

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Heaven Holds All To Me

By Joe R. Price

The constraints of the flesh compel us to be cautious when trying to describe heaven. Many people create expectations of heaven after their own wishes, desires, and fantasies. If they love baseball, they believe heaven will be an endless game on the diamond. If one favors the sun and the sea, he may view heaven as an unending vacation in a tropical paradise. And so it goes. Heaven is frequently viewed through earthly lenses instead of with eyes of faith.

The Bible teaches us heaven is real and what to expect there. As with all other matters of the soul, we will let the word of God teach us about heaven so our faith rests in God and not in ourselves.

We have not seen heaven, but we are sure God's throne is there (Rev. 4:2). Heaven is the Christian's hope (Col. 1:5). It is a place of unquestioned purity, breathtaking beauty, never-ending light, and abundant provisions for the righteous. There God is eternally praised and served. All these descriptions and more are depicted with vivid figures in Revelation 21-22, where heaven is presented as the culmination of God's great, eternal scheme of redemption of His people.

As we grow older and approach the end of life, our mortality compels us to consider immortality. The wise fix their sights on heaven and live with firm faith, not choosing any path that strays from the one leading to the eternal home of the soul (Heb. 11:13-16). As we sing of heaven, the expectation of its glory and grandeur grows more brilliant. As we learn and teach the gospel, its lessons of redemption secure our faith and hope in the future home of the soul (Col. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

The holiness, purity, security, beauty, glory, provisions, and service of heaven are portrayed in Revelation 21:1-22:5. Three aspects of heaven detailed there warrant our reflection, thanksgiving, and preparation.

Heaven is a place of fellowship with God (Rev. 21:1-8). From the earliest days of creation, God arranged for mankind to dwell with Him (Gen. 3:8-9). Man's sin corrupted communion with God and triggered God's purposeful plan to redeem sinners (to bring *“many sons to glory,”* Gen. 3:15; Heb. 2:10). During the Patriarchal age, there were those who began *“to call on the name of the Lord”* and who *“walked with God”* (Gen. 4:26; 5:24). God set His tabernacle among men during the Mosaic age and dwelt with His people Israel (Lev. 26:11-12). In Christ, God's dwelling place is the church (Eph. 2:19-22). Similarly, and in the ultimate fulfillment of God's divine purposes, heaven's reward is eternal fellowship between God and His people (Rev. 21:3). In this fellowship, God removes everything that brings tears and death and sorrow, for sin and death have been banished to the lake of fire (Rev. 21:4-8). In heaven, all things are new (Rev. 21:5). There, refreshment from the water of life is free (Rev. 21:6).

To inherit eternal fellowship with God, we must *“overcome”* sin and death in Christ (Rev. 21:7; 12:11). Live for Jesus in truth, and heavenly fellowship with God will be your reward.

Heaven is a place of protection and peace with God (Rev. 21:9-27). Heaven is here viewed as a great city filled with the glory of God (Rev. 21:10). As Ezekiel saw the church as a city and a temple *“in the visions of God,”* John is given a glimpse of heaven as the eternal city (Ezek. 40-48; Heb. 11:16). In John's vision, the city of heaven has perfect security (*“a great and high wall with twelve gates,”* 21:12). Heaven is a perfect habitation that is spacious, secure, and splendidly arrayed (21:15-21). In heaven, there is eternal peace away from temptation, sin, and death (safety from everything that destroys close communion with God). Nothing

that defiles will enter heaven (Rev. 21:27; 20:10, 14).

God's presence is the defining glory of heaven, which is filled with His worship (Rev. 21:22-26). One's name must be ***"written in the Lamb's Book of Life"*** to obtain the reward of heaven's eternal security (Rev. 21:27).

Heaven is a place of provisions from God (Rev. 22:1-5). When God created Adam, He placed him in Eden, a garden watered by a river that sustained and nourished life (Gen. 2:10). From that earthly creation comes the figure of ***"a pure river of water of life"*** in heaven that proceeds from the throne of God (Rev. 22:1). In heaven, the tree of life (first found in Eden and from which man and woman were barred because of sin, Gen. 3:22-24) bears constant fruit by which the redeemed are nourished eternally (Rev. 22:2). The curse of sin is gone and the servants of God serve before His throne (Rev. 22:3). The servants of God will see His face, and because they belong to God, they will reign with Him forever and ever (Rev. 22:4-5).

Heaven is the reward of the righteous, where we have ***"an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away"*** (1 Pet. 1:4). Those who live in sin have no right to expect it. Their future is eternal death, darkness, and despair (Rev. 20:11-15; 21:8).

Prepare for heaven. Repent and obey the gospel of Christ, and inherit the eternal life heaven holds (Rom. 2:4-11; Mark 16:15-16; 1 Pet. 1:3-5). ■

Keeping The Big Picture Before Us

By Jesse A. Flowers

"Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25).

The faith of Moses ought to be inspiring to every Christian. He was raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He ***"was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds"*** (Acts 7:22). Every day he had access to every form of luxury and pleasure this ancient kingdom had to offer. He was surrounded by immense wealth and was directly connected to royalty. And yet he chose to align himself with the persecuted people of God. He chose rather to ***"endure ill-treatment"*** (NASB) with the people of God who were slaves of Egypt experiencing harsh bondage each day. He chose guaranteed mistreatment rather than enjoying the pleasures of sin for a season. He realized that path in life wasn't worth it in the end. The pleasures of sin are always fleeting. Those who are deceived by them and indulge in them are left empty and unfulfilled. There is no lasting satisfaction that attends sinfulness, only misery, sorrow, and condemnation. As the apostle John wrote, ***"the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever"*** (1 John 2:17).

Is there pleasure in sin? The Bible says "yes" there is. Is it worth it? Why don't we ask David (2 Sam. 11-12) or Judas Iscariot (Matt. 26-27)? As someone once said, ***"Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay."*** No, the temporary pleasure of sin is never worth it. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23). Our sins separate us from God (Isa. 59:1-2). There is no peace for the wicked (Isa. 48:22). The consequences of fleeting sin will often destroy your life like it did to David. And if unrepented of, it will ultimately cost you your soul (Luke 12:20). As Jesus asked, ***"For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"*** (Mark 8:36).

Let us be wise and learn from the example of Moses. Let us possess that kind of faith. Let us always be willing to suffer affliction with the people of God, rather than love the world and the things of the world (1 John 2:15-16) that will be burned up in that Day (2 Pet. 3:1-14). Let us always keep the BIG picture before us, as Moses did, and look to the reward (Heb. 11:26), the eternal reward of heaven! ■

Service Times — Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM — Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Tommy Glendol McClure, Editor and Evangelist - 925-759-4357

Web Site: www.lodicachurchofchrist.com — Email: lodicachurchofchrist@gmail.com — Phone: 209-365-9250