

# WE AWAIT THE PRIZE

by Jack Kinsella



When somebody dies, it is always an occasion for grief, even among Christians. I know, I know. When a Christian dies, he goes home to be with the Lord, it is cause for celebration, his suffering is past, and all that.

But I've been a Christian for more than half my life, and in that time, many of my loved ones have gone home to be with the Lord.

I have to admit that I grieved their loss, in each and every case. For some whom I particularly loved, that grief is only diminished, but not gone, even after many years.

Paul was writing of physical death when he penned;

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope." (2nd Thessalonians 4:13)

Does that mean I am ignorant? Or faithless? I don't think so. I believe in the certainty of salvation, the literal existence of a loving God and the literal existence of a place called "Heaven."

My grief isn't for the person who has gone to be with the Lord. My grief is for my own loss. Knowing I will see my loved one in the 'sweet by and by' is a source of immense comfort, but it isn't the same as seeing them now.

You don't fully appreciate the measure of comfort offered by the certain knowledge salvation until someone you love dies without that hope. When that hope is absent, the grief is magnified beyond measure.

Your personal loss is now inconsequential to the complete and permanent loss of the hopeless. Your grief isn't for yourself, it is truly and tragically for that lost one.

Your loss is over, his is just beginning.

We've discussed at length in previous briefings what kind of eternity is in store for those who enter eternity without Christ.

Let's take a brief look at what the Bible tells us awaits the saved Christian on the other side.

## **Is Heaven a *Real* Place?**

"In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." (John 14:2-3)

This is a proof text for the Rapture; Jesus promises that He will come again and receive us personally unto Himself.

That isn't the 2nd Coming, where He comes astride a white horse, with ten thousands of His saints, wielding a sword and exacting judgment on a rebellious earth.

The purpose of this secret 'coming' is to take the Church, the Bride of Christ, to the honeymoon mansion prepared for us.

But note that also that He is speaking of a real place. Heaven is His Father's house; within which are contained ancillary houses, (mansions) and "if it were not so, I would have told you," Jesus promises.

Elsewhere, Jesus teaches: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:" (Matthew 6:19-20)

That could only apply to an actual, literal, real physical place.

### **What Does Heaven Look Like?**

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." (1st Corinthians 2:9)

Since the Bible says it is beyond our capacity to imagine, those images we are shown are simply that – images.

John describes it in Revelation 21 and 22, streets of gold, inlaid with precious gems, but I like the picture in Revelation 22:1 of a "pure river of water of life, clear as crystal," with the Tree of Life growing on its banks, "and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations . . . and there shall be no more curse."

Heaven is a place of indescribable beauty, but it appeals to me as a place of perfect peace.

### **Do The Saved Go To Heaven Immediately?**

Emphatically, yes. 2nd Corinthians 5:8 says: "to be absent from the body," [is] "to be present with the Lord."

Paul wrote to the Philippians: For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." (1:23)

Man is not 'a body', but rather, man *has* a body. My body is not me, it is my possession. These are my arms, my legs, my eyes, and my hands.

This is also my keyboard, my monitor and my computer. They are in both cases, my possessions, they are not *me*.

When I leave this body behind, I leave behind a possession, but that part that is 'me' is the eternal part, that which was created in the Image of God.

### **But From Body to Disembodied?**

There is considerable Scriptural support for the conclusion that we already have some kind of temporary, physical body awaiting us in Heaven -- even before the resurrection of the dead in Christ at the Rapture.

Paul writes to the Corinthians;

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, *we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens . . .*

Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:

We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be *absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.*" (2nd Corinthians 5:1,6,8)

Paul reveals here that when our bodies die (and are dissolved) there awaits us a "new building of God."

Since our resurrection bodies are our actual physical earthly remains, reformed in the image of Christ's Resurrected Body, the 'building of God not made with hands' that awaits us in Heaven cannot be one and the same.

Further, Luke 16 teaches that Lazarus had a finger to dip in cool water, that the rich man had a body to be tortured by the flame, and that the rich man recognized the forms of both Abraham and Lazarus.

Chronologically, this all took place *prior* to the death and Resurrection of Christ.

But they had bodies of *some* description, notwithstanding.

### **If Heaven is a Real, Physical Place, Where is It?**

We tend to think of Heaven as 'up' and hell as 'down' -- but the earth is round.

If, when I die, I go 'up' to Heaven, does that mean that a guy in China who dies at that same moment goes 'down'?

The idea of Heaven being 'up' is derived from the points on a compass. Straight up is 'north'.

Christians often refer to the passing of a loved one into Heaven as a 'promotion.' Many obituaries announce one's 'promotion to Glory' rather than a death announcement.

The Psalmist reveals: "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south." (75:6)

Isaiah recorded the indictment of Lucifer as follows: "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will *ascend* into heaven, I will exalt my throne *above the stars* of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, *in the sides of the north.*" (Isaiah 14:13)

Heaven, therefore, is a fixed location in 'the sides of the north' from our universe, orienting due north from our North Pole and somewhere north of the highest star.

### **Will We Know Each Other?**

Undoubtedly, Jesus told the Pharisees; "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out." (Luke 13:28)

Clearly, if they can see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets, they will also recognize them for who they are. Otherwise, why the weeping and gnashing of teeth?

At the Mount of Transfiguration, both Moses and Elijah were there. Moses and Elijah had never met. (But not only did they know each other, note that they still had the same names.)

The rich man recognized Abraham. Ok, but that's Abraham! (He also recognized Lazarus)

Paul writes: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know *even as also I am known.*" (1st Corinthians 13:12)

The Apostle Paul expected to be known when he entered Heaven. So do I.

### **Assessment:**

Heaven is a real, literal, physical place that will we will inhabit with real, heavenly, physical (but temporary) bodies that we begin to inhabit at the moment our physical bodies are 'dissolved' (die).

According to the Bible, we will know and be known by our loved ones who have preceded us in death.

Although the literal, physical Heaven is beyond our capacity to imagine, we are assured by our Maker that it will exceed our most optimistic hopes (He should know), that it will be a place of eternal peace, and that our existence there will be one of unimaginable joy.

The curse will be lifted, man will no longer exist by the 'sweat of his brow' there will be no more sickness, no more death, and all our 'tears will be wiped away.'

We began this morning talking about grief and loss. We went on to examine Paul's admonition that 'we sorrow not, even as others who have no hope' -- yet we know that we do sorrow at the death of a loved one, blessed assurance notwithstanding.

But Paul began by saying, "I don't want you to be ignorant."

We can't imagine Heaven, but we can be certain that it exists, and that every single Christian who ever lived and died is still alive and well and physically in the presence of God and all their loved ones.

And we can be equally certain that they will still be there, waiting, when we get there.

If Heaven is such a great place, why is it that we can't really imagine it? Think that through. God put us on this earth with a mission.

It is our job to spread the message of Heaven and the path that leads to it. We are given to know just enough to fulfill that message.

There is an old saying to the effect that "everybody wants to go to Heaven, but nobody wants to die." It's only true because we really *can't* imagine the things that God has prepared for those who love Him.

That's how good it is. And how important the message we carry is. So important that God can't trust us with too much information about the Prize that awaits us at the end of the race.

Because if we *really* knew what awaits us, there'd be nobody left down here willing to wait and carry the message to the next runner.

For now, we'll just have to take His Word for it. On faith.

So Come Lord Jesus. We await for your return.

If you need counseling, prayer or just a listening ear. Email me at [realteam1999@sbcglobal.net](mailto:realteam1999@sbcglobal.net), or visit me online at [www.http://pastormiketaylor.blogspot.com](http://pastormiketaylor.blogspot.com). God bless you all,

***TILL WE MEET AT JESUS FEET***