

## IF I DIE BEFORE I WAKE. . .

### The Life I Was Meant to Live (Pt. 2)

Introduction: "I want to go to heaven, but not right now." What does this sentiment tell us about people's attitude or understanding about heaven?

1. In paradise we will wait for God to work justice on our behalf. What's the most difficult aspect of waiting for justice?

What advice would you give someone struggling with the injustices of this life?

2. In paradise we will long to be clothed. As you consider the passages that speak to our condition in paradise (disembodied spirit or temporary body) which position seems accurate? Which position seems more desirable? Why?

3. In paradise we will look forward to our rewards. Jesus will repay us for the deeds done in this life.

If you are a Christian will Jesus repay you for your sin? Why/Why not?

If you are not a Christian will Jesus repay you for your sin? Why?/Why not?

What scriptures can you use to support your answer?

4. In paradise we will rejoice over those yet to come. How does it affect your understanding of Heaven to know that you will be included in the great cloud of witnesses mentioned in Hebrews 12?

In paradise, will we sorrow over those who reject the gospel message?

5. Are you ok with not knowing everything about Heaven? Why do you think God conceals certain things from us?

Last week we answered the question, “Where do I go when I die?” And the answer is: those who die before Jesus returns goes to paradise which is in the presence of God. Some people call that heaven. And that’s understandable, being in the presence of Jesus would be heaven. In fact, Paul, in 2 Corinthians where he called it the third heaven also called it paradise. Right now, as you and I go about life, those who have preceded us in death are 1) in paradise, they are in the presence of the Lord, but 2) they have not entered the heaven that Jesus has prepared for us; the new heaven and new earth that Revelation 21 tells us about. The question we want to answer this morning is “What are believers doing in paradise?”

### What Will We Do In Paradise?

We’re going to look at a couple of passages that indicate what our activity might be. If you have a loved one in heaven, the question is: What are they doing? We wonder about that. Do they know what we’re doing? Can they observe us? Are they aware of human history? One thing we learn from scripture is that those in paradise right now are waiting for justice.

#### 1. We Will Wait for Justice

It’s natural to assume that those in paradise have the full blessing of heaven which means, no more sorrow, mourning, crying or pain. There’s no tension, no longing for things to be different than what they are. But that’s not entirely true.

#### Revelation 6:9-11

<sup>9</sup>When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under<sup>(A)</sup> the altar<sup>(B)</sup> the souls of those who had been slain<sup>(C)</sup> for the word of God and for<sup>(D)</sup> the witness they had borne. <sup>10</sup>They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord,<sup>(E)</sup> holy and true,<sup>(E)</sup> how long<sup>(G)</sup> before you will judge and<sup>(H)</sup> avenge our blood on<sup>(I)</sup> those who dwell on the earth?" <sup>11</sup>Then they were each given<sup>(J)</sup> a white robe and<sup>(K)</sup> told to rest a little longer,<sup>(L)</sup> until the number of their fellow servants<sup>(a)</sup> and their brothers<sup>(b)(M)</sup> should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

One thing to remember as you read Revelation. Everything that John is recording, up to Revelation 20 is prior to the second coming. So what we read about believers in Revelation who have died, they are in paradise, not the final heaven. This passage is talking about those who suffered martyrdom for their faith. And notice the language: Verse 10, they cried out in a loud voice. Verse 11, they were told to wait. We think of paradise as a place of comfort, quiet repose, perfect contentment. But these people sound a little desperate. They want evil to be repaid, they want justice. And they remember what the Bible said. In three different places in the Bible it says: “It is mine to avenge, I will repay,” says the Lord. God promises that he will one day make all things right, he will balance the scales of justice, people will receive the just payment for their wrongs.

## 2 Thes. 1:6-7 (NIV)

**God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you [7] and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.**

Revelation 6 tells us that, even in paradise we long for the day when all things will be made right. That would tell me that in paradise I'm aware of my life on earth. It seems to indicate that I will be aware of human history and not only that, I will be concerned about human history. There is a peace in paradise because you've been delivered from the evil and the pain of this world, but it's not a perfect peace because all that evil has yet to receive its just reward. And so, you see in Revelation a host of martyred saints longing for, in fact praying for the day when Jesus will return to earth and set things straight. Has anyone ever wronged you? Have you ever suffered injustice at the hands of evil, unrepentant human beings? In paradise you find comfort from the evils of this world but you're still waiting for justice to arrive. In paradise we long for justice.

### 2. We Will Long to be Clothed

A lot of us want to know what our existence will be like in heaven. And again, just to keep in mind, paradise is not heaven. We're in the presence of God, but we're not in the new heaven. So, when we die and go to paradise, what do we look like? And more specifically, do I have a physical body in paradise? Paul said, verse 6 and verse 8, he says it twice, away from the body, at home with the Lord. Some believe that paradise is a place of disembodied spirits; spirits without a body. Some believe that, while we do not have our glorified bodies that come when Jesus returns we do have a temporary or intermediate body by which to function in paradise. So those are the two choices: disembodied spirit or temporary body. Paul said, absent from the body, present with the Lord. In paradise, are we absent from the body? Are we spirits existing without form? There are several debated issues when it comes to heaven and this is a significant one. And let me remind you, there are things we can know, and there are things left to our speculation. And this, I believe is one of those issues.

## 2 Corinthians 5:2-4

<sup>1</sup>For we know that if <sup>(A)</sup> the tent that is <sup>(B)</sup> our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, <sup>(C)</sup> a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

In other words, on earth we have a limited, decaying, earthly body. In heaven (heaven, not paradise) we'll have a perfect, eternal body that will never wear out.

<sup>2</sup>For in this tent <sup>(A)</sup> we groan, longing to <sup>(B)</sup> put on our heavenly dwelling, <sup>3</sup>if indeed by putting it on <sup>(a)</sup> we may not be found naked.

And this phrase, many believe Paul to be referring to a spirit without a body. In paradise we're naked in the sense that we don't have a physical body in which our spirit can dwell. And so we long for heaven to receive our transformed, glorified bodies.

<sup>4</sup>For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal <sup>(C)</sup> may be swallowed up by life.

### 1 Cor. 15:51-52 (NIV)

**Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- [52] in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.**

A day is coming when the mortal takes on immortality; that day when finally and forever, death will be swallowed up in victory. Paul says a similar thing about the earth in Romans 8 where creation longs to be set free from its bondage to corruption. But when will that happen? At the second coming. If a flowers and trees could talk, if mountains could sing we would hear them all saying, "Even so, Lord Jesus, come." Since sin entered human history, all of creation has been in bondage to decay, degradation and death. Today, you have a body but it's not all that great. For those who are young and healthy, this may not be a big deal. But for the rest of us whose bodies don't work all that well anymore and getting worse as the clock ticks, the prospect of having a body that does not get old or wear out seems pretty appealing; even more so, if facing the prospect of not having a body at all in the interim between earth and heaven.

<sup>5</sup>He who has prepared us for this very thing is God,<sup>(G)</sup> who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. <sup>6</sup>So we are always of good courage. We know that<sup>(H)</sup> while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, <sup>7</sup>for<sup>(I)</sup> we walk by faith, not<sup>(J)</sup> by sight.

Paul said he longed for the day when he would be clothed with an eternal house in the heavens. Now, for the other side of this issue, I want to go back to Revelation 6. Verse 10, They cried out with a loud voice, People in paradise have a voice. Can you speak without a physical body from which to speak? Verse 11, Then they were each given<sup>(L)</sup> a white robe and<sup>(K)</sup> told to rest. Wouldn't you need a physical body in order to both wear a robe or to rest? We know that a body needs rest. Does a spirit need rest? So, looking at this passage it might seem probable that, at least, a temporary, intermediate physical body might be present in paradise. Some distinguish it as a resurrection body as opposed to a glorified body. Just as paradise is an intermediate place until the second coming and the new heaven is established, so you will have an intermediate body to function in that place. Here's my take on this: in paradise there is a personal incompleteness experienced by those who are either 1) in a disembodied state, if that's the position you believe is correct, or 2) is in an imperfect state where the temporary body given to you in paradise is not yet glorified into the heavenly body. One last passage on this topic; turn to 2 Corinthians 12. I want to conclude with this: Paul had the privilege of going to paradise which he called the third heaven.

<sup>2</sup>I know a man<sup>(B)</sup> in Christ who fourteen years ago was<sup>(C)</sup> caught up to<sup>(D)</sup> the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know,<sup>(E)</sup> God knows. <sup>3</sup>And I know that this man was caught up into<sup>(F)</sup> paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know,<sup>(G)</sup> God knows—

I really appreciate Paul describing it this way, because it tells me we can't know for sure. Is it important to try to find out? I would say 'yes.' But can we be dogmatic as to the conclusion we formulate? I don't think so.

And so, this is a good place to pause for a moment and ask this question: Are you ok with not knowing stuff? I come across people who just get all uptight about some of these things and they can't rest without a solid answer. And again, friends, there's a lot about heaven we're just not going to answer this side of it. And that goes for a whole host of other theological and doctrinal issues that people have debated for centuries. One of his Jesus' disciples told his friends, "Until I see Jesus from myself, I'm not buying it." And Jesus graciously accommodated him with his presence and then made this statement: blessed are those who don't see and yet believe. The apostle Paul was there and he still didn't know. And he seemed to be ok with that. The Bible reveals enough, we have enough evidence to trust in Jesus and enough evidence to trust God for the things we don't know.

### **3. We Will Look forward to Our Reward**

Jesus said in the sermon on the mount, "blessed are you when people persecute you. . . for great is your reward in heaven." And I don't think he was referring to salvation. Heaven isn't the reward, heaven is a gift of grace. In several parables Jesus indicated that rewards were part of the heaven experience.

#### **2 Corinthians 5:10**

**<sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.**

Paul is speaking specifically to believers in this verse. Then we have Jesus saying,

#### **Revelation 22:12**

**<sup>12</sup>"Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done.**

And these words apply to everyone. On the judgment day everyone will stand before God and receive a just reward. And it starts in this life: you have a choice. You can stand on your own merits or you can accept the merit of Christ on your behalf. That's the first condition of reward; the deciding factor between heaven and hell for you. But beyond that, it scripture seems to indicate that there will be degrees of reward both for the unrighteous and the righteous. Will people like mass murderers receive a greater punishment than an average unbeliever? The Bible seems to indicate that just as it seems to indicate greater rewards for believers who exhibited greater faithfulness and service in this life. The question before us is "when do you receive your reward?" And the answer is at the second coming; on judgment day. John 14. Jesus said, I've prepared a place for you, you'll get it when I return. There's been two thousand years of believers dying and going to paradise and I'm thinking, if they're getting their mansions now, all the good real estate is going to be taken up before I get there. But that's not the case. We're all going to enter the final heaven together. We're all going to receive our rewards at the same time. So for now, if you're in paradise awaiting the second coming, you're also waiting for the rewards Jesus has for you.

#### **4. We Will Rejoice Over Those Yet to Come**

**Hebrews 12:1,2; Luke 15:7,10**

**Hebrews 12:1**

**<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.**

Most of us understand that great cloud of witnesses to contain the heroes of faith that are listed in the previous chapter, chapter 11. Abraham, Moses, Joseph, all those Old Testament saints; they're looking down at us from where? From paradise. Remember Jesus transferred the paradise from the realm of the realm of the dead into the presence of God. And everyone who has died since is in that same paradise. So it stands to reason that everyone who has gone before us, your loved ones, are in that crowd, surrounding us, cheering us on, encouraging us from the very presence of God.

**Luke 15:7,10**

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who<sup>(A)</sup> repents than over ninety-nine<sup>(B)</sup> righteous persons who need no repentance. . . . Just so, I tell you, there is joy before<sup>(A)</sup> the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Note verse 7: It doesn't say the angels rejoice, it just says there is rejoicing.

And in verse 10, it says "before the angels.' Some translations say, rejoicing in the presence of the angels. So, the question is, "who's doing the rejoicing?" We are. I love watching baptisms. And I am moved every time someone shares their story of coming to faith in Jesus. Those of us who have an eternal perspective on life, is there anything better? Really? But imagine, being in the presence of Jesus, and then watching from the galleries of paradise someone you love place their faith in Him. And then, watching one of God's angels picking up the pen and writing that person's name in the Lamb's book of life; having the assurance that one day they will be where you are.

Now, let me address a question I've gotten a couple of times related to this. Some of you are concerned about those you love who aren't ready for heaven. One question I got was, 'Is there sadness in heaven?' We experience loss here when someone we love dies. Does the person who dies experience that same separation? More importantly; what about the ones we love who don't make it to heaven? Will you experience grief in paradise when someone you love rejects the gospel invitation?

**Rev. 7:17 (NIV)**

**For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;  
he will lead them to springs of living water.**

**And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."**

If paradise, and I believe this applies to the final heaven as well, if the presence of Jesus is the absence of sorrow, then how are we to view this question? And here is my feeble attempt at an answer. Remember what I said a few weeks ago; heaven is going to be all about Jesus. The Lamb will be at the center, he will be the focus of our

worship and desire. And He will satisfy every longing and sooth every sorrow, including either the temporary separation of loved ones until they reach paradise, or the eternal loss of a loved one who never makes it. I don't know how he's going to do that, that's his job not mine. All I know is that heaven is a place of eternal pleasures, everlasting joy at his right hand. I'll illustrate it with a personal story. In a few months Rhonda and I will celebrate our 34<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. It took us months to plan it. We notified the family to make sure they cleared June 4<sup>th</sup> on their calendars. We told all of our friends. We asked some very special people to be in our wedding party. We made a long list of people we wanted to come and celebrate with us. But I will tell you; when Rhonda started walking down that aisle, I didn't give one ounce of thought to anybody else in the room. It could have been just me and her on that day and it would have been enough. Actually, some of friends and family didn't make it to the wedding. It didn't affect how I felt about her. Christian, do you know what the bible calls you: His bride. I like that tuxedo commercial that says, when the whole room is looking at her, she'll be looking at you. At the wedding feast, all that's going to matter to you is Him. Regardless of who else is present or absent it will not affect your joy of being in His presence. And that's the question I'll leave you with this morning.

**One Question to Ask: Do I Long to Be In His Presence?**

**Next Week: Read 1 Corinthians 35-58**

**Text Your Questions to 219-379-714**