

9. Heaven (2Q 2009—Walking the Walk: The Christian Life)

Biblical material: Eccles. 9:5, 6; Col. 1:10–14; 1 Thess. 4:13–18; Rev. 21:1–4, 8.

Quotes

- There is nothing but heaven worth setting our hearts upon. *Richard Baxter*
- Earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal. *Thomas Moore*
- It is God alone who makes heaven to be heaven. *Thomas Brooks*
- If you're not allowed to laugh in heaven, I don't want to go there. *Martin Luther*
- It will be one of the felicities of heaven that saints shall no longer misunderstand each other. *Isaac Milner*
- It is certain that all that will go to heaven hereafter begin their heaven now, and have their hearts there. *Matthew Henry*
- Our duty as Christians is always to keep heaven in our eye and earth under our feet. *Matthew Henry*

Questions

How do we answer the charge that heaven is the reward we seek for what we do on earth? How would we live if there were to be no heaven? What is the answer to those who demand proof that heaven exists? Is heaven where this entire world is forgotten? Can a stress on heaven be problematic? How do we explain what heaven will be like?

Bible discussion

Solomon in Eccl. 9:5 reminds us that the dead don't know anything—there is no soul that floats away to heaven at death. Our inheritance is God's kingdom (Col. 1:10–14). In 1 Thess. 4 Paul urges us to encourage one another with the assurance of the Lord's return to take us home with him forever. And in Rev. 21 we see God creating a new heaven and a new earth. “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.” (1 Cor. 2:9 NLT.)

Comment 1

John Lennon encouraged us to “Imagine there's no heaven.” Well, what if there were no heaven? How would you choose to live? Or are we making sure of our richly-deserved reward...

“Ah yes,” my friend told me, “of course you'd do that. After all, there'll be pie in the sky, by and by!”

And so I thought of pies. In particular, those mouth-wateringly delightful pies of all varieties available at that famous American eating establishment, Marie Callenders. (My personal favourite has to be Key Lime. Or maybe German Chocolate. But then again...) Pies from my childhood too—the scrumptious blackberry and apple pie that my Auntie Mais (short for Maisie) made in autumn. Pies upon pies, the jolly pie-man of the nursery rhyme, right down to those on a computer screen—the dreaded pie charts!

Pie in the sky? The sense of a reward—and the suggestion that if there's no pie, you'd act differently!

I met a man (in Scotland, as it happens) while I was collecting for missions. He told me he was better than I was, because he did good without any reward, while I only did what

I did because of my expectations of compensation. He acted philanthropically without thought of benefit, while I was motivated by selfishness. We had an interesting debate, and I went away thinking. Maybe he was right? But in the end I decided I wasn't acting with the thought of being rewarded for doing good. I concluded that the answer was that Christians would live as they do even without the reward of future pie!

Ultimately good is good; truth is inherently true, we do right because it is right. For despite the other ways of responding, what God is looking for is *agreement* over moral and ethical truth. I may obey because I fear punishment. I may obey because I want the reward. But when I affirm the rightness of God with understanding, and without thinking of myself at all, then I truly follow God as a friend.

For “Everyone who does what is right has been born of him,” and “If you really keep the royal law in the Scripture, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ you are doing right.” (1 Jn. 2:29 NIV; Jas. 2:8 NIV). And instead of thinking whether I really want to behave, instead, I “Never tire of doing what is right.” (2 Thess. 3:13 NIV). Even if there is no pie!

Comment 2

“And there was war in heaven.” (Revelation 12:7). The time when Lucifer rebelled against God and the angels fought one another—even in the hallowed courts of heaven! Wonder what weapons they used? Must've been more than harps turned into bows and arrows! More like weapons of the mind... What is important is that the Devil didn't win, and that God didn't wipe him out.

So why didn't/doesn't God zap the Devil?” To find the answer we need to understand what this amazing heavenly war was all about. Isaiah 14:12-15 reveals that Lucifer wanted to be like God. He wanted to have more power even than God! And you can imagine what methods the Devil tried: trickery, deceit and lies. He defamed the character of God so he could get his own way.

Now, if you were God, what would you do? You might be tempted to destroy the Devil. Maybe, until you realized that all the other created beings of the Universe would then serve you from fear instead of love. Imagine the talk in the angelic choirs:

“Did you see what God did to Lucifer and his friends? I'm scared! Better do what God says, or else!” And the apparent message from God would be “Do as you're told or I'll kill you.” A loving Father? You see the problem.

The war continues on this planet. The Devil deceived mankind. And the war will only be over, not when God smashes the opposition by force, but when we agree that only God's way is right. That takes a while. This is why we're still here. We need to see what sin and evil really means, that God is not the kind of person the Devil has said he is. Until that time our role is to speak and demonstrate the truth about God our friend so clearly demonstrated at the Cross.

Ellen White Comments

This world has been visited by the Majesty of heaven, the Son of God... Christ came to this world as the expression of the very heart and mind and nature and character of God. He was the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person. But He laid aside His royal robe and kingly crown, and stepped down from His high command to take the place of a servant. He was rich, but for our sake, that we might have eternal riches, He became poor. {MM 19}

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