

What Is The Kingdom of God (Heaven)?

Mark 4:26-34

June 14, 2009

Question – “Is there a heaven? Is there a hell? Where is heaven? Where is hell? What are they like?”

These questions have been raised over and over again by believers and non-believers. Several years ago there was a series called “Left Behind” that peaked questions by believers and non-believers concerning the reality of heaven and hell.

This was a question raised by one of Bethany’s members and so it’s good for us to review this question and God’s answer.

From God’ Word we can certainly state with confidence that there is a heaven and a hell. Turn with me in the Bible to Luke 10, pg 1027 in the pew Bible, Jesus sends out the seventy-two disciples. Let’s start at verse 8 and follow along.

⁸When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. ⁹Heal the sick who are there and tell them, The kingdom of God is near you. ¹⁰But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ¹¹Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near. ¹²I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. ¹³Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. ¹⁴But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you. ¹⁵And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. ¹⁶He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me. ¹⁷The seventy-two returned with joy and said, Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name. ¹⁸He replied, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. ¹⁹I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you. ²⁰However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. ²¹At that time Jesus, full of joy through the Holy Spirit, said, I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. ²²All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, and no one knows who the Father is except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²³Then he turned to his disciples and said privately, Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. ²⁴For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

In this section we encounter Jesus’ words about heaven and hell and the kingdom of God. There are many references to these three terms throughout scripture. This morning, we are going to take a quick view at some of them.

Let’s start with Hell – is it real? Hell is the abode of the dead, especially as a place of eternal punishment for unbelievers. In the Hebrew it is *Sheol*. It is referred to as the farthest point from heaven. The Greek term used is *Hades*. While the Old testament used *Sheol*, the New Testament used *Hades* to describe the place of the underworld. This was the place for the wicked. Another Greek term used is *Gehenna* that refers to a burning place. In 2 Peter 2: 4 ff. Peter addresses the place of hell. See page 1205 – 2 Peter 2:4.

In the New Testament, hell is referred to as a “place of outer darkness;” A “lake of fire;” a place where there will” gnashing of teeth.” Jesus warns against sinning in Matthew 5:22, 29-30 (pg. 959); and finally in Matthew 10:28 (pg. 965).

Let’s turn our attention to heaven. According to the Bible heaven is a real, objective place. We are not to think of heaven as a mere state or condition. In John 14:1-6 (pg.1067) is recorded these beautiful words from Jesus:

¹Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God^[a]; trust also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. ⁴You know the way to the place where I am going. ⁵Thomas said to him, Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way? ⁶Jesus answered, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

In this passage Jesus indicates a specific place and yet Scripture never defines where it is. In Psalm 103:11 (pg. 595), heaven is said to be “high above the earth.”

I can remember when the Russians sent their first manned spacecraft up and the report came back that there is no heaven, therefore there is no God. Maybe we get a better indication from the Ascension of our Lord as reported in Acts 1:11 (pg. 1077). Here the angels speak to the disciples saying, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken away from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.” The angels were giving the disciples a direction to not try and understand where heaven is; just be certain that it exists. One day Jesus will return and take all who believe in him into that heavenly realm.

Scripture says that heaven is the dwelling place of God. The apostle John describes it in the book of Revelation, chapter 21 (pg. 1230). Read it some time.

Who is in heaven? We know the Father and the Son are in heaven. Angels are in heaven as well as the saints of God – all who have died in the Lord. What a comfort to know that our dear departed who died in true faith are now in heaven, enjoying the company of Jesus, the angels, the saints of God, standing before the throne of God almighty.

What are the outstanding joys of heaven? God’s Word reveals the joy of heaven – Psalm 16:11 (pg. 538) we read, “*You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.*” The Lord Jesus said to His disciples in Luke 6:21 (pg1021), “*Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.*” We know that there will be no more pain or sorrow or death, according to Revelation 21:4 (pg. 1230).

Heaven is beautiful, wonderful, and glorious filled with peace, love, and joy. Heaven is a gift, the gift of God through Jesus Christ. It cannot be bought. It can never be merited by sinful man.

From the *Lutheran Annual* of some years ago is cited the following illustration.

During the Spanish war, Colonel Roosevelt commanded a regiment of rough Riders in Cuba. He became much attached to his men and was greatly concerned when a number of them fell sick.

Hearing that Miss Clara Barton (the famous lady of nursing wounded soldiers) had received a supply of delicacies for the invalids under her care, Colonel Roosevelt requested her to sell a portion of them to him for the sick men under his care.

His request was refused. The Colonel was very troubled; he cared for his men and was willing to pay for the supplies out of his own pocket.

He asked, “How can I get these things? I must have proper food for my sick men.”

Miss Barton replied, “Just ask for them.”

Colonel Roosevelt was embarrassed and did as Miss Barton suggested. He simply asked for some supplies for his regiment and Miss Barton gladly gave them to him.

How often is Colonel Roosevelt’s mistake repeated by many in the matter of salvation! People seem to expect to receive heaven in exchange for something they can offer. One brings an earnest prayer; a second brings a vow or pledge to turn over a new leaf; a third brings a resolution to live a better and purer life; a fourth thinks that before he can be saved, he must produce some evidence of his sincerity by improvement in his conduct; a fifth imagines that he can obtain this great blessing by conforming to certain religious observations.

The truth is that God’s salvation can be received only as a free gift. Pride rebels against this. It would rather pay a small price than receive something free. But God is too great to accept anything from sinful man. The only payment God accepts is the payment of Jesus’ death and resurrection. The free gift of heaven is freely given to all who believe in Jesus the Christ as Lord and Savior. St. Paul writes in Romans 6:23, “*The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life Christ Jesus our Lord.*”

Heaven – what a delightful subject to contemplate knowing it is our eternal home!

Finally, the Kingdom of God is the reign of God. Jesus used this phrase and another similar one, the kingdom of heaven, as a way to describe God’s holy presence and what that means for all who believe in Jesus. When we pray in the Lord’s Prayer “Thy kingdom come,” we pray that we will be included in God’s kingdom now and when it is fully revealed at the Last Day. “I’m but a stranger here, heaven is my home!” Rejoice and believe! Amen.