**Heaven**

**OPENING:** 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18,For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so, shall we ever be with the Lord. 18Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

We comfort one another with these words and thoughts. Jesus is coming soon and there is a Heaven. Heaven is real. That is what I am going to talk to you about today.

I am not sure why we don't talk about Heaven very much anymore. We talk about walking closer to the Word of God, we talk about loving one another, we talk about letting our light shine before others and we talk about making a difference in our communities. Perhaps we may image Heaven to be an endless church service, singing one hymn right after another. Now we will have singing in Heaven, but Heaven is much more!

**Story:** A man died and went to heaven. St. Peter asked him, “Why should I let you into heaven?” The guy said, “Well, I tried to help other people.” “Can you give me an example?”

“Sure. Once I was in a roadside diner and a group of Hell’s Angels were in there bothering a little old lady. They had knives and guns and were scaring everyone in the place. So I stepped up to the leader and spun him around and punched him the face and said, ‘Hey! Why don’t you leave that little lady alone? And while you’re at it, you and your filthy friends clear out of here and get on your bikes and ride away.” “Wow, that was pretty brave, when did that happen?” “About five minutes ago!” There are a lot of jokes about heaven but most of them are certainly not based on reality, and they can be misleading. For instance, there’s nothing in the Bible that teaches St. Peter is going to meet people at the Pearly Gates and admit them into heaven. Peter can’t get you into heaven— only Jesus can—and that’s no joke.

Or use the story about: A Sunday School teacher was teaching his class about heaven. He asked the children, “If I sold my house and my car, had a huge yard sale, and gave all the money to the church, would that get me into heaven?” All the children answered, “NO!” “If every day I vacuumed the church carpets, cleaned the washrooms, and mowed the grass, would that get me into heaven?”

-Again, all the children answered, “NO!” “If I was kind to the poor, gave candy to children, and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?” Once more, the children answered, “NO!” “Then how can I get into heaven?” the teacher asked. A five-year-old boy shouted out, “YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!”

***Text: John 14:1-3: Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 2In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.***

**PRAYER**

Americans are fascinated with the idea of heaven; they just don’t know what the Bible teaches about heaven and how to get there. According to a Pew Research Poll 74% of Americans believe in heaven, and 54% believe if they do enough good deeds, they can earn entrance into heaven after they die. But only 39% of Americans believe in hell. The Apostle Paul certainly believed in heaven and hell.

For clarification, the Jewish traditions says there are seven levels of heaven. Islam also teaches there are seven levels of heaven. But the Bible teaches there are three heavens. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for heaven describe three different realms.

The ***first heaven*** is the atmosphere around the earth. For instance, the Bible says, “The LORD will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands.” (Deuteronomy 28:12) The first heaven is the atmosphere where the birds fly and where rain forms and falls. The ***second heaven*** is outer space. indeed, stance, when God made His promise to Abraham He said, “‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” (Genesis 15:5) The ***third heaven*** Paul mentions is the dwelling place of God (Paradise). This is the most common use of the word “heaven.” For instance, we read these words about Stephen when he was being stoned, “But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.’” (Acts 7:55-56)

This experience of visiting paradise had such a profound effect on Paul that it changed his life. Paul was so passionate about preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. He knew there was a torturous hell to be avoided and a tremendous heaven to be gained. He later said, “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain!” (Philippians 1:21)

For us in our current day and time. Many of us may not seem to be as excited about going to heaven as we have been in the past. Maybe it is because we are so busy and so many things may garnish our attention. I think one of the greatest tragedies of the modern church is that we have either ignored heaven or we have robbed heaven of its wondrous joy to the point that most Christians don't dwell too much on the idea of heaven.

As I mentioned before, one reason may be that we think it will be an endless church service. Depending on what type of services we are accustomed to, that may be exciting, or it may not. And if we think it won't be exciting and we think this way, we may feel guilty that we aren’t more ‘spiritual.’ So, what is Heaven going to be about?

Paul saw a vision of the third heaven, and he was so excited about heaven he couldn’t resist telling people about how they could go there when they died. I want to convince you heaven isn’t going to be a boring church service. It’s going to be the most fulfilling, most exciting existence possible. Yes, there will be singing but there are so many other things we can be excited about. Here are seven fantastic reasons why heaven will be a blast!

 (1) We’ll live in a wonderful new body!

The Bible teaches, “Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed. These earthly bodies we live in are only temporary.

There are two words used in **1 Corinthians 15** to describe these earthly bodies: “perishable and mortal.” That means that they grow old and eventually die, and then they decay. But Jesus will transform these temporary bodies into a body like His. The two words that describe our resurrection bodies are: “imperishable and immortal.” When we live in our resurrection bodies, we’ll never grow old or get sick. If you’re still young and healthy, you may not get too excited about your resurrection body—but for those of us who are getting older and feeling the aches and pains a little more every day, the idea of an eternally young and healthy body makes us smile!

 (2) We’ll retain a physical existence!

In **Luke 24:39**, The resurrected Jesus said, “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” **1 John 3:2** says, “We know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Our resurrection body will be like that of Jesus. His resurrection body was physical. He invited the disciples to touch Him, and He ate in front of them to show them He wasn’t a ghost.

We are not going to have harps, reclining ourselves on fluffy clouds with a spirit-like existence. Will we be fishing or playing golf all day? I am really not sure about that.

And some people believe their pets will be up in Heaven. The Bible does not mention that. I know there were animals before the Garden of Eden was corrupted. It may be reasonable to assume there may be other animals there.

***(STORY OF THE CAT IN HEAVEN)
I was in a church the other day where the pastor's wife loved cats and I asked her if her cats will be in Heaven. She smiled and said, "Yes". I then told her about a cat that went to Heaven. God welcomed him there and asked him if there was anything He could do to make his time more pleasant.***

***The cat said, "I have been around the barn all my life and I have had to sleep on the hard ground all my life. Do you think I could ask for a soft pillow to sleep on?"***

***God said, "Why not!" And gave the cat a pillow. The cat climbed and curled up on the on the pillow and went to sleep. He though he was in Heaven.***

***A couple of days past and a group of mice came up to Heaven. God asked them if He could make their stay more pleasant. One mouse said, "We are few in number because we are so slow. Could you give us something to make us faster?"***

***God gave them a pair of roller skates. He was overjoyed and skated off going all over Heaven. A few days later, God happen to come across this cat and asked him how he was doing. The cat responded, "I am doing great. This pillow you gave me is so wonderful! But I have to confess, you have outdone yourself by providing me those meals on wheels!"***

The Bible speaks about the lion and the lamb literally being a utopia on earth to come. The golden age referred to as the Millennium.

(3) We’ll enjoy heavenly food!

The Bible says, “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” **(Revelation 19:9)** Can you imagine tasting food that in comparison makes a gourmet meal on earth taste like dirt? Do you remember when the resurrected Christ invited his disciples, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ He prepared them a meal and then ate bread and fish with them. He proved that resurrection bodies are capable of eating food, real food. Christ could have abstained from eating. Christ will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.’” **(Philippians 3:21).** He showed our resurrected body is capable of eating.

The wonderful thing about eating in heaven is that nobody will overeat, and nobody will go hungry. We read in **Revelation 22:2** that in heaven the tree of life will be growing on both sides of the river of life, and it will bear its fruit. But this isn’t speaking of a single tree— how can a single tree grow on both sides of a river? It’s speaking of thousands and perhaps million of fruit trees.

It is kind of like me saying “the oak tree” is indigenous to Oklahoma, I’m not talking about a single tree! I am talking about a multitude of trees. We’ll enjoy the fruit and food of heaven for all eternity! Jesus said the Kingdom of heaven is like a man who held a great feast and invited people to come. Heaven isn’t going to be a funeral; it’s going to be a feast! Somewhere along the way, people got the idea hell would be party central and heaven will be boring, but just the opposite is true. Heaven is going to be a blast because that’s where the feast is!

(4) We’ll be friends with Bible heroes!

Jesus said, “Many will come from the east and the west and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” **(Matthew 8:11)** It should be a time of fellowship with others.

Who would you want to go up to in Heaven and have a conversation? David when he fought Goliath? Peter when he walked on the water? Paul when God sent an earthquake, and it shook off the shackles off his hands and feet? Noah about the ark? I believe there will be many more, even those who we may be surprised to see in Heaven. And we will rejoice with them for making Heaven.

(5) We’ll recognize our loved ones!

There is overwhelming evidence that we’ll know others in heaven, including our loved ones. When Jesus experienced His transfiguration, we read “And there appeared before them Elijah and Moses, who were talking with Jesus.” **(Mark 9:4)**. In other words, Elijah and Moses were there and they possessed individual identities. When we go to heaven, we won't be cloned to look like everyone else but have our own identify.

Someone asked if we will be mourning over one of our loved ones spending time in hell. I believe when I get to heaven, I’ll be so overwhelmed by a sense of God’s amazing grace that brought a sinner like me to heaven that I’ll never question God’s perfect justice.

(6) We’ll rejoice in the “no-mores”!

Heaven will be a blast not just because of who and what is there, but also by who or what won’t be there. I call these the “no-mores” of heaven. The Bible says, “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain...the city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light...On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there...nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” **(Revelation 21: 4, 23, 25, 27)**

Where is there a country without sin, crime, lawlessness, bloodshed, disease, death, sorrow and heartache? Heaven is a country or place in which there is the absence of all that is common to any land, for in God’s country there are no barriers, no walls or curtains to divide; no race barrier; no soldiers because there are no wars; no policemen because there is no crime or sin; no undertakers because there are no graves; no physicians because germs, fevers, pestilence, and diseases are unknown; no thieves because there is no darkness. **Example of people who did not know they were sick until they were well.**

Who wouldn't yearn for this better and more desirable place to live in which there are no separations, no broken homes, no crime, no hospitals, no beggars, no persons who are blind, deaf, dumb or destitute?

What a place! Now are you getting a little homesick for a place called Heaven?”

(7) We’ll see Jesus face to face!

The Bible says, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am known.” **(1 Corinthians 13:12)**

Heaven is going to be a wonderful place because we’ll see our Savior’s face. The one who saved us. The one we have been longing for. Nothing on this earth, such as skydiving, extreme sports, white-water rafting will compare to the thrill, like the thrill of seeing Jesus. They will seem tame or boring, next to Jesus. Being next to Him. Embracing Him. Eating with Him. Walking with Him. Laughing with Him. Worshiping Him. Just imagine it!”

Will I see you in heaven? You don’t have to say, “I hope so.” You can answer, “Yes, without a doubt.”

There is only one simple way to get to Heaven. We have to ask God to come into your heart, ask him to forgive us and to continue living a Christian live until you die or when He comes back in His glory.

John 14:6 says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6)

In 1871 Fr. J. Boudreau wrote a short story entitled “The Happiness of Heaven.” It’s a story about a kindhearted king who is hunting in the forest when he discovers a blind, poor orphan boy living there. The king takes the blind orphan to his palace and adopts him as his own son. The king gives to his blind son the finest education and training money can buy. The blind son loves his father dearly and is grateful for everything he has done for him.

When the son turns twenty, a surgeon performs an experimental surgery on his eyes, and for the first time in his life he is able to see. This royal prince, who was once a starving orphan, realizes how he has been blessed with fine food, fragrant gardens, and lovely music. But when he gains his sight, he doesn’t care to look at the wealth of his kingdom or the wonders of the palace. Instead, he only wants to gaze upon the face of his father—the king who saved him, adopted him, and loved him.

We’ll do the same thing in heaven. We were all poor, blind, wretched orphans, and the King of Kings has adopted us into his family. When we arrive in heaven and our faith finally turns to sight, we aren’t going to be looking for a pearly gate, or streets of gold, we’ll only have eyes to look upon the One who has redeemed us!

Optional: Dottie Rambo wrote a song, "Stop looking for the signs and start listening for the sound". We as Christians, seem interested in looking at all the signs of His return, but I believe most of those prophecies have already come to pass. So why not start listening for the sound…the shout, the voice of the archangel, the trump of God with all anticipation. Could this be the day?

Heaven is going to be a glorious and wondrous place. I hope and pray that we all will be excited about Heaven, not only when we get old and start preparing for that journey but keeping the thoughts of Heaven in our hearts and minds now and in the future.

For those who has accepted Christ as your savior, this is your blessed hope. If you have not accepted Him as your personal savior, you can do it today. You can make sure your future is secure with all the others here of this promise of Heaven. I will be down at the alters if you need for me to help pray with you.

References:

1) 1 Corinthians 15

2) Luke 24:39, 1 John 3:2

3) Revelation 19:9, Philippians 3:21, Revelation 22:2

4) Matthew 8:11

5) Mark 9:4

6) Revelation 21:4, 23, 25, 27

7) 1 Corinthians 13:12