

What Will We Do In Heaven?
Sermon preached by Pastor C. John Steer
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No. 3: Heaven and Hell
Scripture: Revelation 7:9-17

What will you be doing tomorrow?

I expect you can answer that question with some confidence. But supposing you die tonight do you still know what your schedule will be?

God wants us to know about our future.

So today as we continue our series on Heaven and Hell we will consider the thrilling question, **What Will We Do in Heaven?**

There is an outline in your RidgeLines, if you would like to follow along with me.

Some say that we will be doing nothing in heaven because the place doesn't exist. This week physicist Stephen Hawking announced he believes there is no afterlife. He says that heaven is a fairy story for people who fear death. As far as he concerned when the brain ceases to function that it is.

Dr. Hawking is entitled to his ideas.

I respect them but I am deeply sorry for him. He is a brilliant man who wrote a brief history of time.

Because of his understanding of mathematics and astrophysics he has seen more of the complexities of creation than most of us. But he has not seen the Creator behind it. Let's pray that God will reveal himself to Dr. Hawking so that he will see that as wonderful as this world is there is a more wonderful world to come.



God has given us the Bible that we might know about the life beyond this one. Scripture tells us that heaven is filled with thrilling and fulfilling opportunities. Unlike Mr. Camping's predictions we can rely on what God has said. So what will we do in heaven?

First in heaven we will enjoy **REST**.

John writes, **"I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on'. 'Yes,' says the Spirit, they will rest from their labor'."** (Revelation 14:13)

That verse has been greatly misunderstood.

People have drawn the conclusion that in heaven we will stop working and start sitting in our Lazy Boy recliner.

But as we will see in a moment God has plenty of wonderful work for us to do in our heavenly home.

Rather the Spirit is telling us that there is an end to a particular type of labor. I believe he is talking about the end of our struggle with the world, the flesh and the devil.

That can be exhausting for followers of Christ.

But we will rest from that warfare in heaven.

Think how marvelous this will be.

We fight with the consequences of sin every day, but in heaven we will rest from the battle with addictions, temptations, and abusive relationships, and all the other frustrations that make life here hard.

In heaven we will be admitted into a perpetual Sabbath.

Augustine captured the scene in *The City of God* when he wrote, "We shall rest and we shall see. We shall see and we shall love. We shall love and we shall praise."

Then the promise of Jesus will be fulfilled when he said, **"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28)**

Then in heaven we will enjoy **REWARDS**.

Jesus says, **"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give it to everyone according to what he has done." (Revelation 22:12)**

Bruce Milne explains this statement, "Our judgment will be in respect of our stewardship of the gifts, talents, opportunities and responsibilities given in this life. It will be a fatherly judgment."



Perhaps we say "But I thought that our salvation was all of grace" and it is. Yet we cannot ignore the biblical teaching of rewards.

The New Testament identifies several types of service which will be rewarded by Christ. These include:

Enduring testing (James 1:12)

Martyrdom (Revelation 2:10)

Diligently seeking God (Hebrews 11:6)

Faithfully doing God's will (2 Timothy 4:8)

Evangelism (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

Faithful stewardship (1 Corinthians 4:1-5)

Acts of kindness (Galatians 6:9-10)
And hospitality (Matthew 10:40-72)



R.T. Kendall writes, "We who are saved will also be judged, not merely on the basis of whether we are saved or lost but on the basis of our lives as Christians."
For myself I believe the greatest reward will be seeing Christ in all his glory, beauty, majesty and splendor.

We will enjoy **RESPONSIBILITIES**.
In the passage we read earlier we are told that,
"They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple." (Revelation 7:15)

We are also informed that in the new heaven and earth, **"His servants will serve him." (Revelation 22:3)**

We shouldn't be surprised at this.

When Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden they were given work to do.

This work was pleasant and fulfilling.

It was only after sin entered the world that work became difficult and dull and God tells Adam, **"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you... By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food." (Genesis 3:17-19)**

But in the new heaven and earth the curse will be removed. So there won't be difficult bosses, inadequate wages and unjust working conditions.

As we will have perfect bodies we won't get tired.

However, I think it would be wrong to imagine that work in heaven will be easy. There would be no pleasure in that.

There is enormous satisfaction in taking on a big project and working through the challenges to produce a successful outcome.

So our work in heaven will be wonderfully stimulating.

Some of our future responsibilities will include reigning with Christ for we are told, **"They will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 22:5)**

This appears to mean that we will be involved in the government of the new heaven and earth.

We will reign over a resurrected universe, centered on a resurrected earth with its capital city the resurrected Jerusalem.

Then we will enjoy **RELATIONSHIPS**.

Two old friends met.

They had not seen each other for years.

"How is your wife?" asked one.

"She's in heaven," was the reply.
 "Oh, I am sorry."

The man realized that was the wrong thing to say so quickly added, "I mean I am glad."

This sounded worse so he settled for, "Well, I am surprised."

I think there will be a lot of surprises of who is in heaven but we do know that **the saints** will be there.

It will be a huge family so no one can number it.

We will need all eternity to get to know everyone.

It will be a varied family. Every kindred, tribe and tongue will be there. Every culture under the sun.

It will be an interesting family made up of the prophets, martyrs, patriarchs, and reformers.

All your spiritual relatives will be there.

Who would you like to speak to first?

In heaven our relationships will be perfect.

There will be no quarrels.

Nor will we want to criticize or exclude anyone.

No one will feel neglected or offended. Nothing will divide us there for we will be all one in Christ Jesus.

So what will we do together?

We will play, laugh and we will eat.

Isn't that good news?

Let me tell you how I arrive at that conclusion.

There are three bits of evidence. First, we are told that from God's throne in heaven flows a crystal clear river down the center of the street. The river nourishes trees which produce a crop of fruit each month. Since fruit is to be eaten this suggests we will spend time in the Father's house eating.

Second, Jesus ate after his resurrection with his disciples. His new resurrected body presumably didn't need the nourishment but he needed the fellowship.

Third, we are told we will gather at marriage supper of the Lamb. All this is appropriate because we use food to express our fellowship and to build a relationship. We ask people over for dinner or we go out together for lunch. And so we will eat in the new heaven and earth.

Then **the angels** will be there.

There will be myriads and myriads of them.

If we have not believed in angels before we get to heaven, we will when we arrive.

At present the angels are a bit above us but in heaven we shall be a bit above them. They will serve us.

Then **the Lamb** will be there.

Jesus will be there.

We will see the nail prints in his hands and his feet. Remember that Jesus has a physical body now and he will then and our body will be like his.

For heaven is a material place.

The LORD God will be there.

Heaven will be a never ending, ever increasing discovery of more and more of God's glory with greater and greater joy in him. The perfection of heaven is not static.

We will not see at once all there is to see for the finite cannot take in the infinite. Therefore there will always be more for a finite person to know and enjoy of God.

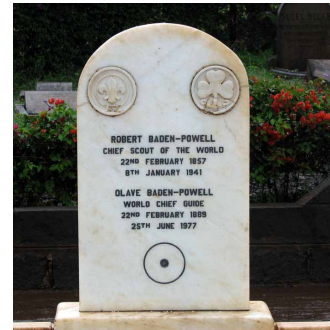


Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts was a committed Christian. On his tombstone there is a circle with a dot in the middle.

That's tracking language for "Gone home."

You can put that over every Christian's grave.

For heaven is God's home and children love coming home, especially to a father like this.



In heaven we will enjoy **REVELATION**.

We will grow in our knowledge of Jesus.

Throughout future ages believers will be shown, **"The incomparable riches of his grace." (Ephesians 2:7)** Though our capacity for knowledge will be greatly increased we will not be omniscient.

We will always maintain our ability to learn.

That means we will never get bored in heaven.

There are many parts of divine truth we don't fully comprehend now. There are the secret things of God that we cannot know now.

But one day all these deep doctrines will be made known and Jesus will be our teacher.

The Apostle Paul tells us, **"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face." (1 Corinthians 13:12)**

Then we will be **REJOICING** in heaven.

It is clear that worship will be one of the central activities of heaven.

Here on earth our worship is imperfect because we are sinful people but then it will be glorious.

Imagine today that instead of me being here in the pulpit the Lord Jesus was present and all around the sanctuary there were cherubim and seraphim.

As Jesus spoke we would hang on his every word.
 We wouldn't want him to stop.
 We certainly would not be thinking of going out to eat or what we are going to do later.

In Revelation we see a great multitude of believers before God's throne crying out, **"Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."** (Revelation 7:10)

Later on these saints are shouting "Hallelujahs" before God's throne. We will lose ourselves in the sheer joy of expressing with our lips the adoration and love we feel for God in our hearts.

A significant part of our worship will be singing.
 We may not be able to carry a tune now but we will be able to sing wonderfully in heaven.
 The book of Revelation contains 14 songs.

Revelation 5 records three of these songs which are sung in turn by the angels and the church.

The songs are Christ centered.

We see this in lines like, **"You are worthy . . . worthy is the Lamb who is slain."** (Revelation 5:9 & 12)

That is why it is important we are not half-hearted in our worship here.
 A good sing of God's praise is a foretaste of heaven.
 Augustine said, "All our activity will be amen and hallelujah."

I am glad that music will be an important part of heaven. Last Saturday I went to Severance Hall in Cleveland to hear the Cleveland Orchestra. They played Bruckner's Fifth Symphony. Anton Bruckner was a devout Catholic and his faith pervades his music. He would interrupt classes to kneel and pray before his students. In the fourth movement the entire orchestra are playing at top volume. It was a sound appropriate for the halls of heaven.



So that is what we will be doing in heaven.
 Why does it matter that we know these things?
 When heaven is real to us it makes a difference the way we live on earth.

This week a friend who is an expert hunter of morel mushrooms told me how he does it.

He goes out into the woods and he looks up for a dead elm tree. He then makes his way towards the tree and it is only when he is underneath the tree that he looks down.

I decided to try it. I went out into my woods looked up and saw a dead tree. I walked towards it. I then looked down and there were about 20 morels that I scooped up and we had them for dinner.



There is a spiritual lesson there. If we want to find treasure on earth we first need to look up. It is when we look up and think about heaven that it gives purpose to life now.

We find treasure in all sorts of earthly activity like our work and our service and we catch a glimpse of God's glory and what is in store for us.

With heaven in our sight we can **FACE DEATH.**

The Bible tells us we are all going to die and as we get older that prospect can fill us with fear.

But if we know where we are going and who is going with us we can face death with courage.

We can say with David, **"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me." (Psalm 23:4)**

Now I don't want to make light of the fear of death. Death after all is the last enemy but it is a fear we should ask God to remove.



Adoniram Judson was the first American Baptist missionary. He went to Burma where he preached the gospel for many years and translated the scriptures. At the end of his life he grew so weak that his wife Emily wanted Adoniram to understand how near to death he was.

He told her, "Death will never take me by surprise. I feel so strong in Christ. He has not led me so tenderly thus far to forsake me at the very gate of heaven. Yet when Christ calls me home I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from his school."

That's how you can die if you are looking up to heaven.

With heaven in our sights we can **PLAN FOR OUR DEATH.** We can prepare for our death by telling our families openly and honestly what our desires are when the time comes for God to take us home.

If you haven't already done so I would encourage you to have an advance health directive that let's your family and the physicians know the treatment you would like to have if you are incapacitated.

I can tell you as a pastor who has been with many anxious families in the hospital that it is incredibly helpful for them to know your wishes. Families agonize over what to do when a mother or father is on life support. But if you have told them. If you have written it down it relieves them of great worry.

Here is where our faith kicks in. If we truly believe heaven is a better place we don't need to hang on to life here. We can say that if there is no realistic chance of recovery our family can let us go with their blessing to God.

Let's also think of others at this time. 6,000 people die every year in the United States waiting for organ transplants. If we believe we are going to get a new resurrection body we don't need this one after we die. Make sure you are an organ donor and a tissue donor. Tell the doctors they can have anything that others need. You won't need it. You will be with Christ.

Then let me encourage you to plan your funeral. This isn't morbid. It is wise. It is a statement of how you want to say goodbye. It is an opportunity to express your faith. And again it is a wonderful help to your family who in the midst of their grief have the added burden of planning a funeral service.

My mother had given clear instructions for her funeral. We knew the hymns she wanted and the scripture readings. We knew who was to preach (me). We knew the poem she wanted recited by my brother. So take some time to compose a beautiful funeral and talk to your family about it. They will be so grateful.

Most important of all we need to prepare for our death spiritually. We need to get right with God. We need to make sure that heaven is our home.

The men's small group I am part of has just finished studying the book of Deuteronomy. At the end of that book Moses makes a great speech to Israel right before his death. He says, **"This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."** (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Moses sets before us the two alternative futures that face every one of us. They are life or death, blessings or curses, heaven or hell. Like Moses I urge you to choose life that you may live.

You don't need to do anything to go to hell.

A sign outside a church read:

"The road to hell keep straight on.

The road to heaven right about turn."

The choice we need to make is to choose heaven, to choose life. No one ever finished up in heaven by accident. People may get to hell that way because they neglected so great a salvation, but not to heaven.



So how do we choose heaven?

By living a good life?

No. That only gets us part way and that is not enough.

By trying to be religious?

By joining a church, or getting baptized?

No, although those things have their place.

We get to heaven by choosing Jesus.

By realizing that he went to hell that we might go to heaven. By acknowledging that he was cursed that we might be blessed. That he died that we might live.

A person may go to heaven without health, without wealth, without fame, without a great name, without learning, without a job, without culture, without beauty, without friends, without ten thousand other things.

But we can never go to heaven without Christ.

I pray that every one of you here will be in heaven one day because you have put your trust in Jesus.