

## A Study of Heaven – Week 2

An accurate view of heaven provides several things according to Chip Ingram. First, it provides us with a perspective in times of trouble. 1 Timothy 6:12 tells us to *“Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”*

2 Timothy 4:7 says, *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith;”*

When difficult times come along we are to focus on what gets us into heaven which is our faith in Jesus Christ. As we will learn throughout this study, the things of earth are temporary compared to the things of eternal life.

Secondly, Chip says that an accurate view of heaven helps us to persevere in time of trials and temptation. In John 14:1, Jesus tells the disciples *“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.”* When you have an accurate view of what is coming, it makes enduring the difficult times much easier.

Finally, an accurate view of heaven aligns our priorities under pressure. We are told in Matthew 6:19-20, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.”* The old hymn, “Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus” says it best.

*“Turn your eyes upon Jesus  
Look full in His wonderful face  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace”*

Compared to heaven, all of the things of earth will seem unimportant. People put their money where things in things that they consider important. Unfortunately, the temporal or worldly things of this earth will remain here after you are gone. We should focus or spend our time on the things of heaven.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 says,

*“13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as indeed the rest of mankind do, who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. 15 For we say this to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who remain, will be caught up together with them in the*

*clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore, comfort one another with these words."*

These verses point to the Rapture. They also refer to death as falling asleep and "sleeping with Jesus". In verse 18, Paul says that we are to "*comfort one another with these words.*"

"For Christians, a cemetery is simply a dormitory where our bodies rest until awakened by Jesus at resurrection." (David Jeremiah)

We will go into the "resurrected body" in more detail later but I want us to be on the same page. Since no one has come back to tell us what happens, the best we can do is try to understand what God's word says to us. There are three schools of thought about death.

First of all, to someone who does not believe in a resurrection, the body and soul die. This belief provides no hope. They believe that a person that believes in a resurrection believes in order to ease the fear of death.

Secondly, there are people that believe that when we die, our soul and body go to sleep. Both will be resurrected in the event described here in 1 Thessalonians . This is referred to as soul sleep.

The third belief is that our body dies and is buried and our soul is taken to heaven, then our body is resurrected in this event in 1 Thessalonians. I personally believe that this is what happens when we die. Several scriptural references support it happening this way.

According to 2 Corinthians 5:6-8, when we die we are absent from the body and present with Jesus.

*"6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight— 8 but we are of good courage and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."*

The third idea fits with 2 Corinthians 5:8 and the verses in 1 Thessalonians. In order to further prove the point I offer Luke 16:19-31. Jesus tells a story, this is not a parable. Stories have names but parables do not. In this story, Jesus tells us a lot about what used to happen after death. I say used to happen because things changed after Jesus' death and resurrection. The table below summarizes the points Jesus made in the story which point out differences between what happens to the men in life, death and eternity.

*The Rich Man and Lazarus*

*19 "Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, enjoying himself in splendor every day. 20 And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, 21 and longing to be fed from the scraps which fell from the rich man's table; not*

only that, the dogs also were coming and licking his sores. 22 Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's arms; and the rich man also died and was buried. 23 And in Hades he raised his eyes, being in torment, and \*saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his arms. 24 And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set, so that those who want to go over from here to you will not be able, nor will any people cross over from there to us.' 27 And he said, 'Then I request of you, father, that you send him to my father's house— 28 for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not come to this place of torment as well.' 29 But Abraham \*said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' 30 But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!' 31 But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

	<b>Rich Man</b>	<b>Beggar</b>
In Life	Fared sumptuously Covered in purple & fine linen Had many servants	Ate crumbs (food) Covered in rags <small>(clothes)</small> Only dogs cared for Lazarus <small>(care)</small>
In Death	Lavish Funeral Buried	Thrown in town dump <small>(funeral)</small> Carried by angels to Abr. Bosom <small>(buried)</small>
Eternity - Place of	Hades, the place of torment Place of memory, misery & mourning	Abraham's bosom <small>(where)</small> comfort, awareness, companionship & fellowship

Jesus gave His listeners lots of information about death and what happens to the soul. I would like to point out that Lazarus did not get treated differently than the rich man because he was poor. He makes the distinction because typically rich men are so focused on worldly things, such as money and possessions. Lazarus must have been more focused on God. What do we learn about heaven from Jesus in these verses?

Angels take believers to heaven. Verse 22 tells us that Lazarus died and “*was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s arms*” Abraham’s arms or bosom was a place where the souls of righteous people that died was kept until the death and resurrection of Jesus. Going to this intermediate heave does not happen today.

Did you notice while reading this story that the rich man and Lazarus are depicted as having physical forms. 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 adds that you will be ushered into the presence of God. As believers we are alive and on the earth or absent from the body and present with the Lord.

We will be able to recognize our loved ones in heaven. In Jesus’ story, Lazarus knows Abraham and the rich man and additionally, the rich man recognizes Lazarus as the beggar that sat at the gate. In Luke’s account of the transfiguration of Jesus, Luke 9:28-36, we are told that Peter, James and John knew Elijah and Moses without introduction. Revelation 4:8-11 that we will worship God in His presence. Revelation 5:6 adds that we shall see Jesus. Through John’s revelations, he did not have to be introduced to Jesus or God.

After we die, it is too late to change your final destination. From the rich man’s description, it is easy to see that we don’t want to go to Hades or Sheol or permanent hell.

Revelation 6:9-10 adds that we are aware of what is happening on the earth because from underneath the altar, the souls of those that were martyred are asking “*How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who live on the earth?*” They know that their deaths have not been avenged.

The table below compares and contrasts Hades and Paradise from the story about Lazarus and the rich man.

<b>Hades</b>	<b>Paradise</b>
Intermediate hell Not the ultimate hell	Intermediate paradise Heroes of faith are there
Unrighteous kept until consigned to eternal hell	When Jesus ascended to heaven, He took all of Paradise and relocated it to a third heaven –
Not purgatory (Not in Bible. It was a place saints went to get prepared for heaven.)	The highest heaven.
Cannot be reversed, it is too late.	Now when we die our body is in the grave and angels take our souls directly to heaven.
Just before creation of a new Heaven all in Hades will stand before judgment of eternity and be consigned to hell forever.	

In this story, Jesus tells us a lot about what used to happen after death. I say used to happen because things changed after Jesus death and resurrection. Ephesians 4:8-10 tells us so. It says

*“8 That is why the Scriptures say,*

*“When he ascended to the heights,  
he led a crowd of captives  
and gave gifts to his people.”*

*9 Notice that it says “he ascended.” This clearly means that Christ also descended to our lowly world. 10 And the same one who descended is the one who ascended higher than all the heavens, so that he might fill the entire universe with himself.” (NLT)*

This story tells us about what happens after death before Jesus. The intermediate hell or Hades are not an option today. Our option is heaven or hell. Hell is permanent. It is the Lake of Fire in Revelation 20:10. Randy Alcorn calls hell, “Heaven’s Awful Alternative.”

“It’s of paramount importance to make sure you are going to Heaven, not Hell. The voice that whispers, “There’s no hurry; put this book down; you can always think about it later,” is not God’s voice. He says, “Now is the day of salvation” (2 Corinthians 6:2) and “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).” (Randy Alcorn)

Jesus wants us to be all in. There is no fence sitting allowed. Jesus warns the Church of Laodicea not to be “lukewarm” Christians or He will spit them out of His mouth (Revelation 3:15-16). In Matthew 25:41 Jesus tells us, “*Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ‘*”

Hell will not be an enjoyable place. Look at how Hell is depicted in the following verses:

Matthew 13:42 - *blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Matthew 13:50 - *furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Matthew 22:13 - *Darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Matthew 24:51 - He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth

Matthew 25:30 - Darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Luke 13:28 - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets will not be there. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

“It will be a place of conscious punishment for sins, with no hope of relief. This is why Dante, in the “Inferno” envisioned this sign chiseled above Hell’s gates, “Abandon every hope, you who enter.” (Alcorn, Randy)