Series: Heaven

Message: 03 The Present Heaven—Part 2 Rev 6\_9-11

Text: Revelation 6:9-11

Theme:

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Location: Christ Community EFC

We are in the third week as of our series about heaven.

Last week we talked about the distinctions and differences between the new heaven, that the Bible talks about in Revelation chapter 21, and the present, or intermediate heaven where Christ sits right now at the right have of the Father, where those who die in Christ now go and wait for the consummation of all things and the arrival of the new heaven and the new earth.

I shared an illustration that Randy Alcorn uses in his book “Heaven” which I find helpful.

Say you were homeless, living in a homeless shelter in Miami.

One day you get a letter from a lawyer telling you about along lost uncle who has passed away. It goes on to tell you that you have inherited huge mansion in California and several million dollars.

Included in with the letter is a plane ticket from Miami to LA, but the flight has a layover in Dallas where you will have to spend the afternoon before changing plans.

Some other family members, whom you haven’t seen in years, will meet you there at the Dallas airport and board the plane with you to LA.

You look forward to seeing them again.

Now, when you get to the airport in Miami to check in, the ticket agent at the counter asks “where are you headed?”

Would you say Dallas? No. You would say, LA, because that’s your final destination. If you mentioned Dallas at all, you would only say, “I’m going to LA *by way of* Dallas.”

The new heaven and the new earth that Revelation talks about in Revelation chapters 21 ad 22 don’t come into existence until the current heaven and earth pass away.

But I have been told all my life that those who have died and who have put their faith in Jesus Christ are in heaven now!

Indeed for us to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). So even though we may have a layover in the current intermediate heaven we will still be in the presence of our Lord.

And what a wonderful place that will be, paradise for sure.

**If you would turn with me to Revelation chapter 6, Revelation 6:9. (p. 1031)**

Before we get to the new heaven and the new earth I want to see if I can clear up some questions about life in this present heaven - the intermediate heaven.

To do that I want to focus primarily on only one reference and see what we can learn about life in the Intermediate Heaven, Revelation 6:9-11.

Starting in Revelation chapter 4 John is given a vision of things to come at the end of this age beginning with the period of time referred to as the Tribulation Period.

Chapter 4 and 5 give us a glimpse into the throne room of God where we see Jesus, the Lamb of God who is declared worthy to open the seals of judgment.

Starting in chapter 6 we see as Jesus breaks each of the seven seals of judgement.

In Revelation 6:9 we find Jesus breaking the 5th seal: “**When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls** (this refers to the whole person-passengers on a plane or ship) **of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.**

**10 They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”**

**11 Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been**.

This passage is part of God’s revelation given to John of heaven and the future that God wanted John and us to know about.

Indeed, parts of it are clearly symbolic, but even though something is symbolic, it is nonetheless real!

Let me say that again. Just because something is symbolic does not mean it is any less real.

The passage we just read certainly seems to be an accurate depiction of reality. It shows what is happening in the lives of the martyrs, those killed for their faith in Christ, who cry out to the Father for justice.

Based on this passage, what can we determine about life where they are now?

Now, granted this is passages specifically refers to the martyrs, but by inference, we can gain a picture into what it is like for all those in heaven now.

When these godly people who were alive on earth died, they were immediately relocated to a place near enough to the Lord to cry out to Him.

**“Under the altar”** is the specific place and that is in His presence.

These people are in every way the very same people who were before they were killed. This shows a direct connection between who we are in this life and who we are there in heaven.

The martyr’s personal history extends back to their very lives on earth.

They are not different people than they were on earth. They are the same people, just relocated into the presence of Christ in the present heaven.

People in heaven will be remembered for their lives on earth. It was known by all in heaven that these were the ones “**slain for…the witness they had borne**”.

They **cried out** (called out)means that they were able to express themselves audibly.

This, with other evidence, may suggest that they had a physical form, with vocal cords. Though not yet in their resurrected bodies which comes later.

This also suggest that they were rational, communicative, emotional—even passionate—beings, just like when they were on earth.

They cried out **“with a loud voice.”**Note, it was not “loud voices” but one united voice.

This suggests that heaven is a place of unity and shared perspective.

They were fully conscious, rational, and aware of each other, God and the situation back on earth.

They asked God to intervene on earth on their behalf, verse 10.

Therefore, those in heaven now are free to ask God for things, which means they have audience with God, that they are able to learn, and had a desire for understanding and pursue it.

No doubt they knew, at least to some degree, what was happening on earth. They knew that those who had taken their lives had not yet been judged.

They have a deep concern for justice. Obviously folks in heaven do not adopt some passive disinterest in what happens on earth.

On the contrary, our concerns will be more passionate and our thirst for God’s justice even more acute.

It appears that neither God nor the angels nor believers will be satisfied until God’s enemies are judged, our bodies raised, sin and Satan defeated, Earth restored and Christ exalted over all! Amen!

So be it, Lord Jesus!

The martyrs clearly remembered their lives on earth, especially that they were martyred.

They pray for judgment, and appear to be interceding for their brothers and sisters on earth who face a similar fate.

They clearly see God’s attributes. **“Sovereign, holy and true.”**

Though they are united in their cry, they are clearly individuals. Each received ***their own*** “white robe.”

There does not seem to be one merged identity that obliterates uniqueness, but distinct individuality – “**each of them**.”

The fact the martyrs wear the robes once again suggest a physical form—a body. Certainly disembodied spirits have no need of robes.

God answers their questions, indicating communication between them and God.

It also shows that we will not automatically know everything when we get to heaven – if they did they would have no questions.

There must be learning and growth there as well.

God’s response is that the martyrs will have to “**rest** (or wait) **a little longer**.”

This suggests that those in the present heave live in anticipation of the future fulfillment of God’s promises.

This also suggests an awareness of time in the present heaven.

To ask, **“how long”**is to request a timetable. **“Wait a little longer”** suggests an awareness of time.

They were aware of time passing and eager for the consummation of time. God’s response indicates that some events must take place on earth first.

There appear to be strong family connections with those still on the earth. The martyrs prayed for their *“fellow servants and brothers.”*

Whether these are family relationships or spiritual brethren in the sense of Christian brothers, we are not sure.

It is apparent that our God knows every detail of what is happening both in heaven and on earth, including every drop of martyr’s blood spilled.

Granted, these conclusions are drawn from just one passage, but they supported by many other passages as well.

So let’s deal with some specific questions about life in the present heaven.

***Do people in Paradise heaven know what is happening on earth?***

Certainly, those in heaven will not be omniscient, omnipresent. They will not know everything that is happening in every place.

But there is some indication that they will have at least some awareness of what is happing on earth.

If the martyrs in heaven know that God hasn’t yet brought judgment on those who persecuted them, it seems clear that they can see what’s happing on earth—at least to some extent.

Another example would be when Christ said in Luke 15:7 “…**I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance**.

In verse 10 Jesus goes on to say “**Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.**”

Notice that it does not speak of rejoicing **by** the angles but **in the presence of the angels**.

This seems to imply that not only God but also the saints in heaven, who would so deeply appreciate the wonder of human salvation—especially the salvation of someone they knew and loved on earth.

***Do people in Paradise have bodies?*** Once again, it appears that they do.

Let me summarize a few indications:

The martyrs certainly appear to have bodies

The rich man and Lazarus certainly appear to have bodies

When Moses and Elijah appeared to Jesus in the presence of Peter, James and John, they were in physical form

The Bible never refers to man without a body. We cannot fully grasp life without a body.

Paul indicates that we groan, **not** to be released from our bodies to live as disembodies spirits, **but** to be clothed with a new body of some sort.

In 2 Corinthians 5:2-4 we read: “**For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, 3 if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. 4 For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life**.

Could this refer to our resurrected bodies? Yes, but could it refer also to an intermediate form still awaiting the final resurrection?

We can only deduce that Paul is writing about some kind of physical-like form, either in the intermediate heaven (Paradise) or in the New Heaven.

When John visited heaven in his revelation, he was surely in bodily form and interacted with others there who were likewise in bodily form.

He grasped, held, ate, and tasted there.

Enoch and Elijah appear to have been taken to heaven in their physical bodies. Indeed they may have shed their physical bodies, but no reference is ever made to that fact.

All indications regarding Paradise describe it as a very physical place.

How can we enjoy a physical place if we are not ourselves physical to some degree? Does not a physical place necessitate a physical form to interact with it?

So … to answer the question, “Do people in Paradise, the intermediate heaven have bodies?” I have to say every indication would say we do.

***Do people in Paradise pray for us?***

Yes, it appears that this is something they do and do well.

We know that Christ continually ministers in heaven by interceding for us. We also know that the martyrs pray for their fellow servants and brothers on earth.

As a matter of fact, if indeed those in the intermediate heaven can see some or all of what is happening on earth, it would be strange if they did not pray for their loved ones.

***“But how can heaven be heaven if we are aware of the bad things that are happening on earth? Wouldn’t that bring us sadness? Isn’t all sadness forbidden in heaven?”***

Indeed many books on heaven suggest that the residents are not aware of people or events on earth because it would make them unhappy.

However, I believe that this argument is invalid and does not take the whole counsel of God into consideration.

Abraham and Lazarus saw the Rich Man’s torment in Hades, but it did not negate paradise for them.

Also, Revelation 21:4 (the most often quoted verse to defend this line of thinking) “**And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.**”

However, please note that the promise of “no more tears” is reserved for ***after*** the end of the old Earth, ***after*** the Great White Throne Judgment, ***after*** the old order of things are passed away when there is no more suffering on the earth.

We can be sure that the eternal Heaven and the New Earth will be sorrow free.

However, Paradise, the intermediate heaven, and the eternal “new” heaven are not the same in every detail.

The intermediate heaven will be a much happier place than the cursed earth, with total access to the Godhead and a growing understanding of the heart of God.

Happiness there will not be based on ignorance of the events on earth but on perspective of God at work in the affairs of man.

Those relocated there will live in the presence of Christ, find great joy in uninhibited worship, living as righteous beings in rich fellowship with one another and the Lord in a sinless environment.

They see God continually at work bringing His purposes to a close, watching Holy Spirit transform lives and influence nations.

They will understand Christ’s return and see more and more how all of this will turn out.

That perspective will transform the way they feel as they witness what is happening on the earth.

Heaven, as we most often like to think of it, is still in the process of being prepared (John 14:1-5).

According to Revelation, we do not receive our resurrected, perfected bodies one at a time as we die, but in the resurrection of the righteous dead.

So, enough about Paradise, the intermediate heaven! Next week we move to what the New Heaven and the New Earth will be like.

But for now, let me close with the apostle Paul’s words found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13: “**But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.**

**14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. 15 For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left 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 cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.**

**17 Then we who are alive, who are left, 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 encourage one another with these words**.

Be encourages that our loved ones, who put their faith in Christ, are now in the presence of God and we will be reunited with them.

We will recognize them and they us.

And we will be together, in the presence of God until that glorius day when we together will receive our resurrected bodied and enter into the new heaven and the new earth.

However, I call to your attention and plead with you to pray for the unsaved, witness to those around you, and live like this life away and with an urgency.

Get your priorities in order and get out of the pew and show the love of Christ to the lost and hurting around you!

**Benediction: “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” (Num. 6:24-26)**