

OUR HEAVENLY HOME

"Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. 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. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:1-3).

God's Word teaches that there are three heavens. The context of each passage indicates the one to which reference is made. The first and second are not mentioned specifically as such, but II Corinthians 12:2 declares that the third heaven is a reality. A third heaven would be an impossibility without a first and a second one.

The first heaven is evidently the atmospheric or aerial heaven in which the birds fly, the rains form, the clouds float, the winds blow and the lightning flashes. According to Genesis 1:20 the fowl were made to "fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven." In Hosea 2:18 reference is made to "the fowls of heaven." Vegetable and animal life on the earth is nourished through the rain and the snow which are formed in the first heaven and fall from it. "For as the rain cometh down and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater" (Isaiah 55:10).

The second heaven refers to the vast expanse in which God has placed the sun, the moon and the stars. "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:16-18).

The third heaven, the location of which has not been revealed, is the dwelling place of God. "Then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place, and forgive, and do, and give to every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest" (I Kings 8:39). It is encouraging to know that, even though God's dwelling place is far from the earth, nothing befalls one of His children without His knowledge, and not a one of them utters a prayer which He does not hear.

We ought to think about heaven much more than we do. Inasmuch as many of our relatives and friends have left us and have gone to spend eternity in heaven, and since each of us wants to go there when we leave here, our thoughts should dwell lovingly and longingly on that eternal home of our Saviour and the saved. God's Word, which is the only reliable source of information about our future home, contains many important facts about this

"..... land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign."

Therefore, we shall seek diligently to learn what the Bible has to tell us about heaven. Perhaps the best way to get this information is by asking certain questions and by giving attention to the scriptural answers to them. This we shall attempt to do.

I. What Is Heaven?

Heaven is not a mere shadowy existence or mental state, as some would have us believe. It is not a vague dreamland where spirits are wafted about in a kind of ecstasy. Heaven is not merely a condition of happiness. According to the Scriptures, heaven is a place. It is the habitation of God and the eternal dwelling place of all His children. Our Lord said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2b-3). He also said, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6:20).

If heaven were not as real a place as the house in which you reside, these Scriptures would be meaningless. It would be an utter impossibility for treasures to be laid up in a place that did not exist. Christ thought and spoke of heaven as a place.

II. Where Is Heaven?

Inasmuch as the Scriptures do not tell us specifically where heaven is located, it would not be wise for us to speculate about it. We can say truthfully that heaven is in some bright expanse of God's great and boundless universe. Certain Scriptures lead us to believe that heaven is above the earth. Christ said, "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). Christ was taken up from the earth when He went back to the Father. "And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven" (Luke 24:51). "And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11). For me it is enough to know that heaven is where Christ is and that He said, "Where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3).

III. What Kind Of A Place Is Heaven?

If you were going to leave your present home and move elsewhere, you would be interested in knowing something about your new home in advance of your arrival. Your interest in heaven, the home to which you expect to go ere long, should be just as real. Unfortunately, the entrancing theme of our heavenly home is frequently ignored in the sunshine of earthly success. Nevertheless, it is usually considered in the shadow of earthly sorrow. A brief study of the Bible reveals seven things about the nature of heaven.

1. Heaven is a place of spaciousness.

Christ said, "In my Father's house are many mansions" or abiding places (John 14:2). Our Lord has made heaven large enough for all, who will ever become prepared to enter it from the beginning to the end of time, to have ample room and never be crowded.

2. Heaven is a place of beauty.

Designed and built by the Lord Himself, heaven is a place of inconceivable and indescribable beauty. Our finite minds are not able to comprehend the beauty and grandeur of our heavenly home. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Corinthians 2:9). Heaven is the most beautiful of all God's marvelous works.

God's children, who are inclined to regret not having a spacious and beautiful home on earth, can be comforted in the fact that a mansion is awaiting them in heaven. This idea is expressed in the words of Hattie E. Buell:

"I once was an outcast stranger on earth,
A sinner by choice, and an alien by birth;
But I've been adopted, my name's written down,
An heir to a mansion, a robe, and a crown.

A tent or a cottage, why should I care?
They're building a palace for me over there;
Tho' exiled from home, yet, still I may sing:
All glory to God, I'm a child of the King."

Contemplating some of the "things which God hath prepared for them that love him," William Hunter wrote these revealing and meaningful lines:

"My heavenly home is bright and fair,
Nor pain nor death can enter there;
Its glittering towers the sun outshine;
That heavenly mansion shall be mine.

Let others seek a home below,
Which flames devour, or waves o'erflow:
Be mine the happier lot to own
A heavenly mansion near the throne."

3. Heaven is a place of rest.

There will never be any weariness in heaven. "There the weary be at rest" (Job 3:17). Sweet rest will be enjoyed by all who will be in heaven. "There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God (Hebrews 4:9). "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Revelation 14:13).

4. Heaven is a place of knowledge.

During our stay on earth we are baffled at various turns in life's road. While we remain here, we receive fragmentary glimpses only of the real meaning of life. But, in heaven all perplexing problems will be solved, and the whys and wherefores will be explained fully and satisfactorily. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face; now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Corinthians 13:12). One of the great joys of heaven will be derived from our perfect knowledge and complete understanding.

5. Heaven is a place of purity.

There is not an earthly home, regardless of how good it may be, but what sin at times casts its shadow over it. In contrast, our heavenly home is a place of spotless purity. Nothing that defileth will ever enter that home of light and life and love. This fact is substantiated by the statement in Revelation 21:27: "And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie." Sin will be a thing of the past, but the memory of redemption and salvation from it will be the source of genuine gratitude, undying love and endless praise. Holiness, righteousness and purity will characterize the heavenly home which Christ has prepared for His friends and followers, who will be complying with the divine will perfectly.

6. Heaven is a place of happiness.

None of the things which mar our lives on earth will ever appear in heaven. There will never be any sin, sickness, suffering, separation or sorrow in our heavenly home. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). How wonderful that will be!

Some are sick most of the time while they are here, and they get so tired of sitting in a chair or of lying in a bed. Many of them know they will never get well, but they are encouraged and comforted by the knowledge that, when they leave this world to go to their heavenly home, they will say farewell to all sickness and suffering.

Furthermore, in heaven there will not be any distress of mind arising from any cause or any broken hearts resulting from any circumstances. The residents of heaven will never have to look into the faces of those who are near and dear to them and see their cheeks grow ashen and their eyes glaze. They will never be called upon to watch anybody fasten the lid of a casket over a loved one or to see a vault that contains the form of one whom they loved so much and whose departure has left life so cheerless being lowered into a yawning grave. Thank God, there will never be a death in heaven. All who enter heaven will be the recipients of an indescribable satisfaction and an unending happiness.

7. Heaven is a place of reunion.

When brothers and sisters, accompanied by their respective wives, husbands and children, assemble around father and mother in all the delights of unexpressed affection in the home where they were born and reared, it is indeed a time of glad reunion. Such reunions thrill the hearts of those who are fortunate enough to participate in them. With many, such gatherings are no longer possible because their parents, and in some cases brothers and sisters also, have gone to be with the Lord. The utter impossibility of these delightful and joyous events does not eliminate a longing for their repetition, but many of us are grateful beyond expression for the precious memories of such wonderful periods of sweet fellowship.

"In the sweet by and by" all of the children of God will meet in heaven. Sons and daughters will meet again the fathers and mothers whose departure left their lives so desolate. Parents will meet again the children whom they never forgot for one day through all the months or years that have passed since they were called home. Husbands and wives will meet again their companions whom they have missed so much and for so long. Friend after friend departs this life, but after the long and silent separation will come the joy of reunion in heaven. What a glad reunion that will be when all the saved meet in heaven, never to separate again!

"O think of the home over there,
By the side of the river of light,
Where the saints, all immortal and fair,
Are robed in their garments of white.

O think of the friends over there,
Who before us the journey have trod,
Of the songs that they breathe on the air,
In their home in the palace of God.

My Saviour is now over there,
There my kindreds and friends are at rest,
Then away from my sorrow and care,
Let me fly to the land of the blest.

I'll soon be at home over there,
For the end of my journey I see,
Many dear to my heart, over there,
Are watching and waiting for me."

- D. W. C. Huntington

IV. Shall We Know Each Other In Heaven?

The belief that God's children will recognize and know each other in heaven has been as universal and persistent as belief in the existence of God or in immortality. Our firm belief in heavenly recognition is based on two things:

1. Reason.

We know one another here, and it is a certainty that we shall not know less in heaven than we do on earth. Common sense tells you that in heaven you will possess all of the intelligence which you have in this life. Heaven may enlarge your faculties, as no doubt will be the case, but most assuredly it will not diminish or eliminate them. As certainly as we recognize others here we shall recognize them in heaven,

"We shall know each other better,
When the mists have rolled away."

2. Revelation.

When David was informed that his son had died, the father said, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (II Samuel 12:23). David did not have any idea of joining the body of his child in the grave, because his lifeless form was still with him. What consolation would he have had if he had gone to his boy and not have known him? What would it have been worth to him to see his loved one in heaven if he had not been recognizable? David firmly believed that he would see, recognize and know his son in heaven.

When Christ was transfigured before His disciples, Moses and Elijah appeared with Him. Even though Peter, James and John had never seen either of these men, they recognized them in their glorified bodies. Since they recognized Moses and Elijah, whom they had never seen, how much more recognizable our loved ones will be to us!

Assurance of recognition in heaven is contained in these words of Christ: "And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 8:11). These words cannot be explained except on the basis of the reality of mutual recognition in heaven.

Nothing can comfort and cheer us like the blessed assurance of being with Christ and our loved ones in heaven. Fanny J. Crosby had that assurance in her heart as was indicated by her poem:

"When my life work is ended, and I cross
the swelling tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see;
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach
the other side,
And His smile will be the first to welcome me.

O the soul-thrilling rapture when I view
His blessed face,
And the luster of his kindly beaming eye;
How my full heart will praise him for the
mercy, love, and grace,
That prepares for me a mansion in the sky.

O the dear ones in glory, how they beckon
me to come,
And our parting at the river I recall;
To the sweet vales of Eden they will sing
my welcome home;
But I long to meet my Saviour first of all.

Thro' the gates to the city in a robe of
spotless white,
He will lead me where no tears will ever fall;
In the glad song of ages I shall mingle
with delight;
But I long to meet my Saviour first of all.

I shall know him, I shall know him,
And redeem'd by his side I shall stand,
I shall know him, I shall know him
By the print of the nails in his hand."

When we meet our Saviour and those whom He has saved in our heavenly home, we shall know them far more intimately than we have known them here. "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known " (I Corinthians 13:12).

V. How Can One Go To Heaven?

There is but one way to heaven. Christ said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). Through His sacrifice on the cross Christ made it possible for sinners, who would repent of their sins and truly believe on the Lord Jesus as their Saviour, to be forgiven of their sins, to become the recipients of eternal life, to be admitted to heaven, and to rejoice in their fellowship with Him and the saved forever.

If you, who are not the children of God, will "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," He will save you, bless you, use you and then some day receive you into "Our Heavenly Home."