

INTRODUCTION

This is the third message in the series "Heaven: An Insider's Guide."

Next Sunday, Joel Rosenberg will be here and he'll be giving you more information about how to get to heaven. Then on Easter Sunday, two weeks from today, I'll conclude this series with a message entitled, "Confirming Your Reservation in Heaven."

Probably the best book about Heaven, besides the Bible, is Randy Alcorn's book, *Heaven*. But if you're looking for another great resource, I recommend Dan Schaeffer's book, *A Better Country: Preparing for Heaven*. I'll be quoting him today several times.

Before you make a trip, helps to know everything you can about your destination. That's why we have travel guides. They tell you the best places to stay, the best places to eat, and a list of the activities that are available to you. If you know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, Heaven isn't a vacation destination; it's an eternal destination. It's the hometown of Jesus and He's there now. So, what will there be to do in Heaven?

Perhaps the biggest falsehood people have about heaven is that it will be boring. In 1977, when he was 28 years old, Billy Joel wrote a song entitled "Only the Good Die Young." In it he wrote, "They say there's a heaven for those who will wait; Some say it's better, but I say it ain't. I'd rather laugh with the sinners; Than cry with the saints; The sinners are much more fun. Only the good die young." Well, Billy turns 65 in May, so he's not so young anymore. But Billy, you got one thing right. People DO die—young and old alike. The Bible says, "It is appointed to man ONCE to die; and after that the judgment." (Hebrews 9:27)

In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain has Huck make this observation about heaven: "She (Miss Watson) told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together."

And Ted Turner, who has been called "the Mouth of the South," had these remarks to say about heaven when he spoke to the National Press Club a few years ago: "Remember, heaven is going to be perfect. And I don't really want to be there. Those of us that go to hell, which will be most of us in this room; most journalists, are certainly going there. Who wants to go to a place that's perfect? Boring. Boring."

I like what C. S. Lewis had to say about people who don't understand heaven: "There is no need to be worried by facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of heaven ridiculous by saying they do not want to 'spend eternity playing harps.' The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups they should not talk about them." (*Mere Christianity*, p. 106)

I always enjoyed Gary Larson's Far Side cartoons. He had one of a man sitting on a cloud in heaven with angel wings saying, "I wish I had brought a magazine." Is heaven going to be

boring? Are we going to sit on clouds and play harps for eternity? No way. The Apostle John described the new heaven and the new earth in Revelation 21:1-5:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’

Revelation 22:1-5. “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 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 forever and ever.”

When a believer dies today, their soul and spirit immediately go to be with Jesus. We learned last week that the definition of death for a Christian is “Away from the body and at home with the Lord.” (2 Corinthians 5:8) They are in Paradise with Jesus. But that isn’t the final heaven. As we read in Revelation, God is going to create a new heaven and a new earth. Just as He redeems and resurrects people, He will redeem and resurrect this old earth.

Randy Alcorn describes the new creation this way: “It is no coincidence that the first two chapters of the Bible begin with the creation of the heavens and the earth and the last two chapters begin with the re-creation of the heavens and the earth. All that was lost at the beginning will be restored at the end—and far more will be added besides. The power of Christ’s resurrection is enough not only to remake us, but also to remake every inch of the universe—mountains, rivers, plants, animals, stars, quasars, and galaxies.” (*Heaven*, p. 126)

So get ready for the most amazing new heaven and new earth, more beautiful and bountiful than you can ever imagine. That’s where we’ll be living for eternity. And once you understand the things we’ll be doing in Heaven, there’s no way it can be boring. Let me give you five reasons why Heaven can’t be boring.

(1) HEAVEN CAN’T BE BORING BECAUSE WE’LL BE EXPLORING ITS INFINITE BEAUTY

Look again at how John described the capital city of Heaven. “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the

Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.” (Revelation 22:1-2)

Stop for a moment and try to remember the most beautiful place you've ever visited on this old earth. I've been to the Grand Canyon, Lake Louise, Canada, and the Monterey Peninsula in California. I've seen the black sands of Hawaii and the white sands of Destin. When my daughters were young we took a trip out west and visited Zion National Park in southern Utah. In the 1800s when the Mormons were moving West, they came to this place of majestic mountains, clear lakes, and rushing rivers. It was so beautiful they named it after heaven – Zion. And it is still probably the most breath-taking location I've ever visited.

What's your most beautiful spot? Well, compared to the beauty of the new heaven and the new earth, Zion National Park might as well be a stinking garbage dump.

There's much more to the new heaven and the new earth than the heavenly city. There are planets and galaxies we'll be able to explore. Humanity has always had the urge to explore. That's why the Europeans sailed across the Atlantic in search for India and instead discovered what they called the New World.

The 1960s was the decade of the space race with the Soviet Union. In eight years, NASA went from putting a man in space to putting men on the moon. In 1968 movie producers extrapolated that same rate of scientific advancement, and released the movie "2001: A Space Odyssey." By 2001 we were supposed to have deep space vehicles capable of carrying humans to vast reaches of our solar system and beyond. Boy, were they wrong! We're not even sending space shuttles into orbit any more. We've sent a few space probes toward Mars and beyond, but we are basically an earthbound people.

The beginning lines of Star Trek are: "Space the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. It's continuing mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no one has gone before." Well, space isn't the final frontier. Heaven is. And we'll be able to explore it without a starship.

Dan Schaeffer writes: "God has made us to explore and discover with great delight. We use spaceships and submarines because we need them, because our bodies are not perfectly fitted to explore our world without them. But Jesus, in His glorified body, which is the prototype of ours, was able to ignore the physical obstructions of our planet, like walls, gravity, density, and other things. Though physical Himself, He vanished and reappeared. He passed through solid walls. He floated up into heaven defying gravity. Our new bodies will be made perfectly to explore the new heaven and earth. We have heard the phrase in history, 'the golden age of exploration.' In reality, that age lies ahead of us, not behind us." (*A Better Country: Preparing for Heaven*, p. 72)

(2) HEAVEN CAN'T BE BORING BECAUSE WE'LL BE ENRICHED BY MEETING NEW FRIENDS

Here's how John described the people he saw in heaven. "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language,

standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands." (Revelation 7:9)

Now, this doesn't mean we'll always be wearing white robes and waving palm branches. Revelation 7 is describing a specific coronation event in heaven. But notice the multitude—people from every nation, tribe and language. These will be our fellow citizens of heaven.

You'll have a chance to ask King David how big Goliath really was. You'll meet a tall tax collector named Zacchaeus. And as one of my Facebook friends posted, you'll meet Eve and Sarah and be able to ask them, "What were you thinking?" You'll be able to ask Daniel what it was like to spend the night reading between the lions. You may think you'll ask Peter what it was like to walk on water, but in heaven, that won't be a challenge any more.

Will you know your family members there? Absolutely. You'll know them better than you ever knew them in this life. But you'll know EVERYONE in heaven better than you know your closest friends and family members now. If your great-great grandparents knew Jesus, you'll get to know them, too. But they won't seem old and you won't seem young to them.

And that baby that died—in the womb, or as a newborn? Absolutely, you'll know him or her in the fullness of their potential for vitality. Jesus took children in His arms and received them and blessed them. He's still doing that. When King David's infant son died he said, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me." (2 Samuel 12:23). According to Hebrews 11:32 David is in heaven, so we can know that's where he went to be with his son who died as an infant.

I wish I could know each of you better. And maybe you wish you could know me better. But in this life, we all have a sin-influenced heart that drives us isolate ourselves. We're shy and withdrawn because we're afraid of hurting people, or of being hurt.

And in this life, there are multitudes of annoying, obnoxious people. The thought of spending eternity with them gives us the "willies." But imagine when they are transformed to be like Jesus, and so are you.

In this life we really only know a few people intimately. You have close relationships with your family members, and maybe a few good friends, but can you imagine what it will be like to truly know and love all the redeemed of all the ages?

Dan Schaeffer writes: "Heaven will be a city of new people—regenerated, renewed and perfect. Imagine upon arriving in heaven that you discovered to your delight, that the first person you met loved you so dearly and deeply that it fairly took your breath away and that this expression of love neither embarrassed you nor made you feel strange. You were able to receive this person's love as easily as he or she was able to give it. Then imagine the next person you met loved you with an equivalent, but unique, perfect love as well...On earth, all our love is sin-infected and sin-affected. The best of our loves has to struggle with resentment, envy, jealousy, pride, anger, and other sinful ingredients. In heaven, each person will be a new 'best friend.'" (*A Better Country: Preparing for Heaven*, p. 90)

Have you ever met a celebrity or sports star? Do you remember how excited you were to meet them, and maybe have your picture taken with them? A friend told me once he drove all the way to Houston to meet George W. Bush once. And instead of shaking hands, President Bush embraced him in a bear hug. Wow! Just imagine that kind of thrill upon meeting every person in heaven. That won't be boring!

(3) HEAVEN CAN'T BE BORING BECAUSE WE'LL BE ENGULFED IN A SYMPHONY OF PRAISE

When John arrived in heaven, there was a scene of worship. He wrote: "Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain... Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'" (Revelation 5:6, 11-12)

This is a specific event in heaven where the Lamb of God, Jesus comes forward and opens the scroll to announce the final chapter of this world's drama.

I love coming to church. I love worshipping and I love teaching the Word. I've been preaching for 43 years and there has never been a Sunday morning when I woke up and said, "Oh no, it's Sunday again." I love Sunday! But most people can't take too much church. It's funny, but the most enjoyable thing a lot of people do at church is to LEAVE. Worship is over, and they storm out to get to their cars which are parked in such a way to make a fast getaway. "Okay. I've put in my two hours for the week; I'm good until next Sunday." So the idea of heaven being an eternal church service really isn't that appealing to most folks.

John Eldredge confesses this idea: "We have settled on an image of the never-ending sing-along in the sky; one great hymn after another, forever and ever, amen. And our heart sinks. Forever and ever? That's it? That's the good news? And then we sigh and feel guilty that we are not more 'spiritual.' We lose heart, and we turn once more to the present to find what life we can." (*The Journey of Desire*, p. 111)

Relax. Heaven isn't going to be six thousand verses of the same praise chorus. It's not going to be a sermon that lasts forty years. Instead, praise and worship will be the very atmosphere of heaven.

I think praise in heaven will be like the soundtrack of a great movie. The music is there, but you're not really aware of it, except it is moving you and enhancing the enjoyment of the experience. I like to listen to relaxing music when I study and write. Just as you listen to the radio or your iPod when you're driving, or working, the symphony of praise will surround you. Have you ever been listening to music, and all of a sudden a familiar song comes on and you start singing along with it? That's what you'll do in heaven, but it will be a new song, and you'll still know the words and the tune!

I think there will be precious moments when we're serving the Lord and we'll just break out in

singing along with the symphony of heaven. And the good news, you'll be able to sing perfectly in heaven. You'll sing better than Celine Dion and Michael Bublé combined.

I can remember standing next to my mother in church and hearing her try to sing. She was awful. She could carry a tune; she just couldn't unload it. She was tone deaf. She was what we call a prisoner singer. She was always behind a few bars and couldn't find the right key. I used to tell her not to sing, but she would still make a joyful noise—emphasis on noise. Now I love the memory of her singing. She's in heaven and she can sing along with choir of heaven in a beautiful voice. Don't worry if you can't sing now. Go ahead and make a joyful noise unto the Lord and just realize you'll be engulfed in a symphony of praise in heaven.

(4) HEAVEN CAN'T BE BORING BECAUSE WE'LL BE ENERGIZED BY SERVING THE LORD

The Bible says, "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him." (Revelation 22:3)

You won't be sitting a cloud wishing you had a magazine. You're going to be working in heaven. You'll be serving the Lord. We'll be ruling and reigning with Christ.

The parable Jesus told about the faithful servants is about how we use the gifts and abilities He has given us here. If we're faithful here, He will give us more responsibilities in heaven. The best translation of 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 literally says, "Do you not know that the saints will govern the world? Do you not know that we are to govern angels?" (McArthur Study Bible).

You'll be working in eternity. You'll be serving the Lord, but you won't get weary or tired. You'll be energized and fulfilled. I think you'll be accomplishing something so amazing that you'll have a feeling of euphoria. I remember the first time I made a hole-in-one. It was number four at Hollytree. 155 yards. I hit an eight-iron that drew toward the flag. It hit once and spun left and disappeared into the hole. I jumped up and down and then I fell to my knees on the tee box and lifted my hands and said, "Thank you, Jesus!" That was euphoria. But I made a double bogey on the next hole, so it was a short-lived euphoria.

Imagine the way you felt when you accomplished something you really wanted: Finishing a job. Graduating from college. Getting that promotion. Then extend that sense of accomplishment and fulfillment out to eternity. That's what it's going to be like working in Heaven.

Dan Schaeffer had written: "God did not create me for a short seventy-to-eighty-year life span. I was created for eternity. The gifts, passions, and abilities that God has given and revealed to you are, and will remain for your entire earthly existence only in the embryo stage...And those gifts will be yours forever, a part of you that God always had in mind to bloom in your forever. None of us, even the most accomplished among us, has ever experienced anything but the bare budding of our God-given talents and gifts." (*A Better Country: Preparing for Heaven*, p. 120)

(5) HEAVEN CAN'T BE BORING BECAUSE WE'LL BE ENJOYING THE PRESENCE OF JESUS

I've saved the best for last. The very best thing about heaven is seeing the face of Jesus. The Bible says, "They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads." (Revelation 22:4)

Paul wrote, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face." (1 Corinthians 13:12). The language there is of a blurred image. It's like looking at a picture that's out of focus. Or like trying to see your face in a mirror that's all fogged up. You can see something, but it's not clear.

Those of us who love Jesus are always looking for His face. We see it dimly now with our eyes of faith. But one day we'll look straight into the face of Jesus and His name will be on our foreheads I believe that means Jesus will be foremost in our minds and thoughts.

People want to know if they'll be married in heaven. Jesus said we would be like the angels in that the angels don't marry. Contrary to what some people believe. We will be married in heaven. We'll be married to Jesus. The church is the Bride of Christ.

Dan Schaeffer writes: "Human marriage was always meant to be but a foreshadow of the things to come. Human marriage is an exclusive relationship between one man and one woman. We desire this exclusive love, this special feeling of being the single and only romantic love of the other. In Heaven, in His presence forever, we will finally eat the banquet for which all human marriages and loves were but hors d'oeuvres. We will not miss having the one human relationship through which we find our life and fulfillment, for we shall finally experience the real thing with our Lord." (*A Better Country: Preparing for Heaven*, p. 114)

When you see Jesus face to face, your deepest yearning for acceptance and intimacy will be fulfilled. You may be single, widowed, or divorced. But in heaven, all previous relationships or lack thereof will be overshadowed by a powerful love relationship with Jesus.

CONCLUSION

A Sunday School teacher was teaching her class of children about heaven. She wanted them to understand the importance of believing in Jesus so she asked them, "Now, boys and girls, what do you have to do to go to heaven?" One little boy shot his hand up and said, "You have to die!" Are you ready to die and meet Jesus?

If you know Jesus, one day you'll die, and you'll see His face. Or He'll return and then you'll look into His face. Five hundred years ago, John Donne wrote: "No man ever saw God and lived. And yet, I shall not live till I see God." And nine years ago Randy Alcorn wrote: "The day I die will be the best day I've ever lived."

It will be worth it all when you see Jesus. In 1923 Nettie Dudley Washington wrote a song that was largely ignored for about sixty years. But the Gaither vocal band re-discovered it and recorded it in 1993. Now the words are familiar. "As I entered the gates of that city, My loved ones all knew me well; They took me down the streets of Heaven; Such scenes were too many to tell; I saw Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Talked with Mark and Timothy. But I said, "I want to see

Jesus, 'Cause He's the One who died for me." Then I bowed on my knees and cried, "Holy, Holy, Holy." I clapped my hands and sang, "Glory, Glory, Glory." I sang, "Glory to the Son of God."

OUTLINE

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"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain... Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!'" *Revelation 5:6, 11-12*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes