Welcome to part 2 in our series titled, Heaven and Hell. Last week we began by looking at three reasons why the teaching and truth about heaven and hell really matter. The reasons I chose to focus on, which are not the only ones, are that eternity is forever, the Bible speaks so much about it that it must be important and that both heaven and hell reveal the glory of God. I want to take this week and talk about “What heaven will be like”, then next week on “What we will be like in heaven” and then two weeks on hell…more on that later. I really do hope that you believe that heaven and hell matter and not just for eternity but for today. Before we get started into what heaven is like, let’s talk about some introductory comments about heaven.

Heaven is important as an evangelistic resource. To point people to a place or an existence of unlimited glory that is available only through Jesus Christ is important. Travel agencies have used pictures of white sandy beaches or tall evergreen trees to lure travelers to make reservations. The promise of the “place” is important motivation to get people to spend their money and time. As we talked last week, this life is so incredibly short that it makes no sense to live it as if it is the only life you are going to have. So to use a description of heaven as a travel brochure is important but as we’ll see in a moment, it might not be as useful as we think. But there’s a more important way I believe. Though we don’t have much in the way of pictures of heaven…well, we really have no pictures of heaven, apologies to John Denver and those of you who are from West Virginia…the picture that Scripture paints of heaven is important motivation for service and life on earth. I think that God intends heaven to be motivation to endure suffering and tribulation here on earth and to sacrifice our lives for Him. Most of the teaching in the Bible about heaven is for shepherding God’s people, not for evangelism. Much of the teaching on heaven is designed to help us know how to live now. The “kingdom of heaven” is not only a future realm or existence…it is here and now as well. Jesus said that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

When I say, “what will heaven be like” I want you to know that I’m not planning on giving you a geography or architecture lesson. From both the Old Testament and New Testament we have some descriptions of heaven but it’s very difficult to know for sure whether those descriptions are allegorical or literal. Will heaven have a street of gold? Will there be pearly gates? My philosophy of biblical interpretation is essentially this: “When the literal sense makes sense, seek no other sense”. That makes sense to me. So, I do believe there will be a new heaven and new earth as discussed by Peter and in the book of Revelation. I do believe there will be a New Jerusalem that will in some fashion serve as a “dwelling place” for believers for eternity…though I don’t really know what that means in an eternal realm. I think there will be a river of life and a tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. But I am not going to be dogmatic on that. Those expressions could be allegorical or metaphorical and are intended to describe something that is just not comprehensible for the human mind. So in my understanding the geography and architecture of heaven are not really all that important.

Also, the activity of heaven is not incredibly important to me. There is nothing given to us in detail that describes what heaven will be like activity wise. There is a description in Revelation of throngs of people gathered together praising God. But if you are an introvert, that might sound more like a description of hell to you than heaven. You have no desire to be in a crowd and certainly not a crowd of millions, tens of millions, billions…. Some don’t like to sing. There is really not much detail given to us about the activity of heaven. Some seem to want to picture the activity of heaven as the eternal extension of what they enjoy on earth. Heaven for someone might be fishing forever or hunting forever or cross stitching forever or watching football forever…of course it would be reruns of Dallas Cowboy Superbowl victories…sorry Bills fans. But the Bible doesn’t really speak much about that. And really, how could we imagine what kinds of activities would take place in a perfect realm and one that has no bounds of time or space?

So, if you came today thinking you would find out about what heaven looks like geographically, where it is located or what we will do there, that’s not my focus today. I’d simply like to talk about two aspects of heaven that give us a very significant picture of what heaven will be like.

First, heaven is a place where God’s glory is on full display. We talked about this a little bit last Sunday but today I want you to see that heaven is the place or realm where God’s glory is most fully known. In human language we often use the word “home” to describe that place where you can most be yourself. Your home is where you let your hair down, kick off your shoes, take off the mask, whatever metaphor you want to use. You put on that pair of sweat pants or yoga pants and your most comfortable sweatshirt with the holes in certain places and you just “be you”. In that sense, I believe heaven is God’s home. I know that God is omnipresent and He is not confined to a place but in a very real way, heaven is God’s home.

We consider heaven to be the dwelling place of God. In Psalm 23:6 David writes that those for whom Jesus is shepherd, they will *“dwell in the house of the Lord forever*”. The prophet Isaiah wrote this in Isaiah 63:15: *“Look down from heaven, and see from Your habitation holy and glorious…”* The writer of Hebrews in speaking of the greatness of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross says this in 9:24: *“For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us”.* The model prayer that Jesus taught His disciples to pray starts out with “*Our Father, which art in heaven*…” The 17th century Puritan theologian, John Owen, wrote this: “The reason why God is said to be in heaven is not because His essence is included in a certain place so called, but because of the more eminent manifestations of His glory there.”

What will heaven be like? It will be a place of immeasurable and incomprehensible glory. The words heaven and glory are interchangeable. In Psalm 73:24 in a reference to heaven, we read “*You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory*”. Hebrews 2:10 reads: *“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings*. The pronoun “Him” refers to Jesus. Are you comfortable with the idea that heaven will be glorious? Is that enough detail for you? There are simply no words available in any language to do heaven justice. Have you ever been some place or been to event that was so amazing or so beautiful that you simply said to someone when they asked you what it was like, “You just had to be there” or “There are no words to describe it”. That’s heaven. I’m reminded of the line from Mercy Me’s song, “Imagine” that we watched earlier: “Surrounded by Your glory, what will my heart feel, will I dance for You Jesus, or in awe of you be still, will I stand in Your presence, or to my knees will I fall? Will I sing hallelujah…will I be able to speak at all I can only imagine…”

My second point is hinted at in the lyric we just read…”Will I stand in Your presence?” In my opinion the most important thing about heaven is that Jesus will be there. That’s what heaven will be like. Heaven will be like being with Jesus. Edward Donnelly states: “The Bible’s favorite way of describing heaven is not in the least hard to understand, but so clear that a child can grasp it. In the New Testament, heaven means being with Jesus.” Let me just show you a few places where this is pointed out. In John 14:3 Jesus says, “*I will come again and receive you to Myself that where I am there you may be also*”. In John 17:24 Jesus prays to the Father, *“Father, I desire that they also whom You gave me may be with Me, where I am”.* To the thief on the cross Jesus said, “*Today, you will be with Me in paradise”* Luke 23:43.

There’s more. The New Testament doesn’t ever ask the question, “When you die will you go to heaven?” The New Testament doesn’t even use the language of “going to heaven when you die”. Instead, the New Testament uses the language of going or being “with Christ”. In describing the conflict Paul is experiencing from prison about going back to the Philippian church to minister to them or to die Paul writes in Philippians 1:23: *“For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far better*.” In 2 Corinthians 4;8 Paul writes, “*to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord*”. In Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians he is comforting them concerning the return of Jesus and he writes this in chapter 4: “ ***17****Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.*” Paul isn’t comforting them with the architecture or the activities of heaven. Paul isn’t saying there will be endless hunting or shopping or leisure or long walks in the woods. That’s not Paul’s emphasis or Jesus’ emphasis. What will heaven be like…it will be like being with Jesus.

You and I need to understand that the place of heaven and the person of Jesus are synonymous. Edward Donnelly illustrates it by telling a story about his father. His father had a friend who became a millionaire. His name was Noble. This man and his father grew up together and they were poor but Noble became a millionaire and their friendship continued. Edward’s father was regarded by Noble as his best friend because Edward’s father did not want anything from the rich man. He just enjoyed being with him. In the 195Os Noble wanted to take a trip from Europe to the United States which in those days was for many the experience of a lifetime. They boarded a boat for the journey and spent time touring the American countryside. Edward writes that whenever his father spoke of this amazing trip he would rarely say, “When I went to America”. Rather, he would say, “When I was with Noble”. The trip was so completely his friend’s gift and provision that he could not think of the trip without associating it with the one who made it possible.

Do you see the connection? It’s not really possible for those who have been granted eternal life in heaven to think of heaven apart from Jesus. We owe it to Jesus in every conceivable way. What will heaven be like? Heaven will be the glory of God and the presence of Jesus. As I close I want to ask you if you think of heaven that way? If you think of heaven as a giant family reunion or the continuation of some fun experience here on earth you are 100% wrong. I’m asking you to change your mind. If you think there is a way to gain heaven apart from Jesus Christ you are 100% wrong. We cannot enter into the glorious presence of God because of our sin. It is only after being transformed by Jesus Christ that we can go with Him to heaven. I don’t really believe there are entrance gates in heaven but if there were, and a person was stopped and had to somehow prove his worthiness to get in, I know that most people in our world, and perhaps even some of you, would point to your good deeds. He would point to his not so many bad deeds. He would point to his occasional church attendance and maybe even his general indifference to God. And he would not be allowed in. But when the next person steps in line here’s the same question at the gate. He would just look to Jesus standing next to him and say, “I’m with Him”…and the gates will swing wide open.

When you die it won’t matter about your accomplishments. It will only matter if you can say, “I’m with Him”. So, are you? Extend invitation to receive Jesus.