

What We Will Do, Part 1

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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REVIEW

I. WHAT HEAVEN IS

II. WHERE HEAVEN IS

III. WHAT HEAVEN IS LIKE

IV. WHAT WE WILL BE LIKE

V. HOW WE WILL RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER

VI. HOW WE WILL RELATE TO GOD

LESSON

VII. WHAT WE WILL DO

In preparing to preach about heaven, I read several books, various journal articles, and a file that I have collected through the years with comments on heaven. It's interesting to discover what people think heaven is like and what they think we will do there. Some suggest what you have seen depicted in cartoons--that we'll sit on the edge of a cloud and play a harp. Others suggest that we'll do things like polish the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. Some have suggested that we won't do anything at all. Early twentieth-century English writer Rudyard Kipling must have had that concept in mind in his verse "When Earth's Last Picture Is Painted":

When earth's last picture is painted
And the tubes are twisted and dried,
When the oldest colours have faded,
And the youngest critic has died,
We shall rest, and faith, we shall need it--
Lie down for an aeon or two,
Till the Master of All Good Workmen
Shall put us to work anew.

He mentions work eventually, but the "aeon or two" of doing absolutely nothing bothers me. I find it difficult to do nothing for thirty minutes, much less eternity! Kipling's is almost a Rip Van Winkle view of heaven. Will we sleep in heaven? Will we merely loiter around heaven, strolling and strumming forever? Or will we have something to do--something to plan for, some responsibility, some goal that will demand all our powers to effect?

A. Negatively

Part of understanding what we will do in heaven is understanding what we will not do. We will not sin. So we will never need to confess it, or struggle with it. We'll never have to apologize to anyone. We'll never experience guilt. We'll never need to write a letter to correct something we said or did. We won't have to straighten out something that got confused because nothing will ever be confused. We won't have to repair or replace anything because nothing will ever malfunction or wear out. We won't have to help anyone because no one will ever need help. We'll never have to battle Satan or demons. We'll never have to deal with sinners. We won't have to defend ourselves against attack because we won't ever be attacked.

We'll never be sad or lonely. We'll never be hurt emotionally or physically. We'll never need to be

cured, counseled, coddled, or entertained. We'll never experience anything but absolute joy. We'll never grieve because we won't lose anyone or miss anyone. We won't have to be careful because we will never make a mistake. We won't ever have to plan for emergencies or avoid danger because we won't encounter either.

B. Positively

The essence of heaven is experiencing unmixed and unending joy, having a perfect body and soul, and dwelling with the Lamb and the Father in intimate fellowship forever. But what will we do? Although the Bible doesn't specify what our individual responsibilities will be, it does provide a general description of our roles.

1. Worship

a) Explained Heaven will be a place of eternal, loving, adoring worship throughout eternity. Without interruption we will continually praise God. Our worship won't be related to a particular place because all heaven will be a temple. In fact, God's purpose in salvation, as clearly delineated in Scripture, was to create an eternal group of worshipers. Speaking to the Samaritan woman, Christ said, "Such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers" (John 4:24). Philippians 3:3 describes Christians as those who "worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh." In heaven we will have a fuller knowledge of who God is and what He has done than we have now. That deep knowledge of His attributes, deeds, and presence will burst forth in unending praise. What thrills me most about our heavenly praise is that it will be perfect. There are many times when with all my heart I want to praise God, but other thoughts crowd in and clutter my mind. Have you ever been praising God and had some evil or trivial thought enter your mind or some nonsensical notion interrupt your praise? How discouraging to realize how earthbound we really are!

In heaven our praise will always come out of pure hearts with pure motives and no distractions. b) Illustrated A quick survey of the book of Revelation will help us to grasp the importance of praise in heaven. In Revelation 14:6-7 John says, "I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people; and he said with a loud voice, 'Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; and worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of water.'" The angel is proclaiming the eternal gospel, the everlasting good news. It is basically a call to reverence, glorify, and worship God. That is what God calls all men to do: The gospel is a mandate to praise God. Revelation 4:10-11, which speaks of events occurring in heaven, says, "The twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, 'Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou didst create all things, and because of Thy will they existed and were created.'" In chapter 5 the scene remains in heaven: "When [the Lamb] had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, having each one a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy art Thou to take the book, and to break its seals; for Thou wast slain, and didst purchase for God with Thy blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. And Thou hadst made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.' And I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads [i.e. limitless numbers], and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.' And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.' And the four living creatures kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders fell down and worshiped" (vv. 8-14). Revelation 7 says, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude, which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues,

standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever, Amen'" (vv. 9-12). Revelation 11 says, "The seventh angel sounded; and there arose loud voices in heaven, saying, 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.' And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give Thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who art and who wast, because Thou hast taken Thy great power and hast begun to reign'" (vv. 15-17). Revelation 15 says, "I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they sang the song of Moses the bondservant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; for all the nations will come and worship before Thee, for Thy righteous acts have been revealed'" (vv. 1-4). Verse 1 refers to such praise as a "sign in heaven." Revelation 19 begins, "After these things I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, 'Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her.' And a second time they said, 'Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever'" (vv. 1-3). We will praise God eternally not only for His grace but also for His justice. Verse 4 continues, "The twenty-four elders, the four living creatures fell down, worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, 'Amen. Hallelujah!' And a voice came from the throne, saying, 'Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.' And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns'" (vv. 4-6). In heaven we will be preoccupied with praise! That's a strong reason for being preoccupied with it now. Perfect praise will be the highest, noblest expression of our perfected being. We will recognize the splendor of God. We will see clearly His majesty. We will see His glory and perfection. And gazing on God's perfections eternally will compel us to offer uninterrupted, unrestrained, adoring, loving worship--it will be our delight! In *The City of God* Saint Augustine wrote, "How great will be that felicity [joy], where there will be no evil, where no good will be withheld, when there will be leisure for the praises of God, who will be all in all! What other occupation could there be, in a state where there will be no inactivity of idleness, and yet no toil constrained by want? I can think of none" ([Baltimore: Penguin, 1972], p. 1087). We will spend eternity doing what we most desire to do-- praising God. Professor E.L. Maskell wrote, "The sole justification for praising God is that God is praiseworthy. We do not praise God because it does us good, though no doubt it does. Nor do we praise Him because it does Him good, for in fact it does not. Praise is thus strictly ecstatic in the sense that it takes us wholly out of ourselves; it is purely and solely directed upon God ... Praise is entirely directed upon God. It takes our attention entirely off ourself and concentrates it entirely upon Him" (Grace and Glory [N.Y.: Morehouse-Barlow, 1961], pp. 68-69). That is the value of praise. Our praise will then rise out of a pure motive: perfected love. Early twentieth-century hymnologist Charles Gabriel wrote in his hymn "O That Will Be Glory," "When all my labors and trials are o'er

And I am safe on that beautiful shore, Just to be near the dear Lord I adore

Will through the ages be glory for me. He was right except in the last line--it will be glory for God. In fact, our greatest joy will be giving glory to God. We will adore God forever with all our creative energies-- through our thoughts, words, and song. We will express ourselves in praise through

collective means and through very intimate and personal means. We will praise God every way that's possible for perfect bodies and souls.

2. Reign

In addition to worship I believe Scripture clearly teaches that we will reign with Christ, having oversight in the operation of the eternal state.

a) A delegated reign In this life every Christian has been given certain responsibilities within the church. Each one of us has received a spiritual gift from God that is to be used for the common good (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4). God will operate His Kingdom in heaven much the same way He operated His Kingdom here: delegating its operation to His people. There will forever be a sphere of responsibility and authority. b) A perfect reign In heaven we will never fail to meet our responsibilities. In contrast Peter—who was continually given responsibilities—continually failed. He finally wanted to leave the ministry, partly because he couldn't stand his own failure. He was told to wait for the resurrected Christ in Galilee, but he decided to go fishing instead (John 21:3). I believe Peter was returning to his old trade, tired of being unable to accomplish what the Lord had delegated to him. Happily things soon turned around for him. But in heaven, we will never have to face failure. I live with self-imposed pressure and God-imposed pressure. Although I experience false guilt for not measuring up to my self-imposed pressure, I also experience real guilt because I don't measure up to what God expects. I often have the lingering feeling that I'm wasting time and energy regardless of how much I do. Being called to serve Christ in this world is a precious opportunity I want to make the most of, so I chasten myself when I don't make the best use of my time. So I look forward to the day when I will do everything the Lord gives me to do perfectly! c) A promised reign First Peter 1:3-4 says, "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 through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." We have an inheritance in heaven right now. It's reserved for us and will never fade away. It's imperishable. And it's ours! An inheritance is something you receive from someone else. In the Jewish context it's a sphere of responsibility or rule that a father bequeaths to his children. As we have seen in our previous studies, our inheritance includes eternal life, heaven, holiness, joy, peace, and the presence of God. In addition, Romans 8:17 says that we are "fellow heirs with Christ." However Christ wasn't an heir to eternal life—He already had eternal life. Similarly, He already had joy, peace, and holiness. The essence of Christ's inheritance is that He is heir to this world—a sphere of rule. In Psalm 2:8 the Father tells the Son, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance." Christ's inheritance is a sphere of authority over nations, demons, and the holy angels. So the phrase "fellow heirs with Christ" emphasizes that we share Christ's rule over the earth. In Revelation 5:1-3 John says, "I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?' And no one in heaven, or on the earth, or under the earth, was able to open the book, or to look into it." That book is the title deed to the earth. When someone wrote a will in New Testament times, often he would roll it up seven times, putting a seal after each turn. To read the will you had to break all seven seals. In Revelation 5:4-5 John continues, "I began to weep greatly, because no one was found worthy to open the [scroll], or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, 'Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.'" Christ alone has the right to break all seven seals. The unfolding judgments that follow picture Christ's progressive unfolding of the title deed to the earth. We will reign with Christ over the earth. I don't know what each of our specific duties will be, but we will have authority. Speaking about those who will be in heaven, Revelation 22:5 says, "They shall not have need of the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever." First Corinthians 6:3 adds that "we shall judge angels." We will have authority and responsibility over

angels. In Matthew 19:28 Jesus says, "Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration [the rebirth of the Kingdom] when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Christ tells the apostles that they will reign over the twelve tribes of Israel--they already have their duty specified. He tells the rest of us that we have an inheritance, a sphere where we will co-reign with Christ forever and ever.d) A proportionate reignBeginning in Matthew 25:14, Christ tells the familiar parable about a man who went on a journey and left five talents to one servant, two to another, and one to the last. When the master returned, he found that the slave with five talents had made five more talents, the slave with two had made two more, and the slave with one had hidden his, so he only had the one talent to return. To the one with ten talents he said, "Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master" (v. 21). I believe that is a picture of heaven for the faithful person who made the most of his spiritual gifts by serving others. The more faithful you are in this life, the more responsibility you will be given in the life to come. Somehow our rule in heaven is proportionate to our faithfulness in this life. Some may wonder why there should be any distinction between the one who received five and the one who received two--they both doubled what they had been given. God is equitable and just, but He is also sovereign. And in this life He has chosen to give gifts to some that will allow them to minister to more people than others. In eternity God will exercise His sovereign purpose in the same way. We will have differing responsibilities. But no one will be jealous, boastful, or envious because we'll all be perfect. We have unequal opportunity here. Some people heard the gospel when they were young and walked with Christ for years. Others came to Christ a week before they died. Someone could ask, "Was God fair to let that person live his whole life in sin and corruption before saving him? But God is sovereign and has the right to do what He chooses. The potter does what He wants, and the clay has no right to ask questions. None of us will rule over a tribe of Israel, but the apostles will. It isn't a question of better or worse; it's a question of God's design for us. We all have different capacities, and God will use those capacities according to His predetermined plan. In heaven you will be the fulfillment of everything God intended for you. The U.S. Army advertises, "Be all that you can be." But the army can't do that. Only God can make you all that you can be-- and He will someday in heaven. I believe the parable of the talents pictures heaven because when the Lord confronts the slave with one talent, He says, "Cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness" (v. 30)--a picture of hell. The contrast is that one slave is in hell and the other two are in heaven. Our Lord portrays heaven as a place of sharing His joy and reigning with Him. In Luke 19 Christ says, "A certain nobleman went to a distant country ... and he called ten of his slaves and gave them ten minas" (v. 12). Verses 15-16 say, "It came about that when he returned, after receiving the kingdom, he ordered that these slaves, to whom he had given the money, be called to him in order that he might know what business they had done. And the first appeared, saying, 'Master, your mina has made ten minas more.'" That slave responded to God's call and made the most of his spiritual opportunities. The master said to him, "'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, be in authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Your mina has made five minas.' And he said to him also, 'And you are to be over five cities'" (vv. 17-19). We will have authority in heaven. In Revelation 3:20-21 Christ tells the Laodicean church, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me. He who overcomes [i.e. a believer; 1 John 5:4-5], I will grant to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." So the Bible stresses our ruling in heaven.

CONCLUSION

In heaven you will not spend most of your time sitting on the edge of a cloud and playing a harp, strolling golden streets, or picking flowers in a massive celestial garden. We will be busier than we have ever been, yet will do perfect work and never grow tired. Forever you will fulfill the inheritance

God has given you yet rest at the same time. People sometimes tell me that I need rest. But when I rest, I don't want to do nothing; I want to do something different. God has built into human nature a drive to accomplish a goal and objective. One of life's greatest pleasures is satisfaction over a job well done. In heaven you'll be able to smile in the presence of God, knowing that each task in the sphere of your delegated authority will be executed perfectly. That will be a small part of the praise you offer to God.

The measure of our responsibility there will be related to the measure and use of our giftedness here. How you live right now dictates how you will serve then. Be sure to make the most of your spiritual privileges, and reap the benefits both now and later.

Focusing on the Facts

1. Explain what we will not do in heaven.
2. What is the essence of heaven?
3. What was God's purpose in salvation? Support your answer with Scripture.
4. Explain the problems we have praising God now.
5. Explain the meaning of Revelation 14:6-7.
6. What passages in Revelation establish the importance of praise in heaven? Explain each.
7. What will be the motive of our praise in heaven?
8. In what way will God's heavenly Kingdom be like His Kingdom now?
9. What is Christ an heir to?
10. What is "the book" in Revelation 5:1-3?
11. What will be the apostles' duty in heaven (Matt. 19:28)?
12. What does the parable of the talents teach us about heaven?
13. Who is "the overcomer" in Revelation 3:20-21?

Pondering the Principles

1. Although the Bible doesn't tell us everything about heaven, what it does tell us should elicit unending praise. When we consider what we were apart from Christ and what we will enjoy in heaven because of Him, our lives should be one mighty chorus of praise. Take time now to express to God how thankful and full of praise you are because of the place He is preparing for you. Ask Him for a greater awareness of the fleeting value of this world and the surpassing value of the world to come. Begin now what we will do perfectly in heaven: praising God.
2. It is sobering to realize that our opportunities in heaven are related to our faithfulness here. Every Christian has the duty to minister to his family, fellow believers, needy people, and unbelieving friends and acquaintances. How faithful have you been in fulfilling each of those responsibilities? Have you allowed trivial things to preoccupy your mind, time, and energies? If you have remained faithful, why? Is it your love for God and an awareness of His love that compels you or is it something else? Set aside some time today to reflect on your service for Christ and earnestly ask Him that you might make the best use of your time on earth.

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