

# Taste the Joys of Heaven

## LHC: Message Forty-Six (011021AM)

### Week 46: Taste the Joys of Heaven

(Revelation 21–22)

As the end of days approaches, you can find hope as you taste the joys of heaven!

#### SUNDAY: Thoughts on Heaven

*“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. **I go to prepare a place for you.**”*

—John 14:2, emphasis added

When you think of heaven, what comes to mind? As for me, thoughts of heaven always lead back to sweet memories of my being a little boy in Sunday school and singing this song: *I’m going to Heaven, can’t wait; Going to see Jesus, can’t wait; Heaven is wonderful, bright and fair, Praise the Lord, I’m going there!*

A childlike wonder permeates the minds and hearts of the very young—especially when it comes to things of the Lord. Thus, little lambs can joyfully think: *Can’t wait to get to heaven!* But as lambs grow into sheep, the manifold distractions of this world can crowd out that joy, childlike wonder begins to fade, and that sweet song of a soft heart changes to: *I’m going to Heaven, but it can wait; going to see Jesus, but He can wait; Heaven is wonderful, bright and fair, praise the Lord—but it can wait!* In other words: *Heaven with Jesus sounds wonderful, but let’s hold it off for a little while!*

Isn’t that how we become as we age? Usually, not until we are approaching the end of our life do our thoughts go back to: *Can’t wait to get to heaven!* It is that in-between time when we are at the greatest risk of heaven losing its wonder in our minds and hearts. If we’re honest, most of us would say that we are hoping for heaven, but not just yet. Why is that?

Dave Hunt comments,

For most Christians heaven is a place they desire to reach eventually, but not until they have lived out their full days on earth. Their hopes, ambitions, and interests, contrary to what Christ taught and the early Church lived, are really bound up in the life they aspire to live in this world. Heaven is a distant and unreal destination they reluctantly expect to reach at the end of life, but it is not desired before then. To be suddenly raptured to heaven would be, for most Christians, an unwelcome interruption of their earthy plans and ambitions.<sup>1</sup>

Most of us have thus forgotten how to embrace the awe of being in our Father’s house! Restoring that childlike wonder is my goal for this week’s devotionals. And it is my heartfelt prayer that when you have finished on Saturday that you will, with joy, be singing:

## **This World Is Not My Home**

*This world is not my home  
I'm just a passing through  
My treasures are laid up  
Somewhere beyond the blue  
The angels beckon me  
From heaven's open door  
And I can't feel at home  
In this world anymore.*

—Albert E. Brumley (1905–1977)

Would the Rapture be an unwelcome interruption of the plans you have for this life, or your greatest joy? Are you an earth dweller at heart, or a pilgrim who longs for “heaven’s open door”?

**My Prayer for You This Week:** *Oh Father, we do thank You for heaven! We thank You that the writer of Hebrews says this hope we have is an anchor of our souls. Oh Lord, we pray that You will make sure that we are believing the Truth about You, and following the way that You would have us to go. Open our minds and hearts to embrace the Truth as we detach ourselves from this place and choose to attach our affections upon heaven—to look forward to our Father’s house. We thank You for what You will teach us! In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.*

## **MONDAY: In My Father’s House**

***“In My Father’s house are many mansions.”***

—John 14:2a, emphasis added

Christ’s promise to us in John 14:1–6 comes in the language of the Bible, and it is bound by culture and time. Therefore, understanding the Scriptures involves more than knowing what the words mean. We need to understand those words from the perspective of the people that God chose both to write them and to have those words communicated to them in the New Testament world. Therefore the people God chose as His instruments, the people to whom He revealed Himself, were Hebrews living in the Near East. We can’t divorce ourselves from that context or we won’t fully understand God’s Word. Remember the world is divided into Oriental and Occidental—we’re Occidental, a western culture. They are Oriental—an eastern culture—so they think in terms of concrete reality. The western world thinks more in ideas and an abstract mode rather than the concrete mode, which the Hebrew and Greek languages use. Their language was one of pictures, metaphors, and examples rather than ideas, definitions, and abstractions.<sup>2</sup>

If we were to have a little concert of worship in today’s church vernacular, someone might say, “Oh, God, I praise Your mighty omniscience!” Or another might say, “I am so grateful for Your omnipotence!” But you wouldn’t hear those kinds of words in a Hebrew prayer meeting. A Hebrew preferred to pray: “The Lord is my Shepherd.” Do you know what that means to the Hebrew? “The Lord is all-knowing; He never slumbers

or sleeps; He is all-providing; He watches over us night and day, and leads us.” They are saying that God is the One who is not only with them but also provides for them.

Now look at the concrete imagery of John 14:1–6 as we go through this passage:

- “*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me.*”—Jesus is speaking to His disciples, who don’t know what’s ahead.
- “*In My Father’s house*”—That is a description of heaven!
- “*are many mansions*”—These are dwelling places, nests, places of rest—an innumerable amount of rooms are there.
- “*if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you*”—Heaven isn’t an idea, or merely another dimension; it is a place. Jesus is saying, “I am going away to prepare a special place for you, so be sure that you have your room reserved!” He is preparing a place for all those who make prior reservations before they leave this earth (that is what salvation is about).
- “*And if I go and prepare a place for you*”—“A place” speaks of an individual room for each of His children.
- “*I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know.*”—If you search the Scriptures, you know all about this because heaven covers the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation. And what beautiful pictures they are!
- “*Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?’*”—Thomas is speaking here for all of us!
- “*Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life.’*”—Jesus told them, “I am the Way to heaven, the Truth about heaven, and the Life that you long for because you will have My unbroken presence!”
- “*No one comes to the Father except through Me.*”—Coming to the Father is the same as going to live in the Father’s house, and Jesus is the Door through which we must enter.

Heaven is the unbroken presence of God forever, the unsoiled shores of Paradise, the unending enjoyment of the Living and True Almighty Lord of Heaven and Earth. Thus heaven has always been the source of comfort, hope, and focus of God’s servants.

When Christ’s disciples felt extremely distressed in their hearts because He told them He was going to die, and not be with them anymore, Jesus comforted them with heaven. Heaven is what those in the Coliseum clung to as they went to their death in the arena. Thoughts of heaven gave enduring hope to those in the dungeons, going through the fires of persecution, and dying for their faith. They all clung to heaven as their secure hope for the future. We, too, should cling to heaven because Jesus intended that heaven be our comfort as we walk His path on earth.

The early church lived in such a way that they looked every day for Christ. When they saw the sun rising their thoughts turned to: *When morning gilds the sky my heart awaking cries, may Jesus Christ be praised—perhaps today He will come . . .* That is what those early believers lived, which is so often remote from our culture. We plan our

lives so far in advance that if the Rapture happened this week it would ruin our plans. We should be planning according to *His* plans! Yes, we need to prepare wisely for the future, but the real need we have is to long for heaven. That should take precedence over any personal agendas. Long for your Father's house, but most of all, long for Jesus!

## TUESDAY: Heaven Is a Dwelling Place

*"In My Father's house are **many mansions**; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare **a place** for you."*

—John 14:2, emphasis added

Heaven is the eternal and very distant world that is the abode of God, the angels, and glorified believers. But to help us grasp some of its wonder, join me in a look at:

### **What is heaven?**<sup>3</sup>

**Heaven is a dwelling place.** Jesus has told us that there are many dwelling places in His Father's house. The most frequent association with heaven is that it is the place where God dwells. Although God is the central inhabitant of heaven, He is not its only resident. The angels live there as well, as more than a dozen verses tell us. The company of the redeemed also lives in heaven; at the end of Elijah's earthly life, God took him up to heaven by a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1), and Revelation repeatedly portrays glorified saints as inhabiting heaven. A preponderance of the Bible's pictures of heaven show it to be a crowded place.

When you think about heaven, though, don't consider it to be an endlessly huge place. Think about it in Bible terms. Let me show you one that just makes me chuckle—a reference to heaven in the Old Testament. I love this one because it reminds me of our family of ten! (You might say that our home is "a little bit like heaven" in this sense.) Right in the middle of warning King Ahab about the consequences of his sin, there is this little note in 1 Kings 22:19: *"Then Micaiah said, 'Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left.'"*

What is that all about? Well, heaven might be huge, but the idea is that everybody will be crowded right around the throne—as close as they can get to God! Do you see what it is? Heaven is shown to be a massive place that could house 100 billion people—each having a room with space that would equal the size of a whole palace of their own. Yet, in spite of that, the descriptions of heaven almost remind me of what my beehives look like: the queen bee is right there, and all the bees are gathered together as close to her as they can get. That is what heaven is like: we will all be gathered together around our heavenly Father's throne just to be near Him!

What does that have to do with my home? When Bonnie and I are brushing our teeth, I'd say that 90 percent of our family is standing right there by us brushing their teeth as well. And, if Bonnie is in our kitchen, everybody is right around her in the kitchen. Why does my family stay so close by? Because we love to be together! Do you know what heaven is? A dwelling place of those who want, more than anything else, to be where God is. They want to adore Him, worship Him, magnify Him, see Him, know Him, and be with Him! For that reason, Jesus was named Emmanuel, "*God with us*," so that we could get to be with God!

Being with God forever is the fulfillment of everything about which the Scriptures speak. God created Adam and Eve for fellowship with Him, and to walk with Him, but they fell into sin and broke that bond of fellowship. So, through Jesus, He came back to redeem them—to bring them to Himself by offering a means of escape from the curse of sin—from the penalty they incurred because of their transgression. In the New Testament, Jesus Christ became the fulfillment of those promises (Matthew 1:21, 23).

God came to be with us so that we can go to be with Him. The ultimate description of heaven is the dwelling place where we get to be with God. We get to know Him, to be like Him, to see Him as He is. We get to spend forever with the One who loved us and gave Himself for us! If we die in our sleep, as David said, “When I awake, I will awake in Your likeness because I want to be like You, and I want to be with You” (see Psalm 17:15).

### **WEDNESDAY: Heaven Is a Real Place**

*“In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare **a place** for you.”*

—John 14:2, emphasis added

I want to underline in your mind that heaven is not an idea alone. In the Bible, heaven is emphatically a definite locale. To enter it is to enter a definite space. In the verse above, note that Jesus specifically said that He was going to prepare “*a place*.” If we ask where this heavenly place is, the answer overwhelmingly is that it is above the planet Earth. Vertical imagery dominates in the placing of it.

**Heaven is a place from which God looks down to the earth:** “*The LORD looks down from heaven on the sons of men to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God*” (Psalm 14:2, NIV). Psalm 80:14 says, “*O God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see!*” (NIV). And in Psalm 102:19, “*the LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth*” (Psalm 102:19, NIV).

So what is heaven? Not only the dwelling place of God, but it has an incredible vertical imagery. It is the place, first of all, from which God looks down upon us.

**Heaven is the place from which Christ came down:** “*For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world*” (John 6:33). The Bible describes heaven not only as the place from which God looks down upon the earth but also the place from which Christ came down to the earth.

Jesus said, “*For I have come down from heaven not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me . . . I am the bread which came down from heaven*” (John 6:38, 41). So where is heaven? God says, “I am above you—looking down at you!” That is where heaven is, and that is where Jesus came from. For that reason the Jews grumbled at Him saying, “*Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How is it then that He says, ‘I came down from heaven’?*” (John 6:42).

**Heaven is the place to which people look up from earth:** “*It [the Truth] is not up in heaven, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will ascend into heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’*” (Deuteronomy 30:12, NIV). When Elijah and

Elisha were on their way from Gilgal, *“the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind”* (2 Kings 2:1, NIV).

In Luke 18:13, the repentant tax collector *“would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner’”* (NIV). Jesus said that when you raise your eyes toward the sky, you are looking toward heaven.

**Heaven is the place to which Christ ascended after His earthly life.** As He was ascending, *“they were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven’”* (Acts 1:10–11, NIV). Did you catch the vertical imagery of heaven in these verses? Amazing! Heaven is the place to which Christ ascended after His earthly life; the place to which people look up from earth; the place from which Christ came down; and the place from which God looks down upon us!

**Heaven is a literal dwelling place—a place of absolute security.** Heaven is always described as being “up” from our perspective of living on earth. Heaven is remote from earth, a higher and superior mode of existence, and a regal place of supreme authority. It is the command center; it is the place where we can be secure. This is indicated by nearly a dozen references to God’s throne being situated in heaven. This royal quality indicates both the splendor of heaven and the authority of the God who rules the universe from heaven.

**Heaven is sometimes the regal palace of the King of the Universe.** It has many rooms, specifically prepared by Christ for His followers, leading us to view it as a place where people live (John 14:1–3).

**Heaven sometimes has the features of a celestial temple.** This is in keeping with the worship that occurs there: *“I saw the LORD seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple”* (Isaiah 6:1, NIV). Now look at Revelation 3:12: *“He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God. And I will write on him My new name.”*

The one who “overcomes” is every born-again believer. And every true child of God will become *“a pillar in the temple of God,”* never again to leave God’s presence; we will forever be His servants. This is a command center in heaven, and God will write His name on each believer, and the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from God.

I could take a piece of paper and write just three lines on it—and that one piece of paper would find its way to one person out of six billion if I included the name, address, city, state, and country. Just three lines can separate one person from six billion! Do you want to have some security? In Revelation 3:12, God is saying, “When you are born again, I am addressing you for heaven, so you can be sure to arrive safely. I identify you as Mine, one out of billions, and you are going to go to the place I’ve prepared for you, a place of ultimate security.”

**More than anything else—heaven is a city.** In Revelation 20–22, we see that this city is replete with walls, gates, and streets. This testifies to us as believers being united in one place in the worship of God. We are all going to be delivered securely to a city in heaven that is perfect and eternal. But though a city, it is unlike any city we know here on earth, for this city also possesses the features of an earthly paradise. We will have the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God (Revelation 2:7). There is also the crystal-clear river of life that flows from the throne of God. On each side of the river is the tree of life, that bears twelve crops of fruit every year, and its leaves are for healing the nations (Revelation 22:1–2).

Just think: in heaven, we will also be with all our brothers and sisters in Christ! And the great blessing is that we won't be together for just a visit now and then—but for eternity!

### **THURSDAY: Heaven Is a Permanent Place**

*“He waited for **the city which has foundations**, whose builder and maker is God.”*

—Hebrews 11:10, emphasis added

Poets have always depended on artistic imagery when portraying heaven. Such images combine hardness of texture and brilliance of light to suggest a realm of superior permanence, value and splendor, when compared with the cyclic, vegetative world in which we live. Jewel imagery is the most prevalent type of artistic imagery.

Ezekiel's vision of a heavenly level of reality is replete with such imagery: flashing fire and lightning, burnished bronze that sparkles, gleaming chrysolite, and sapphire (see Ezekiel 1). To this we can add the memorable pictures in Revelation of a sea of glass, like crystal; the appearance of God in splendor like that of jasper and carnelian; golden crowns, gates of pearl, and a city of pure gold. In addition to jeweled imagery, physical light and its equivalent—glory—are recurrent in biblical images of heaven. In the heaven portrayed in Revelation, the light of the sun and moon are no longer needed *“for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb,”* and by the light of heaven *“shall the nations walk”* (Revelation 21:23–24). There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign with Him forever and ever (Revelation 22:5).

**Heaven is a holy place.** The purity of existence in heaven and the spiritual perfection of those who are “enrolled in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23) are expressed by imagery of washed robes (Revelation 7:14), white garments (Revelation 3:5, 18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9, 13), clothing of *“fine linen, bright and pure”* (Revelation 19:8), and chaste people who are *“spotless”* (Revelation 14:4–5).

Daniel pictures the people as shining *“like the stars forever and ever”* (Daniel 12:3)—symbolic of permanence and glory. Revelation also pictures the redeemed receiving such things as the morning star (Revelation 2:28), a white stone with a secret name written on it (Revelation 2:17), and water from a fountain of life (Revelation 21:6). Similarly, those who enter heaven will become pillars in the temple of God (Revelation 3:12).

**Heaven is an unimaginable place.** While not a major part of the images of heaven, beings that have never existed in human experience are included in the visions of Ezekiel and Revelation. Examples from Ezekiel's vision include living creatures with four faces, four wings, and soles like those of a calf's foot (Ezekiel 1:6–7). These creatures move about in a riot of motion, and something that looks like torches of fire moves among them (Ezekiel 1:13). There is a celestial chariot replete with gleaming wheels which have rims full of eyes (Ezekiel 1:15–18). *"The spirit of the living creatures was in the wheels"* (Ezekiel 1:21)—which mystifies us still further. Revelation's pictures of creatures with six wings *"full of eyes in front and behind"* (Revelation 4:6–8) likewise contain the motif of strangeness.

The effect of all this is to reinforce the difference between heaven and earth and to underscore the sense of mystery surrounding heaven. The far reaches of incomprehensibility enter when we read: *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him"* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

**Heaven is a worship-focused place.** Compared to the relatively plentiful descriptions of heaven as a place, the Bible gives little information about the activity that transpires there. Activity in heaven consists almost entirely of worship (see Revelation 4; 5; 7:9–12). Revelation 14:4 adds the picture of the redeemed following the Lamb wherever He goes. We also read that God will *"dwell"* with his people and *"be with them"* (Revelation 21:3). In addition, there is also the transformation of our earthly experience into a different mode.

Half of the equation is the negation or canceling out of fallen earthly experience. There will be no more hunger or thirst, no more scorching heat (Revelation 7:16). God will wipe tears away and death shall be no more (Revelation 7:17; 21:4); mourning and pain will vanish, *"for the former things have passed away"* (Revelation 21:4). As part of this exclusion of evil, heaven is a protected place: nothing unclean shall enter it or anything *"that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie"* (Revelation 21:27). The sheer freedom from fallen experience is pictured by city gates that *"shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there)"* (Revelation 21:25).

The other half of the equation is the creation of earthly categories into something "new." The main example is the new heaven and new earth that fills the last two chapters of the Bible, as well as the image of New Jerusalem, with its suggestion of earthly reality raised to a higher level of perfection. The writer of Hebrews claims that people of faith *"desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one"* (Hebrews 11:16, NASB).

**Heaven is a joyously satisfying place.** The two dominant human responses to new life in heaven are joy and satisfaction. The joy of heaven's inhabitants is pictured by the scenes of praise in Revelation, the white-robed conquerors waving palm branches (Revelation 7:9), and the guests at the wedding supper (Revelation 19:1–9). This is buttressed by the imagery of some of Jesus' parables, where attaining heaven is compared to attending a banquet (Luke 14:15–24) or entering into the joy of one's master (Matthew 25:21, 23).

From the perspective of life in this world, heaven is the object of human longing and the goal of human existence. Hebrews 11:13–14 employs the imagery of quest to



express this reality: *“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, . . . for . . . they seek a homeland.”*

In addition to being the goal of a quest, heaven is the reward for earthly toil, as in Paul’s picture of himself as having *“finished the race”* and looking forward to *“the crown of righteousness”* (2 Timothy 4:7–8). We see this, too, in Peter’s vision of *“the Chief Shepherd”* conferring *“the crown of glory”* on those who have served faithfully (1 Peter 5:4).

There is also the glorious picture of believers having come to *“Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God . . . to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly”* (Hebrews 12:22, NIV). Images of satisfaction emerge from the pictures in Revelation of saints being guided by a divine Shepherd to springs of living water (Revelation 7:17) and having access to *“the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month”* (Revelation 22:2, RSV).

**Heaven is a rest after labor.** Those who die in the Lord *“rest from their labors, and their works follow them”* (Revelation 14:13). Similarly, *“there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God,”* which believers *“strive to enter”* (Hebrews 4:9–11, RSV).

Author and pastor John Piper once said,

The radical pursuit of joy in God may cost you your life. . . . But it will be worth it. The world has an inconsolable longing, which it tries to satisfy with anything but God. Scenic vacations. Sexual exploits. Ascetic rigors. Managerial excellence. Sports extravaganzas. We have turned our back on the breathtaking beauty of God and fallen in love with our shadow. To delight in the Light is a dangerous duty indeed. It may cost you your friends. It may cost you your reputation. It may cost you your life. But it will be worth it. Because the steadfast love of the Lord is better than life (Psalm 63:3)!<sup>4</sup>

## FRIDAY: Entering Heaven

*“And Jesus said to him, ‘. . . Today **you will be with Me in Paradise.**’”*

—Luke 23:43, emphasis added

If the Lord tarries, each of us will cross through the valley of the shadow of death to enter heaven. Erwin Lutzer tells a wonderful story about dying grace. He writes:

When Corrie ten Boom was a girl, her first experience with death came after visiting the home of a neighbor who had just died. When she thought of the fact that her parents would die someday, her father comforted her by asking, “When I go to Amsterdam, when do I give you your ticket?” “Just before we get on the train.” “Exactly. Just so your heavenly Father will give you exactly what you need when we die—He’ll give it to you just when you need it.”<sup>5</sup>

To have dying grace does not mean that we will be free from sorrow, whether at our own impending death or the death of someone we love. Some Christians have mistakenly thought that grief demonstrates a lack of faith. Thus they have felt it necessary to maintain strength rather than deal honestly with a painful loss (Hebrews 5:7).

As Christians, we live with the tension between what is “already ours” and the “not yet” of our experience. Paul said believers should look forward to Christ’s return *“that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope”* (1 Thessalonians 4:13, NASB). Grief was expected, but it is different from the grief of the world. There is a difference between tears of hope and tears of hopelessness.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, on the way home from the funeral of his first wife, was trying to think of some way of comforting his children. Just then a huge moving van passed by their car and its shadow swept over them. Instantly, Barnhouse asked, “Children, would you rather be run over by a truck or by its shadow?” The children replied, “Of course we’d prefer the shadow!” To which Barnhouse replied, “Two thousand years ago the truck of death ran over the Lord Jesus . . . now only the shadow of death can run over us!” (see Psalm 23:4). Death is the chariot our heavenly Father sends to bring us to Himself.<sup>6</sup>

We are accustomed to talking about the differences there will be when we make our transition from earth to heaven, but there are also some similarities. Given the fact that *our personalities continue*, we can expect continuity. Heaven is the continuation of the glorified and perfected earthly life of the believer.

**Personal knowledge continues in heaven.** (See Matthew 8:11.) Jesus said at the banquet in heaven we will sit and fellowship with people we know about—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**Personal love continues in heaven.** I like what a news article once attributed to Chet Bitterman after his missionary son was killed by guerrillas: “We have eight children. And they all are living: one’s in heaven and seven are on earth.” (See Romans 8:18.)

**Personal feelings continue in heaven.** (See Psalm 16:11; Revelation 6:9–10; 7:17; 21:4.) David was promised that when he was at last in the presence of God he would experience the emotion of “fullness of joy”!

**Personal activities continue in heaven.** “We are,” says Maclaren, “saplings here, but we shall be transported into our heavenly soil to grow in God’s light. Here our abilities are in blossom; there they shall burst forth with fruits of greater beauty. Our death is but the passing from one degree of loving service to another; the difference is like that of the unborn child and the one who has entered into the experiences of a new life. Our love for God will continue, but awakened with new purity and purposefulness.”<sup>7</sup>

**There is no intermediate state.** (See 2 Corinthians 5:1 and Revelation 6:9–10.) Believers go directly into the presence of Christ at their moment of death or at His gathering of the church at the Rapture. They are conscious and in command of all of their faculties.

**We will each have a resurrection body** (1 Corinthians 15:42–44). We are sown a perishable body, but we will be raised imperishable. Like a seed sown in the ground, there is continuity between the acorn and the tree, between the kernel and the stalk. Not every particle that ever was a part of you has to be raised, and God just might add additional material to make up the deficiencies. In heaven, no one will comment on your age or notice that the years are beginning to take their toll. You will look as young a billion years from now as you will a thousand years from now. As Dr. Hinson wrote:

“The stars shall live for a million years, A million years and a day. But God and I will live and love when the stars have passed away.”<sup>8</sup>

**We are sown in dishonor, but raised in power.** When a body is transported to a funeral home it is always covered by a sheet to shield gaping eyes from the ignominy of looking upon the corpse. Every dead body is a reminder of our dishonor, a reminder that we are but frail. However, we shall be raised in power.

**We are sown in weakness, but raised in strength.** The resurrection body is not subject to material forces. Remember how Christ came through closed doors after the resurrection. Keep in mind that the reason the angel rolled the stone from the tomb was not to let Christ out, but to let the disciples in!

**We are sown a natural body, but we are raised a spiritual body.** To say that we will have a spiritual body does not mean that we will just be spirits. Christ’s glorified body was so human that He invited the disciples to touch Him and affirmed, “See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have” (Luke 24:39). There will be continuity with a difference. Our future body will be like Christ’s resurrection body: “We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2). Just think of the implications. See Revelation 19:7!<sup>9</sup>

## **SATURDAY: Heaven—The Place to Be**

*“In my Father’s house are many rooms; . . . I am going there to prepare a place for you. And . . . I will come back and take you to be with me **that you also may be where I am.**”*

—John 14:2–3, NIV; emphasis added

What we need to believe today is what Jesus taught us—this world is not our home. Our real home is the one He went to prepare for us. All that we see, use, and have here on earth is only temporary. That is the key to a pilgrim view of life.

In John 14:2–3, Jesus assures us that death for His children is only a transfer to permanent housing. Paul declares: *“As long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5:6–8, NIV).

The great English Bible commentator, Matthew Henry, might reflect our feelings best:

Would you like to know where I am? I am at home in my father’s house, in the mansion prepared for me here. I am where I want to be—no longer on the stormy sea, but in God’s safe, quiet harbor. My sowing time is done and I am reaping; my joy is the joy of the harvest.

Would you like to know how it is with me? I am made perfect in holiness. Grace is swallowed up in glory. Would you like to know what I am doing? I see God, not as through a glass darkly, but face to face. I am engaged in the sweet enjoyment of my precious redeemer. I am singing hallelujahs to him who sits upon the throne, and I am constantly praising him.

Would you like to know what blessed company I keep? It is better than the best of earth. Here are the holy angels and the spirits of just men made perfect. I am with many of my old acquaintances with whom I worked and prayed and have come here before me.

Lastly, would you like to know how long this will continue? It is a dawn that never fades. After millions and millions of ages, it will be as fresh as it is now. Therefore, weep not for me!<sup>10</sup>

Oh, the wonders of our promised haven, the glories of that eternal home! But nothing will compare with the knowledge that heaven is the outflow of Jesus Christ. Let us seek Him, like the words of this song so true: “*Tis heaven below, my Redeemer to know, For He is so precious to me.*” That is heaven.

“My Redeemer to know” is what God created us for; that is what Jesus is preparing for us; and that is what He’s coming again for, either in a personal rapture through the valley of the shadow of death or in a corporate rapture when He comes to take His church home—but He *will* come again to take us to that place!

**Make a Choice to Live in Hope:** As Christians, we look forward to an event that will pale all others. It will happen the second we pass through death’s shadow into heaven’s splendor and see our Lord face-to-face: “Think of—Stepping on shore, and finding it Heaven! Of taking hold of a hand, and finding it God’s hand. Of breathing a new air, and finding it celestial air. Of feeling invigorated, and finding it immortality. Of passing from storm to tempest to an unbroken calm. Of waking up, and finding it Home.”<sup>11</sup>

What a thrilling moment! Thinking about it can make our hearts beat faster! So rejoice in heaven! Rejoice in what your Father has done— and is doing for you even now: “*You received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God . . . —heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. . . . The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*” (Romans 8:15–18).

Make a choice to live securely in hope because you have a relationship with God that allows you to cry out to Him, “Abba, Father” (a term of endearment meaning “Daddy” or “Papa”)! As His child, heaven means “going home to Daddy”—to enjoy His presence forever! Whatever you go through before your home-going will only make your time in heaven that much more precious because of remembering His Son’s sacrifice of love and His faithful companionship during your sojourn on earth. You are a joint heir with Jesus—to be glorified together with Him! What a joyous privilege!

Isn’t it hard to live in a tiny two-room apartment when you know that you will soon get a mansion and gardens—and will live forever with the Lord in Paradise?

I encourage you to softly and tenderly sing this song to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords who has lavished His infinite love on you!

### **Majesty**

*Majesty, worship His majesty,  
Unto Jesus be all glory, honor, and praise.  
Majesty, kingdom authority*

*Flow from His throne unto His own; His anthem raise.  
So exalt, lift up on high the name of Jesus.  
Magnify, come glorify Christ Jesus, the King.  
Majesty, worship His majesty;  
Jesus who died, now glorified, King of all kings.*  
—Jack Hayford (b. 1934)

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<sup>1</sup> Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1993), p. 320.

<sup>2</sup> Ray Vander Laan, *That The World May Know: Set 4 Leaders Guide for Faith Lessons 19–27* (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, 1997), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> The following is adapted, drawn, and quoted from Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight: The Glorified God and the Satisfied Soul* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001), p. 21.

<sup>5</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, *One Minute After You Die* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), p. 46.

<sup>6</sup> Ray C. Stedman, “The Cure for Troubled Hearts,” *Secrets of the Spirit* (1973), accessed online at <http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/secrets/3123.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Lutzer, p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, adapted slightly from pp. 62–67.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in C. T. Quintard, *Balm for the Weary and Wounded* (Columbia: Evans & Cogswell, 1864), 35–37.

<sup>11</sup> “Heaven,” author unknown, in *Poems That Live Forever*, comp. Hazel Felleman (New York: Doubleday, 1965), p. 331. A version of this poem has also appeared under the title “The Homeland,” attributed to Myrtle Erickson in *Knight’s Master Book of New Illustrations*, comp. Walter B. Knight (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). p. 279.