

Heaven

What is your heaven like?

It seems that most people think there is a Heaven somewhere, and it seems that most think they are going there. Survey data says that about 75% of people believe in heaven, but interestingly, less than 60 % believe in Hell. And just so you know, about 90% of Republicans believe in Heaven but only about 80% of Democrats do.

So people seem to have it pretty well in mind as to whether Heaven exists or not. But when people are asked what heaven is like. Things get pretty fuzzy and the answers are all over the place from floating on a cloud playing a harp to the more realistic definition which we will examine a bit today. Some people even indicate that they may be bored in Heaven if all you do is float around on a cloud and play a harp and as such they are not sure whether they want to go there or not.

The Bible tells us quite a bit about heaven. Genesis 1:1 says "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

We know from the Bible that God's dwelling place is in Heaven and that he operates from there.

In Genesis 22 Abraham has taken Isaac up on the mountain to sacrifice him as God told him to do, but in verse nine it says [9] When they reached the place God had told him about, Abraham built an altar and arranged the wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. [10] Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. [11] But the angel of the LORD called out to him from heaven, "Abraham! Abraham!" and stopped the sacrifice. So God contacted Abraham via an angel from Heaven.

As Moses was leading the people out of Egypt they became hungry. In Exodus 16:4 we read [4] Then the LORD said to Moses, "I will rain down bread from heaven for you.

So the Bible indicates here and in many other scriptures that when God wants to intervene in the affairs of men, He sends the intervention from Heaven.

We can see that the original Garden of Eden was somewhat like Heaven will be, at least it was until sin entered the picture. God and man existed in a common plane of existence. They walked and talked together. They had a same place relationship. Then man chose to change that relationship by listening to Satan.

When man broke his relationship with God by following Satan rather than God, things changed. Rather than walking and talking together with God in the Garden, Genesis 3:8 tells us [8] Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

So sin caused a separation from God. Sin caused the creation to fall under the curse of death just as God said. As soon as disobedience toward God, SIN entered creation, everything began to deteriorate and die.

Nothing was like it was before sin, except that God loved His creation and wanted His creation to love Him back. Let me repeat that, nothing was like it was before sin, except that God loved His creation and wanted His creation to love Him back.

But even at that time God had structured a plan so that those who truly loved Him and had faith in Him would be able to spend an eternity with Him in a perfect love relationship in a place called Heaven.

As we work our way through the Bible we find that John the Baptist began Preparing the Way for our relationship with God to be restored. The Bible says in Matthew [3:1] In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea [2] and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." So the teaching about Heaven began to be realized as John the Baptist began preaching.

The Bible tells us that Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized. And the story continues by telling us what happened right after Jesus was baptized by John. In Matthew 3:16 it says [16] As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting

on him. [17] And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." God was once again interacting with this world from Heaven and gave us a preview of what was going to happen with His Holy Spirit and how it would come to earth to be our teacher, comforter and helper.

If we follow the life of Jesus through the Bible we see that He gives us some hints of what heaven will be like.

Matthew 25:31 (NIV) The Sheep and the Goats

[31] "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. [32] All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. [33] He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

[34] "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.

Here we see that God in His foreknowledge of what was going to happen to the creation, had prepared Heaven, from the time of creation, for those who love Him.

Jesus preaching the Sermon on the Mount (or the Beatitudes) in Matthew 5:3 said [3] "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

What does it mean to be "poor in Spirit". Billy Graham explains it this way.

We must be humble in our spirits. If you put the word "humble" in place of the word "poor," you will understand what He meant. We must be humble in our spirits.

In other words, when we come to God, we must realize our own sin and our spiritual emptiness and poverty. We must not be self-satisfied or proud in our hearts, thinking we don't really need God. If we are, God cannot bless us. The Bible says, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

Jesus encourages us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven rather than having all kinds of junk sitting around our place or stored in our barn.

In Matthew 6:19 Jesus talks about that [19] "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. [20] But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. I've got some stuff sitting around that's getting pretty rusty and it won't do me a bit of good once I pass through the gateway to Heaven.

Jesus also tells us how valuable a home in Heaven is and how getting there should be the most important item in our lives. In Matthew 13:44 Jesus gives us a couple examples of the value of Heaven and how our total being should be focused on attaining an eternal home there.

Jesus says [44] "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. [45] "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. [46] When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

Insuring that we are traveling the road to a mansion in heaven should be of utmost importance in our life and our daily living. Jesus indicates that we should be willing to give up all that we have to insure that we have a home waiting there.

In Matthew 6:25 Jesus says Do Not Worry. [25] "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? [26] Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? [27] Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life? . [34] Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Not worrying about stuff is pretty hard for me. I trust God, but there is a lot of stuff in my life that just always seems to need my attention. Well let me tell you this, when I get to Heaven there will be absolutely nothing that needs my attention anymore, nothing for me to worry about.. I love the song written by Doyle Lawson entitled "I Won't Have to Worry Anymore". Just listen to a bit of the lyrics from the song.

Down here my burden's heavy and the road is rough and long. Sometimes my feet get weary and so sore. But a brighter day is coming soon I'll step on Heaven's shore and I won't have to worry anymore

Chorus:

I won't have to worry When I reach the other shore All my troubles will be over And I'll rest forever more. My eyes will be on Jesus And my heart will be aglow And I won't have to worry anymore.

That chorus gives us another great picture of what Heaven will be like.

My eyes will be on Jesus and my heart will be aglow and I won't have to worry anymore.

That phrase gives us a picture of how God's perfect love in heaven will totally change our perspective from what we think (worry) about here on earth. When I hear this song, a feeling of peace just comes over my being.

I guess the next question becomes, How do we get to our eternal home? Notice I didn't say how do we get to Heaven, because there are two places of eternal residence. Heaven and Hell. We know from what the bible relates that we will spend eternity in one or the other. So how do we get to eternity? The gateway to eternity is either death, the return of Jesus or some divine intervention such as happened in the Old Testament to Elijah.

In 2 Kings 2:11 the Bible says [11] As they (Elijah and Elisha) were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind.

I don't know about you but I don't think a whirlwind is going to suck me up to Heaven, so for me death, or Jesus' return are what I am looking forward to for my passageway to heaven.

So what happens at death? The most detailed look at what happens at death comes from Jesus speaking in Luke 16:19 and telling a story about The Rich Man and Lazarus [19] "There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. [20] At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores [21] and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

[22] "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. [23] In hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. [24] So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

[25] "But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. [26] And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.'

So Jesus tells us that at death our eternal destiny is determined and we are either escorted by angels into paradise or sent to a place of torment. (Hades).

This is the beginning of eternity for those who die but is not the final home that we will have in Heaven. The second phase begins when Christ returns and our bodies will all be resurrected and these resurrected bodies will become the eternal home for our spirits. Our final eternal destiny will begin after Jesus returns and we will reside either in Heaven in the presence of God or in Hell with the absence of God.

Some people believe that the Bible teaches that our soul goes to sleep at death and sleeps until Jesus returns but the previous story seems to

contradict that. And there are others, for example, in Revelation 6:9 the Bible says

[9] When he (the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar, the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had given. [10] They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" [11] Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

So we see the souls of the martyrs for Christ, active, talking and receiving a white robe. No matter which way you believe, we know that when our resurrection occurs at Christ's return, our soul will be back in our resurrected body for eternity.

To activate that eternal relationship "in Heaven" lots of things have to change. No longer can we live in a sin tattered and cursed environment. This worldly home, as we know it, will have to be recreated to rid us of its sin, temptations and death. God will provide us with a purified home for our glorified and perfectly resurrected bodies and it will be a glorious and perfect place for us to enjoy an eternal loving relationship with God. It will be an environment where we are living with our creator and a place where God's perfect love exists.

All of the things that seem so important here on earth just simply won't matter anymore. When we are under the influence of God's perfect love little else will matter except that we are with Him and with Jesus.

Where is God today? In Heaven? Yes. But the Bible tells us He is everywhere.

Acts 17:24 (NIV) [24] "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. [25] And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. [26] . [27] **God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach**

out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. [28] 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

The Bible says that God is omnipresent, everywhere. Since He is a spirit that is really hard for us to comprehend. But Paul says God is not far from each one of us.

So the veil in the temple was removed "torn apart" when Jesus died on the cross symbolizing that we now had a direct pathway to God through Jesus. When Jesus returns the veil that keeps us from seeing the spiritual world all around us will be removed and we will be able to see and be part of the heavenly kingdom that is veiled from us today.

Paul says a couple things about that. In 1 Corinthians 13:12 he says [12] 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 fully known.

Dr. Eben Alexander, a neurosurgeon had a near death experience and recalls - A warm wind Blew through, like the kind that springs up on the most perfect summer days, tossing the leaves of the trees and flowing past like heavenly water. A divine breeze.

Perhaps this breeze is the Holy Spirit, remember how the spirit blew in on the Apostles on the day of Pentecost and empowered them to preach the Gospel.

Dr. Alexander continues, I began wordlessly putting questions to this wind, and to the divine being that I sensed at work behind or within it.

When I silently thought about a question, the answer came instantly in an explosion of light, color, love, and beauty that blew through me like a crashing wave. What was important about these blasts was that they didn't simply silence my questions by overwhelming them. They answered them, but in a way that bypassed language. Thoughts entered me directly. But it

wasn't thought like we experience on earth. It wasn't vague, immaterial, or abstract. These thoughts were solid and immediate—hotter than fire and wetter than water—and as I received them I was able to instantly and effortlessly understand concepts that would have taken me years to fully grasp in my earthly life. The overall message had three parts, and if I had to translate them into earthly language, I'd say they ran something like this: "You are loved and cherished, dearly, forever." "You have nothing to fear." "There is nothing you can do wrong."

That message flooded me with a vast and crazy sensation of relief.

Paul's words about 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 fully known, seem realized in Dr. Alexander's experience.

We are loved by God who loves with a perfect love. However, in this fallen world and with all of its temptations and sin keeps us from experiencing that perfect love in the perfect environment where Satan and his minions can no longer interfere and steal that perfection of love that God has for us. Can you imagine what this world would be like if sin did not exist and the only inhabitants were the saints of God. As you think about that you are beginning to think about Heaven.

How is our Home in Heaven being prepared for us. In John 14:1 (Jesus tells his disciples [14:1] "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

And in Matthew 24:30 (NIV)

[30] "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. [31] And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the

four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other. The sheep will be gathered.

Then in Revelation 21 we see the final preparations for our eternal home with God and Jesus and all of the other saints that have served the Lord throughout time. [21:1] Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. [2] I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. [3] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. [4] He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

[5] He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

[6] He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. [7] He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.

The final veil has been removed. There is now nothing between us and God. The relationship between God and man that was present in the Garden of Eden has been recreated but with one exception. Satan is not there and there will be no opportunity to sin. For we who have loved God during our lifetime on earth, this is our eternal reward. Revelation 20:10 tells us [10] And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Satan is gone. Only those who have chosen to love God are in Heaven.

We will be eternally encompassed within the perfect love of God as a reward for us trusting in Jesus and loving Him while we were alive.

What about the other side from Heaven, Hell. The place to which Satan has been banished. I heard Charles Stanley talking about that a couple weeks ago and in his mind the one word that describes a person headed

for Hell is "Looser". An eternal Looser he called them. I like a different word "hopelessness". Eternal hopelessness. Do you realize how important the word hope is in each of our lives. We hope for all kinds of things. The word hope as used in the Bible is much more positive than what we associate with the word hope today. We say well I hope so thinking that maybe something will happen that we are looking forward to. But in the Bible it means To trust in, wait for, look for, or desire something or someone; or to expect something beneficial in the future. Hope plays a very important part in our lives.

Consider the person in Hell. Eternal Hopelessness – nothing to trust in, wait for, look for, or desire. Nothing beneficial to expect in the future. Eternal darkness, eternal fire, an eternal separation from the light of God.

Where we go is determined by the choices we make in this world and God Honors those choices. Hank Hanegraaff says it this way. God will not drag someone kicking and screaming into heaven, when during their whole lifetime they wanted nothing to do with Him.

Or C.S. Lewis said it in a slightly different way. "There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, **"Thy will be done,"** and those to whom God says, in the end, **"Thy will be done."** All that are in Hell, choose it by refusing to acknowledge and love God during their life on earth.

How about you. Are you saying to God with your priorities and your life, God, Thy will be done in my life.

Or will God say to you in the end, Thy will be done! Spend eternity away from me.

Lets Pray.