come under the rule of God. When the Bible says Jesus preached the kingdom of heaven is at hand, He meant the kingdom of God is at hand. And when He called people into the kingdom, He called them to salvation. When Jesus said you must be saved, He meant salvation. When He said you must inherit eternal life, same thing, He meant salvation. And when He said, “Enter the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven,” He meant salvation. So, when you become saved and inherit eternal life and become a believer in Christ, you enter into the kingdom of God; you’re under His rule, not in heaven but in the heavenlies, as it were. You’re under His rule. So, presently we don’t live in heaven, but we live in the heavenlies, and that’s why we are to have our preoccupation with heavenly things. We have a heavenly life. Our new life in Christ is life in the heavenlies. That is, it is under the dominion and the rule of God.

Now, what is heaven like? It’s a new order. It’s a new community of holiness. It’s a new fellowship of harmony with God and Christ. It’s a place of joy, and peace, and holiness, and love, and fulfillment. And don’t we experience that in part here? Hasn’t the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee or the pledge of that produced in us the fruit of love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control? All of those will be characteristic of heaven. We are experiencing them in a smaller way here because we, not in heaven, are in the heavenlies. The hymn writer said, “It’s a foretaste of glory divine.” The future heaven where we will be, we are tasting right now. We have the pledge of the Holy Spirit. We have the life of God within us. We have the rule of God over us. We know joy, and peace, and love, and goodness, blessing. We have come into a new kind of humanity, a new kind of community, a new kind of fellowship, a new kind of family. We have come out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. We are no longer under the dominion of Satan but under the dominion of God in Christ. We have a new life principle. “If any man be in Christ he is a new” - What? - “creature.” 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Old things have passed away and behold, new things have come.”

We are new creations. We are members of a new family. We are no longer in the family that we once were in. We are children of God. We are children of a new place. Galatians 4:26 says, “Jerusalem is our mother.” What Jerusalem? The Jerusalem of God where God rules. We have a new citizenship. Philippians 3:20, I read it to you earlier: our citizenship is not in this world; it is in heaven. We have a new affection. We are to set our affections on things above and not on things on the earth. We have a new storehouse; our treasures are to be placed there. So, heaven is a place, but it is also a sphere in this world where God rules and gives us a foretaste of glory divine.

Now, listen to this, the best of your spiritual experience is a taste of what will be commonplace in heaven. Your highest highs spiritually, your profoundest depths spiritually, your greatest blessings spiritually would be the commonest things of heaven. We are tasting in a small way the age to come, the glories of the life to come. So, we live now in the heavenlies, and we need to occupy ourselves with that heavenly kind of mindset. We’re part of a new order, a new community, a new fellowship. We possess a new life principle, a new family, a new citizenship, a new affection. And we’re just passing through this life in this world until we can get to the place where all of the heavenly reality becomes just that for us. It is now a sphere where we live under the rule of God and in the blessing of His Spirit. It someday will be that and a place where we will actually set our glorified feet and walk - a real place.

The prayer of Jesus - what a magnificent, magnificent prayer it is - John 17, listen to verse 24. I love this, “Father, Jesus says, I desire that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am in order that they may behold My glory.” That is Jesus praying to the Father to bring His own to heaven where He will live forever and ever. So, we’re in the heavenlies now and someday we’ll be in heaven. What a tremendous hope. In John 14, do you remember it? Beautiful promise, “Stop letting your heart be troubled, believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house there are many rooms, many dwelling places” - not mansions, folks, rooms - “if it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I’ll come again, receive you to Myself that where I am there you may be also.” See, Jesus wanted us to be forever where He is that we might see His glory and the glory of His Father. And He’s up there right now preparing a place for us. “In My Father’s house are many rooms.” Jesus is getting us a place ready, and we’re going to actually be in that place, as much as we’re in this place tonight. We will be in a physical form. We’re going to talk about that. What are we going to be like in heaven? It will be a physical form, in a sense, and yet it will be an eternal and glorified supernatural form in another sense. You say, “Well, where do you get the model for that?” The resurrected body of Christ. You remember He walked, He ate, and yet He ascended through space into heaven. And so, we’re looking for that place. We’re looking for that place. The Bible calls it “a city whose builder and maker is” - What? – “God.”

Do you know how much a city meant to people in ancient times? You see, in ancient times a city was a place of safety. A city was a place of refuge. Inside the walls there was brotherhood and harmony. Inside the walls there was security, protection, safety. And you can imagine the nomadic people of

ancient times wandering across the desert, vulnerable to the robbers and the thieves who would come and steal and take their lives, vulnerable to the elements. And you can imagine after months, perhaps weeks, of that kind of life how refreshing it was to enter the protection of a city, fortified and walled. And there to find harmony and fellowship, joy, companionship. You have to see a city from the viewpoint of the biblical timeframe. Cities today represent decadence. They represent crime. They represent all that is wicked and evil. And it seems to me that people in the city are longing for a country. But in those days, people in the country were longing for a city: a place of refuge, a place of protection, a place of safety. We need that mindset. We need to see ourselves as pilgrims and strangers wandering through this world looking for a city whose builder and maker is God, a real place where we will really go and really live with Christ.

Just as much as His disciples were with Him after His resurrection, so will we be with Him. Just as Thomas could touch His fingers and touch His side, so will we touch Him. So will we sit with Him. So will we sing with Him. A real place. And we are only now experiencing a foretaste of that place in the joy of walking with Christ, whom having not seen, we love. In the joy of knowing the Spirit lives within us as the pledge that someday we'll come to that place.

And by the way, the moment you leave this life as a Christian, you go to that place. There's no *limbus patrum* as the medieval theologians called it. There's no limbo place. There's no purgatory place. There's no pit that you wait in. You go immediately into the Lord's presence. "Absent from the body," said Paul, "present with the Lord." Philippians 1, "Far better to depart and be with Christ." Is that your heart's desire? We should, in this hour, live in the heavenlies to the degree that we long for the fullness of all that spiritual blessing could possibly be. Do you rejoice over the work of God in your life? Do you rejoice because He has given you all the good blessings you have? If you do, you're going to want more, and if you're going to want more, you're going to want heaven.

So, when I think to myself that Jesus actually prayed, that all who knew Him would spend eternity with Him to see His glory, how thankful to God I am for that. And I want to have the heart of Paul. I want to literally long to be clothed upon with my heavenly form. I want to get out of this world and on with eternal bliss. And I hope that by the time this series is over, and I'm already about two weeks ahead of you studying, that you're going to want the same thing. And it's going to have a profound effect on how you live your life in this world. Let's bow together for prayer.

Father, how thankful we are for this great promise, the promise of heaven. We're so unworthy, so undeserving. You've given us life, breath. You've given us Christ. You've given us salvation. And You've given us the hope of eternal heaven. Almost takes our breath away to think that we can leave this painful existence and spend forever in Your presence is overwhelming. We just bless Your name for such a promise. And, Father, it's not something we just wish for; it's something we count on because You've given us the pledge of the Holy Spirit. You've given us the guarantee. You've planted in us the One who has begun that good work that we'll be perfected. Father, I just pray that each one

of us will learn to live with heaven in mind. Loosen us up from this life. Loosen us up from this world. Help us truly to set our affections on things above where everything we really love is waiting for us. In Christ’s name. Amen.

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