

Sermon November 10, 2024 To Heaven and Beyond: Part 2

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen!

Today is Part 2 of the 4-part series *To Heaven and Beyond*. People are always wondering, and I often get questions on what happens at death and what it's like on the other side. So I've put together everything I know on the subject at this point, which isn't a lot, since the Bible – for some reason – just doesn't give us a lot on the subject.

Part 1 addressed the inescapable reason we die. It also relayed how our body and soul are torn apart at death, with our body remaining here on earth while our soul is carried to the place we call heaven.

Sometimes people say we enter eternal life when we die. This feels right because if our life ends here, then all that's left is to go on into eternity. That's not the best way to say it. Jesus said it this way. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.” John 6:54 When we are given the Holy Spirit, we receive all his gifts: true repentance; cleansing; holiness; faith; a new heart and mind; *and eternal life*. We already have eternal life. In that way, our hope is already half filled. We already have eternal life in our soul. Now we wait for our body to catch up.

We will spend some of our eternal life here on earth in body and soul. Our soul will spend some time in heaven. Then made whole again in the resurrection, we will spend the rest in the New Creation and whatever else the Lord has planned for us in that realm.

Another common position people have is that when we die – and since our soul then leaves our earthly body - somehow or in some way we enter into a timeless eternity. No time, no clocks, no past, no present, no future. No way. No how. We are created beings. Even with all the body and soul splitting and waiting and coming together, we will always be part of creation which is in the realm of time. Only the Triune God is outside of creation and therefore outside of time. We, on the contrary, are beings in time and space. While we are elevated to the place of the children of God, we won't be taken up so far as to be beyond the three dimensions. I'm not sure if we will always have use for calendars, watches, and

cuckoo clocks, but we will always have a past, present, and future. Even for all eternity. Hard to imagine, isn't it? That's why it's so easy to misunderstand.

We already have eternal life. Check. We will always exist in the realm of time. Check. So what's it going to be like when we are taken to heaven? This is where the real misunderstandings begin. I am trying to be as accurate as I possibly can on this subject, because there are so many pre-conceived notions about heaven that are just incorrect. Including those in my own mind. First off, and a hard truth to reckon with, is that our experience of heaven will not be in the body. Just like we heard from the Apostle Paul last week, our body remains on earth. "Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8) Only our soul is in heaven. He reinforces the truth in Romans, "But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness." (Romans 8:10) Our time in and experience of heaven will be out-of-the-body. I know it's hard to wrap our heads around this truth.

There are many beings in heaven. We get glimpses of them in the Bible, and it seems we will be able to communicate with them in heaven, but we will not be able to physically embrace Jesus, the angels who had charge over us on earth, mom, dad, or any other being. I often think about all those near-death experiences (NDE's) so many people have. Some see grandma, some see Jesus, some see and even hear from their sister who they had never met because she died before they were born. But if you examine these experiences carefully, people who have these NDE's never touch anything. They have no body. It's just their soul. We don't use NDE's to establish our teaching on the afterlife. However, granting that they are very probably real, it's nice to be able to find matches between what the Bible says and what these people experience. I haven't been able to match everything perfectly, but there are close similarities. Here, the lack of any physical experience seems consistent between the Bible and people's NDE's.

It naturally follows that if, indeed, we have no physical body in heaven, we will be quite limited in what we will/ can do. This does seem to be the case. One of the most popular notions is that in heaven we spend all our days singing and praising God. Well, the psalmists say otherwise.

Among the dead no one proclaims your name.
Who praises you from the grave? Psalm 6

What is gained if I am silenced,
if I go down to the pit?
Will the dust praise you? Psalm 30

The dead do not praise the Lord,
nor do any who go down into silence. Psalm 115

We can make all sorts of rationalizations about how this cannot be true, especially if you're like us and like to sing, but passages like these don't give us much wiggle room. If we have no physical body in heaven and if in heaven we aren't gathered around the throne singing God's praises, what WILL we do? The answer? Not much. We really have to go for a long shot when deciphering how we will spend our time in heaven, because the most specific references in the Bible about what we will do in heaven come from the most maligned part of God's Word: The book of Revelation. With that in mind, here goes.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!" Revelation 14:13

Here we find a specific description of something we will do in heaven: rest. That doesn't sound too bad. But resting sounds pretty inactive and boring, especially with everything we have in mind and the plans we have made for what we will be doing when we get there. Maybe another passage from Revelation will clear things up.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete. Revelation 6:9-11

Hmm. So here the dead in Christ can communicate with God, so they are conscious, not sleeping like in a coma or something. But after they speak, they are told to do some more resting. So, from what little we are told, heaven is a place of rest for us. Interesting. It looks that in heaven we will be doing just like what we have been putting on tombstones all these years: R.I.P. Resting in Peace. Those tombstone engravers were right all along!

Now don't go and give up the faith because heaven sounds so boring that you don't even want to go there anymore. As I explained in the introduction to Part 1, we still have two more steps to go through. The first is Jesus' resurrection and how in him we will also be made fully human again in our resurrection on Judgment Day. The final step is when heaven -where our souls will be resting until the last day - comes down to earth, the dwelling place of God will no longer be somewhere up above, but right here on earth, and Jesus will usher in his new and eternal kingdom where all the things we imagined about heaven – and more - will in truth take place on earth.

For now, God bless you with the fullness of his Spirit to keep you in eternal life and the hope of things to come. Amen.

**The peace of God guard your hearts and minds as you believe and trust in him.
Amen.**

Pastor Ron Breight Christ Lutheran Church Forest Hills, Pennsylvania

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