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## SALVATION THROUGH CHRIST

# GAINING THE ETERNAL HOME

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“For our citizenship is in heaven; . . .”  
(Philippians 3:20, 21).

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The very mention of heaven refreshes the spirit and enriches our thinking! Heaven is the ultimate of the aims and hopes of God’s people. It is the eternal reward that God has promised His faithful children. To Christians, “heaven is what it is all about”!

Is heaven a place, or is it merely a state of being? The Bible teaches it is both but does not give us a complete picture which includes every marvelous detail. The Lord has given us enough information about heaven to stir our hopes and motivate our desire to go there. If we should miss heaven, we have missed it all.

Paul wrote the Corinthian saints,

I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body, I know not; or whether out of the body, I know not; God knoweth), such a one caught up even to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body, or apart from the body, I know not; God knoweth), how that he was caught up into Paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

The mention in this passage of “the third heaven,” called “Paradise” in verse 4, infers a first and second heaven. The Bible describes three places under the name “heaven.” First is the space above the earth where the birds fly. Jesus said, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). Second is the firmament, where the heavenly bodies including the sun, moon, stars, and planets are. David said, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night

showeth knowledge” (Psalm 19:1, 2). The “third heaven” is the place where God dwells, the place to which Jesus ascended from atop Mount Olivet. David said,

Jehovah is in his holy temple; Jehovah, his throne is in heaven; his eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men (Psalm 11:4).

Jehovah looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, that did seek after God (Psalm 14:2).

Solomon, in his great prayer of dedication when the temple had been completed, prayed, “But will God in very deed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded!” (1 Kings 8:27). After Jesus had commissioned His disciples to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation,” Mark records, “So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken unto them, was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19). In his admonition to masters of servants, Paul said, “And ye masters, do the same things unto them, and forbear threatening: knowing that he who is both their master and yours is in heaven, and there is no respect of persons with him” (Ephesians 6:9).

In His infinite wisdom God saw fit to depict heaven to us by fleeting glimpses and partial descriptions rather than by one grand and glorious picture. By giving us varied glimpses, here a little, there a little, of what our eternal home will be, God has revealed enough to provide us with the concepts that are sufficient to make us long to

go there; and at the same time He has left enough unrevealed to create heart-throbbing anticipation of what eternal life in the eternal home will be like.

## I. AN ETERNAL KINGDOM

*Jesus described heaven as an eternal, heavenly kingdom.* In the judgment the King will say unto them on His right hand, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). Kingdoms have always held a gripping fascination to men. Concepts of power and might wielded by kings and armies grip the human mind at the thought of a kingdom. When John the Baptist began his preparatory work for the coming of the Messiah, he announced that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Jesus and His disciples, first the twelve, then the seventy, continued proclaiming the near advent of the kingdom. When Jesus showed that the citizens of the kingdom of heaven would be those who practiced the Beatitudes which are given in Matthew 5:1-12 rather than people who wielded military power by carnal weaponry, it was difficult for the people to erase the idea of an earthly, material kingdom from their minds.

Even now when people think of a kingdom, it is usually in terms of ancient Babylon, France under Louis XIV, or Israel under Solomon. But kingdoms like these, even under their greatest kings, fade into insignificance compared with the eternal "kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Both soldiers and citizens of the glorious kingdoms of the past suffered untold hardships and deprivations. Think of the terrible poverty-stricken conditions of tens of thousands during the "sun kingdom" of Louis XIV of France, and the fear and apprehension of those under the iron hand of a tyrant like Nebuchadnezzar, not to mention the terrible tax burdens during Solomon's reign! Sickness, disease, hunger, and squalor characterized large portions of the cities in these kingdoms. How wives and children must have suffered during military campaigns when their husbands and fathers were away months and years without coming home! Compare these terrible conditions with the happiness, joy, and eternal security of those who are "blessed of the Father." History records the failures, injustices, and down-

fall of countless kingdoms, but the faithful saints of God will inherit the one truly grand and glorious one prepared by the Lord Himself, and will be eternal in its duration.

Shortly before his execution by the emissaries of one of earth's most cruel kings, Paul wrote from his prison cell in Rome to his beloved son in the gospel, Timothy, "The Lord will deliver me from every evil work, and will save me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (2 Timothy 4:18). And Peter admonished,

Wherefore, brethren, give the more diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never stumble: for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1: 10, 11).

## II. AN ETERNAL HOME

*Heaven is depicted by Jesus as the "Father's house."* One of Jesus' most thrilling and most comforting statements is this:

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

The "Father's house" in this passage is not the church, and should not be confused with "the house of God, which is the church of the living God" in 1 Timothy 3:15. Jesus is talking about the eternal home of the redeemed. In it there are "many rooms" which the Lord has gone to prepare for the saints. The oft-heard expression "Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people" is true. The glory and splendor of the "Father's house" with its many rooms will never be defiled or demolished by earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, or calamities that often devastate even the most beautiful mansions built on earth by men.

Eternal home! How beautiful the sound of these wonderful words! We think of home as a place of tender love, intimate joyful relationships, comfort, and security. The eternal home of the soul is all this and more. All the attributes that combine to make life enjoyable and worth living will be in that eternal home in perfect symmetry.

### III. AN ETERNAL INHERITANCE

*Heaven is a Christian's inheritance.* Just as God's people Israel inherited the promised land of Canaan, so God's people will inherit the heavenly land. Because Christians have been born again and are children of God, they are the heirs of His wondrous estate. Paul said, "For our citizenship is in heaven . . ." (Philippians 3:20). He also told the Roman Christians,

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him (Romans 8:14-17).

Peter revealed four things about the Christian's inheritance,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Peter 1:3-5).

First, it is "*incorruptible*." The inheritance is imperishable, not subject to decay by eroding time like an earthly inheritance. "The things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18). Material estates perish with the onrushing tides of time, and even our physical bodies return to the dust; but the Christian's inheritance from our heavenly Father is not subject to corruption. Second, it is "*undefiled*." An earthly inheritance, whether it be money or property, is always subject to defilement. A beautiful new house may be in a near perfect gem-like setting, and its colors and architecture such that will cause passersby to stop and admire it, but its beauty and very existence is always subject to defilement by fire, vandalism, etc. But the inheritance of the saints cannot be defaced or vandalized by enemies. There will be no enemies in heaven and no contaminants to mar its beauty. Third, it "*fadeth not away*." "The inheritance of the saints in light" is not like anything we may inherit on earth. Whatever we may inherit that is of a material nature sooner or later will fade. I have gasped in amaze-

ment as I looked upon the beautiful Rhododendron Gardens on Roan Mountain in the spring, but their beauty soon fades. Marvelous gardens of flowers in their multicolors soon turn brown, fade, and return to the ground. But the glorious beauty of the eternal home never fades. It wears its freshness and splendor forever. Fourth, it is "*reserved in heaven for you*." The reservation is made for us. No tickets can be obtained at the pearly gates. The Lord Himself has written our reservation. He said, ". . . I go to prepare a place for you."

While living in Boston, I tried unsuccessfully for several months to attend a concert by the famous Boston Pops Orchestra, but was never able to obtain a reservation. But it will not be that way in heaven. All the saints of God have reservations made for them, securely guarded by the power of God through faith.

### IV. AN ETERNAL CITY

*Heaven also is pictured as an eternal city with eternal foundations.* Men have built cities since the days of Cain and Nimrod (Genesis 4:17; 10:11, 12). Some of the great cities have long since passed into oblivion, and the spades of archaeologists unearth evidences of their existence. In our generation, cities like Mexico City, Tokyo, and New York City represents the largest ever built by man. The historian's account of ancient Babylon, with its beautiful hanging gardens and massive walls upon which four chariots could drive abreast, intrigues us. But Babylon is gone and so are many other of earth's great cities. These cities were vulnerable to attack from enemies, poverty, and human miseries. But not so the eternal city of God. The writer of Hebrews said, "For we have not here an abiding city, but we seek after the city which is to come" (Hebrews 13:14). Again the writer said concerning Abraham,

For he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God . . . . But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God; for he hath prepared for them a city (Hebrews 11:10, 16).

The most graphic and awe-inspiring picture of heaven as the beautiful city of God was revealed to the beloved John on the Isle of Patmos. John wrote,

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away; and the sea is no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband . . . And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like a stone most precious, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal: having a wall great and high . . . And the city lieth foursquare, and the length thereof is as great as the breadth: . . . the length and the breadth and the height thereof are equal . . . And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine upon it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the lamp thereof is the Lamb . . . and there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or he that maketh an abomination and a lie: but only they that are written in the Lamb's book of life.

And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life, bearing twelve manner of fruits, yielding its fruit every month: and the leaves thereof were for the healing of the nations. . . . And there shall be night no more; and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun; for the Lord God shall give them light: and they shall reign forever and ever (Revelation 21:1, 2, 10–12, 16, 23, 27; 22:1, 2, 5).

## V. AN ETERNAL REST

*Heaven is a place of eternal rest for the people of God.* All of us know what it is like to work long hours and return home so tired we can hardly get one foot in front of the other. How sweet to sit down for a while and rest! Jesus promised rest to those who would come to Him for salvation and life:

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matthew 11:28–30).

The writer of Hebrews said,

Let us fear therefore, lest haply a promise being left of entering into his rest, any one of you should seem to have come short of it. . . . For we who have believed do enter into that rest; . . . Let us therefore give diligence to enter into that rest, that no man fall after the same example of disobedience (Hebrews 4:1, 3, 11).

On Patmos John wrote, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, Write, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth: yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors;

for their works follow with them" (Revelation 14:13).

Many have asked me, "What will heaven be like? What kind of place do you think heaven really is? What will the quality of life there be like?" In answer to these and similar questions, I note first that *heaven will be a place of eternal beauty, happiness and pleasure.* The psalmist said, "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; in thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psalm 16:11). Peter wrote, "And the God of all grace, who called you unto his eternal glory in Christ, after that you have suffered a little while, shall himself perfect, establish, and strengthen you" (1 Peter 5:10). In Paul's epistle to the saints in Rome he wrote, "To them that by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and incorruption, eternal life: . . . but glory and honor and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Romans 2:7, 10). *Without doubt, Paul describes in these verses what life in heaven is like: "glory and honor and incorruption, . . . and peace."* One cannot conceive of anything that would be better than this.

But before the children of God enter into the glories of the eternal home their physical bodies must be changed. Paul wrote the Corinthian saints,

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We all shall not sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Corinthians 15:50–53).

For we know that if the earthly house of our tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. For verily in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our habitation which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For indeed we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but that we would be clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life (2 Corinthians 5:1–4).

Yet again Paul said concerning the change that must take place,

. . . we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto himself (Philippians 3:20, 21).

### CONCLUSION

A line from a grand old spiritual song says, "Everybody that's a-talkin' 'bout heav'n ain't a-goin' there." Misconceptions and erroneous ideas abound as to who will be in heaven. Dr. Michael Ramsey, Archbishop of Canterbury, and one-time president of the World Council of Churches, made a statement that is indicative of some of the unscriptural ideas people have as to who are heirs of heaven. He said, "Heaven is also not a place to which we humans go in our present bodily state, nor is it a place for Christians only. Those who have led a good life on earth but found themselves unable to believe God will not be debarred from heaven. I expect to meet some

present day atheists there." When one compares what the learned doctor says with such passages as Matthew 25:41–46, 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9, Galatians 5:19–21, and 2 Peter 3:3–14 and several other like references, he can see just how far afield some are from the truth.

Dr. Ramsey and others like him notwithstanding, the Bible is the only source of information we have as to who will be ushered into that eternal kingdom. God Himself tells us who will be there. The family of God, consisting of all God's children, are the heirs of His estate. Those who have been born again of water and the Spirit are God's children and heirs together of His promise (John 3:1–5). Those who live "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world," adding the graces that must adorn the life and character of true Christians, who live faithfully even unto death, have the hope and promise of eternal life in heaven.

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