



IMAGINE HEAVEN

Evidence of the Afterlife

Saturday, 9/12/20 at 4:00 | Sunday, 9/13/20 at 9:00

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: Many people around the world are wondering: What will happen when I die? Some people living in Burkina Faso, West Africa asked Rev. James May these three questions: (1) Is there a God? (2) Is there a heaven? (3) How do we get there? These are the answers: **Yes**, there is a God, the Triune God – *the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit!* **Yes**, there is a heaven – *at least three of them!* And how do we get there? The Father has made the way through the work of the Son and the Holy Spirit! *Therefore, by God's grace, may everyone repent and trust in Jesus as their Savior from sin, death, and hell!*

This sermon is on the topic of heaven! The Bible is our source for knowing God's truth about heaven and many other things. This sermon is based on the Bible; it also includes another topic, *which can aid our understanding of the Bible!*

Why study about heaven? When we know more about heaven: It will ♦transform our lives on earth and ♦cause us to look forward to going to heaven someday!

1. **The Bible and Heaven:** The Bible includes the terms “heaven,” “heavenly,” or “heavens” over 650 times! Here are some examples:
 - a. God created the heavens: ^{NAU} **Genesis 1:1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The Bible identifies three heavens – ▶the daytime sky, ▶the nighttime sky, and ▶the dwelling place of God!
 - b. Angels travel between heaven and earth: ^{NAU} **Genesis 28:12** [Jacob] had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.
 - c. From heaven God sees us: ^{NAU} **Psalm 33:13-15** The LORD looks from heaven; He sees all the sons of men; From His dwelling place He looks out On all the inhabitants of the earth...
 - d. From heaven God calls to people on earth: For example, God called to Abraham, *telling him to STOP, to NOT sacrifice Isaac* (**Genesis 22**).
 - e. From heaven God pours out wrath and blessing: For example, His wrath upon Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19**) and His blessing of food upon the Israelites (**Exodus 16**).
 - f. When people die in Jesus they go heaven: For example, Jesus, *from His cross*, said to the criminal next to him – *who ▶repented and ▶confessed his faith in Jesus*, “...today you shall be with Me in Paradise” (**Lk. 23:43 NAU**), which is another name for ▶the third heaven and ▶the dwelling place of God (**2 Corinthians 12**).

2. What Is Going On in Heaven?

- a. There is peace: ^{NAU} **Isaiah 57:1** The righteous man *[the one with faith in the Messiah]* perishes *[physically dies]*, *[and]... is taken away from evil [from the evil of this world]*, *[and] He enters into peace [“prosperous relationship,” Holladay, BW]... Right now, in this life, through Jesus, we can have peace in every circumstance! In heaven the peace ♣ will be greater and ♣ will be complete!*
- b. People are serving God and are richly blessed by God: Dr. Becker wrote: “The scenes described in Revelation [chapter] 7 are the first of a number of visions¹ in which the Holy Ghost portrays the glorious hope that ought to live in the heart of a believing child of God” (120). ^{NAU} **Rev. 7:9-17** After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues *[that is, from the four corners of the earth]*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes *[signifying God’s gift of righteousness]*, and palm branches *were* in their hands *[indicating victory]*; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb *[note that God and the Lamb get all the credit; all the saved take no credit].*”¹¹ And all the angels were standing around the throne and *around* the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might *[7 words of perfect praise]*, *be* to our God forever and ever. Amen.”

¹ The security and hope of God’s people: 11:15-19; 14:1-5; 19:1-8; 21:1-22:5

Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, “These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and where have they come from?” ¹⁴ I said to him, “My lord, you know.” *[In other words: “You will have to answer that question for me.” (Becker, 128)]* And he said to me, “These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation *[referring to the believers coming out of this world as they die in Jesus]*, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. **[Now, notice their 10 blessings:]** For this reason, **[1]** they are before the throne of God; and **[2]** they serve Him day and night in His temple; and **[3]** He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them. **[4]** They will hunger no longer, **[5]** nor thirst anymore; **[6]** nor will the sun beat down on them, **[7]** nor any heat; for **[8]** the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and **[9]** will guide them to springs of the water of life; and **[10]** God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”

HYMN: Children of the Heavenly Father, LSB 725, stanzas 3-4

- 3 Neither life nor death shall ever
From the Lord His children sever;
Unto them His grace He showeth,
And their sorrows all He knoweth.
- 4 Though He giveth or He taketh,
God His children ne'er forsaketh;
His the loving purpose solely
To preserve them pure and holy.

3. **The Bible and Near-Death Experiences:** Many have near-death experiences today, *and at least one is recorded in the Bible.*
- a. What is a NDE (Near-Death Experience)? (1) Someone is near death or has clinically died (*no heartbeat, no brainwaves*); (2) he experiences something beyond this life on earth; and (3) he is brought back to life through modern medicine or through God working a miracle. For those who have studied many NDE's, their stories reveal what the Bible teaches – *but with greater clarity!*
 - b. In the Bible, did some people die and were brought back to life? Yes! **God** worked **through Elijah** to raise a young boy (1 Kings 17:17-24), **through Elisha** to raise a young boy (2 Kings 4:32-37), **through Jesus** to raise the daughter of Jairus (Mark 5), the son of a widow who lived in Nain (Luke 7), and Lazarus (John 11), **through Peter** to raise Tabitha (Acts 9), and **through Paul** to raise Eutychus (Acts 20)!
 - c. What NDE is recorded in the Bible?
 - i. The ND (Near-Death): ^{NAU} **Acts 14:19-20 ...Jews came [to Lystra] from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city. // Was he near death and, over time, he revived, or did God work a miracle? *It must be one or the other!***
 - ii. The E (Experience): With these words, Paul refers back to when he was stoned and left for dead: ^{NAU} **2 Corinthians 12:2-4 I know a man in Christ [Paul is talking about himself] who fourteen years ago [which**

is the time of Acts 14] -- whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows -- such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man... was caught up into Paradise [implying that Paul knew it happened when he was stoned and left for dead] and heard inexpressible [unspeakable] words [possibly words unknown on earth]...

- d. How common are NDE's? According to a 1991 Gallup Poll estimate, 13 million Americans have reported that they have had a near-death experience. Years ago, a member of Bethlehem told me about his NDE – dying at Parma Hospital in the heart center for about 10 minutes, having an amazing experience of peace and light, and being brought back to life. With all such experiences, *we must be careful*: ☹️ If they contradict the Bible, *reject them*; ☺️ if they increase our understanding of the Bible, *they might be useful*.
- e. What do medical doctors think about NDE's? Since most believe in evolution and don't believe in anything after death, *most medical doctors reject NDE's*. But here is one doctor who changed his thinking: Cardiologist, Dr. Michael Sabom: He describes what changed his mind: “Before talking with Pete, and scores like him, I didn't believe there was such a thing as a near-death experience... [Pete] told me he had left his body during his first cardiac arrest and had watched the resuscitation. When I asked him to tell me what exactly he saw, he described the resuscitation with such detail and accuracy that I could have later used the tape to teach physicians.... These people, like Pete Morton, saw details of their resuscitation that they could not otherwise have seen.” Then, because of

what Pete said, Dr. Sabom began five years of research on NDE's. His findings were published in the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA).²

- f. One of many interesting NDE stories: The Lancet, one of Europe's most prestigious medical journals, published the account of a patient who had experienced cardiac arrest and was brought into the hospital comatose and not breathing. As a tube was placed in the patient's airway..., it was noted by the medical staff that the patient wore upper dentures. The dentures were removed and tucked into the drawer of a nearby crash-cart while the patient was in a deep coma.... A week later, the patient regained consciousness. When the nurse came in he exclaimed, 'Oh, that nurse knows where my dentures are.' The nurse was very surprised as the patient explained: 'Yes, you were there when I was brought into the hospital and you took my dentures out of my mouth and put them [in the drawer of a cart in that room].'³

4. What Is the Purpose of Studying the Topic of Heaven?

- a. Consider these comments from Rev. Don Piper, who had his own NDE: "...people can't imagine Heaven, so they don't live for it.... Experiencing Heaven is the most real thing that's ever happened to me. I did not want to come back. If you've been there, you don't want to be here. But when I did come back here, I intensified my effort [more and more rapidly] to help people understand the free gift of Heaven offered through

² John Burke, *Imagine Heaven* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2015), 38.

³ *Ibid.*, 42.

Christ.”⁴ Paul, *who also went to heaven*, wrote something similar: ^{NAU} **2 Corinthians 5:2** ...*in this house [that is, in our physical bodies] we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven [that is, our eternal bodies]...* He also expressed his longing to return to heaven with these words: ^{NAU} **Philippians 1:21** *For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*

- b. These are some comment from Rev. John Burke, the author of the book, Imagine Heaven: “How you think about heaven affects everything in life—how you prioritize love, how willing you are to sacrifice for the long term, how you view suffering, what you fear or don’t fear. ...much of what we love about this life and more awaits us in eternity.” The Bible says: ^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 2:9-10** ... “THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.” For to us God revealed *them* through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God.

Let Us Pray: Dear F, S, and HS, ever-impress upon us that the Bible is true, *so that we are thoroughly convinced that creation, sin, Jesus, heaven, hell and much more are also true!* Then, *knowing more about heaven*, help us to ♣long for it, ♣live for it, and ♣invite others to join us there through Jesus!

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⁴ Ibid., 13.