Knocking on Heaven’s Door

Luke 21:25-36 12/1/2024

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***The Coming of the Son of Man***

***25****“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves.****26****People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.****27****Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in a cloud’ with power and great glory.****28****Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke%2021%3A25-36%09&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-25846a)*]*

***The Lesson of the Fig Tree***

***29****Then he told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees;****30****as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near.****31****So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near.****32****Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.****33****Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*

***Exhortation to Watch***

***34****“Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life and that day does not catch you unexpectedly,****35****like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.****36****Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.”*

*Pray：*

*Lord God, we ask for the Holy Spirit to fill and pour out upon us. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to You. We pray this in the name of our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

Today's Gospel speaks about the end times and the events to come. Among both the general public and Christians, there are many widely held and popular ideas about the "end of days" or "heaven." However, these ideas often do not align with the Bible or Christian theology. Today, I will cut straight to the point and discuss the biblical perspective on heaven.

Over time, when discussing heaven, two persistent misconceptions have emerged:

The first misconception is often heard in some evangelistic sermons, which focus heavily on who will enter heaven and who will go to hell. This approach stirs fear and anxiety, urging people to ensure they are "on the inside" rather than "left outside." However, it fails to address a more fundamental question: What exactly is heaven?

The second, more modern misconception is the use of heaven as a means to comfort those grieving the loss of loved ones with generic clichés. Both pastors and believers often shy away from addressing the difficult theological and philosophical questions. However, the truth is that without first confronting the reality of death, one cannot fully experience the glory of heaven.

We can all understand that sometimes grief runs so deep that we temporarily set aside theology just to ease the pain. However, today’s Advent scripture invites us to embrace the Bible’s true promise of heaven—a hope that far surpasses what is offered by greeting cards or poetic lyrics about "becoming a thousand winds."

I would like to first describe three things that heaven is not, and then explain three things that heaven truly is. My hope is to help us discern the truth about heaven.

Heaven is not these three things:

1. Heaven is not the eternal continuation of a person's soul. For a long time, many people have believed that when a loved one's body is laid in the grave, their soul continues on, bringing comfort to those left behind. However, this belief is not based on Christian theology.

This idea stems from Greek philosophy that predates Christ by centuries. The dualism that holds that human nature consists of material body and soul, where the body dies and the soul continues - this is not what the Old Testament understood. The Bible teaches that the human body and soul are one. Death is real.

When Henry Scott Holland once said, “Death is nothing at all. I have only slipped away into the next room… Life… is the same as it ever was. There is absolutely unbroken continuity” , that may be comforting to some, but it is not orthodox Christian theology.Who would look at Jesus nailed to the cross and say, "Death is nothing at all?” What about those who witness a car speeding into a crowd at a Thanksgiving parade, or a shooting in a department store? Is that how we view death as simply "going into the next room"? No, death is an end. Our hope is not placed in a false view of death. Rather, we know that death is not God's final word.

Secondly, this idea has become very popular in modern times. You may have heard phrases like, "I am a thousand winds that blow, I am the diamond that shines on the snow, I am the sun on the ripe grain, I am the gentle autumn rain." This worldview, similar to that of Henry Scott Holland, offers an understanding of heaven that doesn't require belief in God or the significance of Jesus' cross and resurrection. The problem is that it denies the reality of death, treating heaven as a waiting room or as an intangible wind, offering no real hope.

The third idea is that of the rapture or end-times theology. At a funeral, a man might say, "I believe my wife is now in heaven watering and pruning the roses, just like she did here." This suggests that heaven is essentially a continuation of our current material life. It is an overemphasis on the material continuity of heaven, rather than the resurrection of the body.

These three ideas about heaven and the afterlife are not necessarily harmless, because, in reality, they distract people and lead them away from the Bible, away from God, and away from seeing God through Jesus.

When I quote popular poems and songs that deny the terror of death, when I downplay the overwhelming glory of God's incomparable presence, I lose the sense of awe and wonder that should come with knowing God's majesty.

Our hope is that, after death, we come before God’s wondrous power, love, and passion—like an overwhelming wave, a raging fire, or blinding light. After death, we do not face a forgotten body or a diminished, ambivalent spirit; rather, we experience the resurrection, a transformation into glory.

Having discussed three misconceptions about heaven

Heaven is not about seeking continuity of the body or soul. It is about encountering God through His revelation, seeing His character revealed through His Word, and discovering His will. It is through God's presence and His transformative work in us that we will experience true restoration.

So, let us look at three aspects of what heaven truly is like:

**First, heaven is related to worship.** The Bible gives us a picture of heaven, like a choir of angels lifting their voices, glorifying God. It's a wonderful place of continuous worship. We will have our own bodies, but within the larger body of Christ, we will find the true meaning of our voice. In this great body, as we harmonize with one another, we will make the most pure and sincere sounds of praise and gratitude: In heaven, we will be able to fully focus; every detail and part of the greater body will be important. In heaven, I will rejoice in the gifts and talents of others, and my own gifts will be increased. In heaven, we will sing praises to the Lord, giver of all gifts.

The church places great emphasis on worship because we believe that worship is the most important way to depict and anticipate heaven. Everything depends on the object of our worship. The Book of Revelation clearly shows that we worship the Lamb who was slain, the Lamb who sits on the throne—Jesus Christ. He is the God who, out of His love for us, gave up His life. He is the resurrected Lord, the one we long for and rely upon.

In worship, He animates us. When every breath and all our focus is on the God we find in Jesus Christ, we can truly be immersed in wonder, love, and praise—for heaven and all things are His creation.

What is heaven like? **Second, heaven is about friendship**. Jesus said at the Last Supper: “I no longer call you servants– I call you friends.” At the core of God is the perfect communion of the Trinity. However, there is always a fourth seat at the table—a place for us to participate in the communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is heaven, the invitation to the table of friendship. When we are in perfect communion, humanity and all creation join the Trinity in the eternal dance.

If this friendship is the meaning of heaven, it not only expresses the friendship between God and us, but also expresses the friendship between us and others. This is what the final part of Revelation speaks about—the coming of the new heaven and the new earth. But we learn to be friends, live together, and worship together, which is the core of preparing for heaven. Just as we strive to worship and serve in the church, we also work to build relationships in the community. We believe that crossing barriers and forming friendships is something we will always do, because we are called now to wait for heaven.

What is heaven like? **The final aspect, third, is that heaven is a shared table**. This is one of the most frequent images seen in the New Testament—a banquet, where God and all His children come together in perfect union and fellowship.

The Eucharist is the center of the life of the Church because the sacrament is a blending of food, friendship, and worship. When we gather to worship and take communion together, we become friends with God and with one another. As we share this meal, we remember Christ’s love—past, present, and future—and partake in the transformative feast that renews and changes us.

The sacrament describes what creation is and its cost. When we gather to share a meal and build friendships, we experience a tiny reflection of heaven: a foretaste of the eternal fellowship we will have with God and one another.

**This is heaven: worship, friendship, and sharing a meal together.**

When facing death, what truly matters is not to depart from the central message of faith and the image of hope we see. We are called to enter into the life God has prepared for us—the life that Jesus gave His own for, opening the way for us to live.

Remember, Advent is about anticipating heaven, preparing our hearts to worship truly, make friends, and commune in fellowship.

The Bible has told us everything we really need to know and what is important. That is: to be filled with the power, love, and glory of God, now and forever.