

Heaven and Hell 3

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- [0 : 0 0] Surely that must have been some incredible spectacle to behold. As they stood there surrounding the Lord, all of a sudden he begins to just elevate.
- And they stand there, probably their eyes as wide open as saucers, and watch as he just slowly and... Nothing like this had ever been experienced before.
- And up, and up, and up, and he stand there gazing. For probably as long as they could see him, and the higher he rose, the more of a speck he became.
- Until finally he's gone out of sight. And they stand there and look at each other, dumbfounded. Probably each one was thinking, are these other guys seeing the same thing I'm seeing?
- Or am I just imagining this? And surely enough, there he goes. And then the angel addresses him, well, why are you standing here gazing up into heaven?
- [1 : 1 1] Again, this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come again, in like manner, as you have seen him go into heaven. The ascension of our Lord, recorded in the Gospels and here in the book of Acts.
- And where did he ascend to? Well, the scriptures tell us that he ascended into heaven. And that's our subject for this morning.
- Heaven, the what, the why, and the how of it. Where is heaven? Some people are of the opinion, right here on earth.
- Depends on how you live your life, and if you live it as you should, you can enjoy heaven here on earth. And if you don't, it can be hell on earth.
- So your heaven and your hell is right here on earth. Isn't it amazing how people try to decide things based on wish fulfillment? How some try to create their own reality?
- [2 : 1 6] I remember talking some time ago with someone, we were discussing the subject of heaven and hell, and they said, well, I don't have any problem with heaven, I can understand that, and I buy that, but I don't believe in hell.
- It's amazing. People think that not believing in something means that it doesn't exist. An effort to create your own reality?
- Hell, to some, is unacceptable and distasteful. So what do you do with it? You just ignore it out of existence. But it doesn't work that way.
- Because what is, is. And it isn't because you want it to be, or because you don't want it to be. So in response to a written request to do so, we are engaging a brief study on the subjects of heaven and hell.
- And both of these have been considerably depreciated of late, particularly hell. We've already considered in two introductory sessions something leading up to these subjects, and I would suggest that if you want the fullest and most comprehensive treatment, you really ought to obtain the two previous CDs, and they are on the table in the back.

[3 : 39] The last two Sundays, they are available back there, and they are free of charge. And they will give you a much better perspective than if you just go with the subject matter in itself beginning this morning.

And we emphasized that heaven and hell are both predicated upon two necessary realities. Number one, Genesis 1.1.

There is a God, and this God is responsible for having created all things. Genesis 1.1, in my estimation, is definitely the most important verse in all of the Bible, because if it is not true and in place, then nothing that follows after it makes any sense.

John 3.16 makes no sense if Genesis 1.1 is not accurate. So we've got the existence of God, of whom it is said he is the creator, sustainer of all things, and that provides the bedrock for the existence of hell as well as heaven.

And then, the second thing we noted is based on Genesis 2.7, where we are told that God formed man after the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

[5 : 02] So God imparted into our first parent the essence of what we call spirit. It is the inanimate, non-physical part of our being, and this part of our being is indestructible.

The body, of course, is destructible. The interior part of our being that is invisible, no one has ever seen.

It is spirit, immaterial. It is also indestructible. It is that part of our being that lives on in the afterlife, when the body is disposed of through burial, or cremation, or buried at sea, or whatever, that does not destroy the immaterial part of our being.

And as we pointed out in the past, it is this immaterial part of your being that is the real you. That's where your personality resides.

Of course, your body, temporarily, is the housing for all of this. But the time is coming when that spirit part of our being exits the housing, which is the body.

[6 : 25] And in the case of believers, is absent from the body and present with the Lord. That is the part of your being that is subject to spiritual rebirth.

It is not your body. It is your spirit. And when you are regenerated, it is that spirit that is made a new creation in Christ.

Best as I can understand it, and the jury is still out on a lot of these things, I don't understand it nearly as well as I would like, but I believe that it is in the human spirit that the personality, and the temperament, and the creativity, and the memory, and all of these things exist.

We know that it is not in the flesh of these bodies, but it is in that immaterial part. And some would also refer to that as the mind, which is to be distinct from the brain.

Because while the brain is physical, the mind is not. Yet it is just as real. As best as we can understand, the brain and the mind work in tandem.

[7 : 33] They use each other to function fully as a human being. So, we have a part of our being that is in perpetuity of life after the death of the body.

And that, of course, means there has to be some place for this immaterial part of our being to reside. Then that presents a problem.

Why does there have to be some place? Because if it is immaterial, it does not occupy space nor time. I know what you're thinking.

It's above my pay grade, too. But it is part of the marvelous way that we are fashioned. And I suspect that this is precisely what is meant when it says we are made in the likeness and image of God.

And that means we have a spiritual capacity to us. We have another dimension to our being in addition to the physical.

[8 : 40] And that, of course, is the spiritual. These two subjects of heaven and hell should be of paramount interest to all human beings everywhere.

I said they should be of paramount interest to all human beings everywhere. But they clearly aren't.

Why not? Well, in many respects, there is a contempt for the spiritual. Some have reduced our personhood to nothing more than a mere body.

You are your flesh. You are what you eat. And that's all you are. So when you die, that's the end of you kaput.

There is no future. There is no heaven. There is no hell. There is no anything. There is no consciousness. You are just ceasing to exist in any form.

[9 : 40] There are many people who adopt that position. And, of course, for them, hell and heaven are non-entities. They just don't exist and there is no purpose, no reason for them to exist.

And, by the way, where do we get any of these ideas that we are talking about? They all come from Scripture. They are not supported by tradition necessarily or the wisdom of philosophers.

All that we know about these subjects that comes to us with any authority at all comes from Holy Scripture. And were it not for the revelation of these two entities given in Scripture, we would know absolutely nothing about them.

So, really, what this all boils down to is the same thing it always boils down to. Authority. Authority. What do you accept as authoritative?

And for the believer, for the Christian, we come back to Holy Writ, to the Scriptures. And insofar as a person is concerned, and virtually everyone in the world can identify with the personality of Jesus Christ, even those who don't believe in him.

[10 : 57] And, granted, there are places in the world where they've never heard the name of Christ and know nothing about him. But, by and large, he is known world over and has been for the last 2,000 years.

And I, in my opinion, the most authoritative thing you can give anyone by way of an answer, if you are ever discussing the subject of heaven and hell, why do you believe that?

I believe the best possible answer that you can give is because Jesus Christ believed it. He is the standard. He is the authority.

And if it is not true, and heaven and hell do not exist, then Jesus simply lived under a delusion. And what's more, he passed it on.

And he taught it. And he encouraged others to buy into the delusion, which would make him a most unworthy Savior or Lord.

[11 : 55] So, this is as bottom line as it gets. Jesus Christ, the singular one who split all of human history between B.C. and A.D., the one who is extolled in Scripture as King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the one who has never been in any way, shape, or fashion disproved as to his personhood or his authority or his accomplishments.

He said it. That ought to be good enough for us. And for the believer, of course, it is. The closest in considering this, making this of paramount importance, and I said that most do not, the closest that most come to in caring for future realities is in their retirement plan.

If they have a hefty 401k, they consider themselves well cared for for the future. Well, if all you have is this present existence, then I would say, you're sitting pretty.

But if there is something beyond the grave, which the Scriptures attest that there is, then you need to look beyond that 401k, way beyond it.

Because the time is coming when you will be a resident of somewhere. And where that will be will be without end.

[13 : 41] So you need to make the choice and make it well. There lies beyond their retirement plans a future that is far, far more important.

Nothing compares in importance to that of our eternal destiny. However long we live here, if you even make it to the century mark, some do.

Get that birthday card from the White House. That is but a drop in the bucket to what is going to be spent on the other side.

I realize that we are talking about eternity, where there is timelessness, which is another thing that is difficult for us to grasp.

But nevertheless, that is where it's going to be. Now let's look at the what. And would you turn, please, in your Bible to 2 Corinthians chapter 12, and we'll concern ourselves with the first few verses.

[14 : 51] 2 Corinthians chapter 12, we have a little bit of information given regarding heaven. I told you before, I think I mentioned this last week, that we all have our curiosities about heaven and we have curiosities about hell too.

Is the fire real? Is it literal? Is it, why aren't people burned up? This kind of thing. And does it really exist? Or is that just an allegory or whatever?

And about heaven, those of us who have sent loved ones on ahead cannot help but have curiosities abounding regarding them.

and things that have crossed my mind by way of questions are what is she seeing? Who has she seen? Who has she met? And what is she doing?

Has she seen my mother and father? And my grandparents? And hers? Can't help but wonder about things like that. And questions like are people identifiable?

[15 : 57] And I'll just give you a heads up, of course they are. Absolutely. And we'll see some evidence for that later. But we cannot help but have a whole host of curious questions.

And the scriptures are silent for the most part on these. We are given generalities by way of answers but we are not given a great many details. And it just really causes us to wonder.

2 Corinthians chapter 12 Paul said boasting is necessary though it is not profitable but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord.

I know a man in Christ who 14 years ago whether in the body I do not know or out of the body I do not know. What he is saying is he does not know if he was actually dead he was left for dead when he was stoned at Lystra or whether he was simply unconscious and saw what he is describing here in a vision or was he actually there in person.

He doesn't know and he admits he doesn't know. God knows. Such a one verse 4 was caught up into paradise.

[17 : 21] This is the third time this word is used. I take it it is synonymous with heaven. When Jesus was on the cross he told the thief next to him verily I say unto you today thou shalt be with me in paradise.

And it is used here in 2 Corinthians and it is used once again in the book of the Revelation. And these are the only times the word paradise is used.

At any rate caught up and notice it is always up. Up. Heaven is always spoken of as up. And a legitimate question is up from where?

Because up from Jerusalem is radically different from up in Argentina or the United States.

Because as you view the globe up is in whatever direction out and beyond. And the only thing I can conclude is that virtually all international type directions and global directions that are mentioned in the Bible always use Jerusalem the city of the great king as the focal point.

[18 : 42] so up is up from Jerusalem and whatever that is it appears to be far beyond and removed.

In fact Paul describes it as the third heaven. We'll look at that later but he says he was caught up into paradise and heard inexpressible words which a man is not permitted to speak.

Now all he is saying is this I was caught up in this vision into paradise and I heard things that I am not permitted to relate to you.

Boy I sure would like to know what those were. Wouldn't you? Wouldn't you like to get in on that? Wow. And one of the things that I have comforted myself with the expression that Paul uses in Philippians when he talks about I have a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better.

and I can't help but ask myself now how do you know it's far better Paul?

[20 : 08] How do you know that? He was there. You know as I look back on the life and ministry of the apostle Paul this is just a personal observation I may be all wet but I think I'm on to something here.

This man Paul the apostle was driven with an incredible energy and determination and tirelessness and confidence he just wouldn't quit and on more occasions than one he referred to himself as toiling and the Greek expresses that as meaning laboring to the point of sheer exhaustion where when he finished a task he was just spent wiped out why did he do that?

I think his motivation was based on what he knew and God used what he knew and poured this knowledge into Paul so that it would be a motivator a stimulator a driving force for him Paul was Paul the apostle because of what because of God calling him and because of what God revealed to him and all he wanted to do was spend and be spent and if you were ever to ask yourself what is it with this guy what drives him like that what pushes him like that why is he so passionate about this I think he could legitimately answer well listen if you knew what I knew you would be too why he wasn't permitted to reveal it to anyone else we are not told but he was told that he could not do so in fact there was given a thorn in the flesh let's read on that on behalf of such a man will

I boast but on my own behalf I will not boast except in regard to my weaknesses for I do wish to boast I shall not be foolish for I shall be speaking the truth but I refrain from this so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me and because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations Paul was let in on some stuff that must have been just absolutely incredible and he goes on to say for this reason to keep me from exalting myself what else could this be but I know something you don't know and he's not going to go there keep me from exalting myself there was given me a thorn in the flesh a messenger of Satan to buffet me to keep me from exalting myself and he asked that it be removed and the

Lord said his grace is sufficient so while we're in the Corinthian section let's come back to chapter 5 because here we have probably as much information as we're going to get regarding this intermediate state and we're still dealing with the what heaven in answer to the what heaven will be populated by believers in an intermediate state and then followed by an eternal state in 2nd Corinthians 5 and verse 1 for we know I love that expression it's ginoko in the Greek and it has to do with a certain knowledge Paul isn't saying this is our suspicion but he's saying we know that if the earthly tent which is our house that your body your physical body is spoken of as a tent because a tent is a very temporal affair you just put it down temporarily and it's designed to take up again and move to someplace else and that's of course what these bodies are they are just very temporary it is our house if it is torn down that is through death disease debilitation or whatever if it is torn down we have a building from

[25 : 05] God a house not made with hands eternal in the heavens well what is that I wish I could be more definite about this but there are three possibilities one of course is heaven itself that is the house of which he's speaking or the building from God but that doesn't seem to fit the context and then there is the possibility that it is a temporal body that will replace this present body but that would be like an intermediate body that is not this body and it is not your resurrection glorified body it is a body in between and I have some problems fitting that in that just doesn't seem likely that we're outfitted with some kind of a temporary body until we get the resurrection body which will take place at the rapture and then the third possibility is that it is our glorified body but the problem with that is how can we have a glorified body before the resurrection because it is in connection with the resurrection that the glorification will take place and then to throw something else in the mix and muddy the water even further we are dealing with eternity which is time less and always remember eternity is not what people think it is it isn't time stacked on top of time stacked on top of time that can be measured in years or months or even thousands of years because eternity isn't time at all it is devoid of time no

I can't understand that either but it is it is where God dwells he inhabits eternity you see time was a creation of God when he created the heavens and the earth he made them out of material substance and when you have material substance it has to have space and time to occupy but we're talking about immateriality where there is no space and there is no time but if there is no space how can that be no space no time both are created by God in the beginning and something else I want to just throw out there do you realize and I know that there are plenty who would contradict me on this especially those of the scientific community but

I am satisfied they talk about the earth being billions and billions of years old there is no such thing as billions and billions of years there's no such thing as millions of years how can you say that well I say that based on God bringing time and space into existence when he created the earth well then before that there were billions and billions no no no before that there were no years period there was just God timeless spaceless and time and space are both for us for materiality and before materiality was created there was no materiality there was no earth no planet no sun no stars no milky way no nothing just

God eternal invisible timeless God and he brought into existence out of nothing time and matter and time which we often regard as having passed millions and billions of years and scientists have proved that the universe is 6 billion plus years old that's just stuff and nonsense they haven't proved anything they can make claims but there's no proof there I know I sound probably pretty weird but I consider myself being in good company well Paul goes on to say in this house we groan longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven now he's not talking about your beautiful robe he's talking about a glorified body that will replace this body of corruption this is the clothing with our dwelling from heaven in as much as we having put it on shall not be found naked that's a little bit misleading so let me explain to you he is not talking about you mean we're going to run around in our birthday suits no he's not talking about that kind of nakedness he's talking about not having a body he is talking about being disembodied what does a disembodied person look like nothing because if you are disembodied there is nothing remaining but your spirit but your spirit is invisible and intangible and nobody has ever seen it well how is that going

I have no idea but my suspicion is that spirit will be able to relate to spirit and when the time comes well let's read on for indeed while we are in this tent that is this present body we groan if you aren't groaning you're just not old enough wait time will come when you'll be groaning being burdened because we do not want to be unclothed that is nothing more than a reference to the natural fear of death we don't want life to leave this body what is life it is the spirit that animates this body James says the body without the spirit is dead that scares us terrifies us we don't want to be separated we want to keep everything together that's only natural we want to hang on to that which makes us a person which is inside us and when the body when the body dies there is a separation that takes place a cleavage and the real you is torn away from the body and the body just goes kerplow it's lifeless it's just a corpse and we dispose of it we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed in order that what is mortal that's this present body may be swallowed up by life now he who prepared us for this very purpose is God who gave to us the spirit as a pledge therefore being always of good courage and knowing that while we are at home in the body in other words you and your spirit is where it belongs when you are home sweet home the real you is inside this body we are absent from the

[34 : 04] Lord we what is the we that's the spirit we are absent from the Lord and when we the spirit vacates the body we are present with the Lord the body is disposed of but the real person is with the Lord for we walk by faith not by sight we are of good courage I say and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord are we now well I would answer that by saying if we knew what Paul knew we would be a lot more eager to be on the other side than we are maybe this is one of the reasons we don't know we don't want people living abnormally dangerous lives with the possibility of checking out prematurely just so they can get to what's awaiting them maybe this is one of the reasons that we cling to this life you know it is death is just a natural natural fear because it terrifies us to think in terms of our personhood being broken up coming to some kind of an end and we've never done that before we've never been there scares us and rightly so so we have as our ambition whether at home or absent to be pleasing to him for we must all appear before the judgment seat of

Christ this is the award throne it is the bema seat it is a place of assessment and this is in the context limited to believers and when Paul says we here he is talking about himself and those to whom he is writing in the church at Corinth and it incorporates other believers who comprise the body of Christ but it is certainly not mankind in general because there is a special time of assessment that is limited to believers only and this is it this is the bema seat the award throne the judgment seat of Christ and he goes on to tell us something about what it's about when he says we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ that each one may be recompensed or rewarded for his deeds in the body according to what he has done whether good or bad it appears thankfully that the sin issue is settled but once we come to faith in

Christ we are responsible for how we live our lives and in chapter 3 of 1 Corinthians which will not take time to go to but the apostle mentions that there are deeds done in the body by believers that are of various qualities some are gold silver and precious stones apparently those are the kinds of acts or deeds that have the favor and blessing of God behind them they are noble things that believers do ministering to the body of Christ and ministering to those outside the body of Christ they are admirable works of faith and of grace characterized as gold silver and precious stone and when the all seeing scrutinizing eye of Christ is put upon that believer's works to assess them and see if the motivation behind them was pure they stand the test of time and they will be appropriately rewarded there are also those deeds that we may do that only appear good outwardly but they were wrought with impure motivation or with personal agendas or self aggrandizement or ego trips or whatever and

God who really reads the hearts and knows the motives is able to distinguish one from the other and what will those things receive by way of reward nothing they are characterized as wood hay and stubble and they go poof and they're gone they don't last there is no reward there so there are apparently going to be various kinds of rewards in heaven and I don't know all of this business about crowns there is a crown of life and there is a crown faithfulness and so on but who can wear more than one crown anyway at a time there are going to be rewards dispensed by the all knowing all seeing eye of God and no one no one will get any kind of a reward that is not just and deserving and no one will be denied of a reward that they really do have coming because it will be complete justice and equanimity it's going to be something this is in part the why of heaven and it includes the preparation of a place for a permanent abode of the redeemed to dwell eternally with their maker and redeemer we are told in revelation 4 that

God is worthy to be praised because he created all things and why did he do that simply because it pleased him you realize that's all the reason that God needs he was pleased to do so it was his good pleasure that's the only reason that anything that exists exists it's because God was pleased to bring it into existence and in chapter 5 we're told that he is worthy of praise and honor and power and glory and dominion because after having created everything he redeemed everything because that which he created was ruined in the fall and Jesus Christ came to redeem everything and he is Lord of Lords King Kings the how of it or how it is realized to be a place of eternal habitation is linked to one's personal faith and trust in

[41 : 24] Jesus Christ and this is our only hope of heaven that is because Christ died for us our faith and our trust is in him and to repeat a question that I have asked you many many times over in the 35 or nearly 40 years I've said is if you were to die today and stand before your maker and he said John Smith why should I let you come into my heaven what would you tell him there have to be a thousand wrong answers to that question but there's only one right one you should let me come into your heaven because Jesus paid it all he died for my sin in my place and he is my only claim to heaven and if that isn't good enough I'm sunk that's all I've got but that's all you need that is the coin of the realm is that

Christ died for our sins about and one of it in the chapter 15 and I realize that this doesn't come even close to being an exhaustive study probably nobody could but But we just want to give you enough to encourage you and to put your appetite perhaps for some personal study on your own.

And I'm looking at 1 Corinthians 15 and verse 35. Paul said, How are the dead raised and with what kind of body do they come? You fool.

That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies. This is the old principle of a grain of wheat. It doesn't bear fruit until it is placed into the ground.

And then it dies. It has to die. And out of that death comes due life, which is just something that God designed. That which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or something else.

[43 : 46] But God gives it a body just as he wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. All flesh is not the same flesh. There is one flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another flesh of birds, and another of fish.

There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. But the glory of the heavenly is one. The glory of the earthly is another. One glory of the sun. Another glory of the moon. Another glory of the stars.

For star differs from star in glory. And if you will, let us come down to, well, let's continue on. Verse 42. So also is the resurrection of the dead.

It is sown a perishable body. In other words, it is a body that breaks down and decomposes. You put it in the ground. And the body returns to the dust of the ground from which it was taken.

It is sown a perishable body. It is raised an imperishable body. Well, it hasn't been yet. You realize there is only one body that has ever been raised imperishably?

[44 : 53] And that is the body of the risen Lord. There's never been anybody else in the history of humanity resurrected apart from Jesus Christ.

Lazarus wasn't resurrected. He was just brought back to life. When you're resurrected, you have a glorified body.

And Christ is the first fruits of them that slept, which, of course, guarantees a full life. Crop to be harvested later. But he is the only one who has been raised an imperishable body.

It is sown in dishonor. That is buried in dishonor. It is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, debilitation, ruin, amputation.

All kinds of bodies we place in the ground that are spent, used, worn out, shot up, cut up. And we place them in the ground.

[45 : 56] And when the time comes for the resurrection of the body, that body that was sown in weakness and fragility is going to be raised in power.

I don't know exactly what these glorified bodies are going to look like. But they're even going to be better than the commercials you see on television for the physical workouts and all of that stuff.

You know? Going to be something. Raised in imperishable. Sown in natural body. Raised a spiritual. A spiritual body.

That sounds like a contradiction in terms. Spiritual body? Well, not when God gets finished with it.

It's going to be something. Wow. Verse 47. The first man is from the earth. Earthy.

[46 : 56] The second man, that's of course referring to Christ, is from heaven. Or this resurrection body. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy. And as in the heavenly, so also those who are heavenly.

And then he goes on to tell us about these present bodies have to be glorified and changed because these bodies cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. God has a special body.

It will be a graduated body in verse 45. An immortal body in verse 53. And a victorious body in verse 54. It is a body beyond our wildest dreams.

Nobody, nobody is going to look at their glorified body and say, This is it?

I'm stuck with this for eternity? I don't know about you, but there are times when I can look at this one and say that. But you won't be able to say that about that glorified body.

[48 : 07] And just be comforted with the fact that a glorified body will be as good as God can make it.

And the habitation for it to dwell in will be as good as God can make it. How good is that?

Pray with me, please. Father, our hearts are just, should be filled with gratitude overflowing.

Just for all of the planning and preparation and promises that you've made for us. Here we have just a very slight hint.

With the good times that we experience one with another, the joys that we are able to bring one to another, just gives us a little taste of that which lies ahead that will be so good and so wonderful and so fulfilling.

[49 : 18] Not a modicum of disappointment, dissatisfaction or disapproval. You will pull out all the stops in making a home and a body for your people that will just be absolutely amazing.

And we rejoice in the truth of your word. Indeed, we have nothing else. And we need nothing else.

Thank you. In the name of that dear one you sent to make it all possible for us. Our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Amen.