

Saints Triumphant—C  
Isaiah 65:17-19  
“Heaven Is My Home”

In the name of him who makes it possible for you and me to sing, “I’m but a stranger here; Heav’n is my home,” my dear Christian Friends,

A lot of people think that talking about heaven has little or nothing to do with this earth and its daily problems. They feel that a lot of pious talk about the hereafter is copping out on the here and now. I’ve even heard it said that a man who has his eyes fixed on heaven is not practical enough to see what is straight ahead of him on this earth.

But today we’re going to talk about heaven anyway. Why? Because so many people don’t have the vaguest idea of what it is like—their minds are full of the ideas of fairy tales, cartoons, and sacrilegious jokes. They smile and talk about floating on clouds, flying around with angel wings, and standing before St. Peter’s gate. Because most people do not know what heaven is like, most people are in no hurry to get there because most people think this earth is a much more fun place to be. A few years back there was a movie in which the hero was having so much fun committing adultery with one woman after another that he didn’t want to go to heaven. “Heaven can wait,” he said. That was the name of the movie: “Heaven Can Wait.” More than just one person has said, “I’ve got things to do yet on this earth—places to go, wild oats to sow, money to make, adventures to take. I’ll be bored sitting around playing harps and floating on clouds. Heaven can wait!” How about you? When was the last time you thought to yourself: “I just can’t wait to get to heaven?” When was the last time you talked to someone else about how much you were waiting to be with Jesus in the glories of heaven? Are you waiting for heaven more than you’re waiting for anything else? Or has the thought of going to heaven been placed on the back burner of your life?

We need to talk about what heaven is like today. So many lives on this earth are twisted and troubled because the people living them have a twisted and troubled idea of heaven. Instead of settling on a description of heaven from fairy tales, cartoons, and bad jokes, you and I are going to look for our description of heaven from the one who made heaven, the one who lives there, and the one who is inviting us all to spend our eternity there. God’s description of heaven is in the Bible. When we find out from his book what it is like “up there,” it’s going to make a difference in how we live from now on “down here.” When we find out how wonderful heaven is, we will proclaim: “Heaven is my home. I am ready to go there whenever God calls.” There are three things that we today are going to learn about heaven that will make us want to go there and live differently here: Heaven will not be on this earth. In heaven we will be with God. In heaven all sorrow will be gone.

I. Heaven will not be on this earth

Perhaps one of the most harmful misconceptions about heaven is that it will be just like this earth. People always like to ask earthly questions about heaven such as: Will my puppy be there? Will I know my Grandma? Will I be sad if one of my friends isn’t there? Will there be neat things to do there like going shopping, or out to eat, or playing golf, or watching a ballgame? Some church bodies have come up with all kinds of false doctrine based on the hope that there will be a heaven on earth, conjuring up millenniums, raptures, Armageddons, conversion of the Jews,

wars between believers and unbelievers, and a whole bunch of other weird ideas. Most of our so-called institutions of higher education teach that we are all basically good and that only time is needed to straighten this world out as it evolves slowly but surely into a better and more perfect place to live. And then there were those anti-heaven flashy commercials and exciting advertisements telling us that “it doesn’t get any better than this.”

But the Bible from cover to cover again and again, tells us not to look for heaven on this earth. Isaiah says: “*Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create*” (17). In the book of Revelation, St. John quotes this same passage and tells us that heaven will be something entirely new and different than this earth (21:1). St. Peter writes that this earth will pass away: “*The day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and everything in it will be laid bare*” (2 Peter 3:10). St. Paul told us that creation itself declares that God’s promises of heaven are far better than anything on this earth (Romans 8:19-21). If we use our Christian ears and eyes we will be able to see and hear why creation feels that way. St. Paul says that creation groans in pain and frustration because of the sinfulness mankind has brought into it. All is not well with the creation God originally made perfect. The trees which give us shade and pleasure on our camping trips groan in death and decay because of disease and fire. The wind that cools us off on hot days can also develop into tornadoes that destroy. The rains that can give a nourishing drink of water to the earth can also cause rivers to flood and drown the beauty that it helped to make. The wonderful animals which once walked in front of Adam to be named, now scare us away with their growls and bites, and turn us away from the sight of their bodies rotting along the sides of the road. St. Paul tells us all to listen carefully to creation next time we mow our lawn or take a walk through the woods. Its groan of frustration is a reminder that there is no heaven on this earth.

What does all this mean for you and for me? Knowing that heaven is not on this earth makes a big difference in how we live on this earth now. The old devil loves using the wonderful earthly blessings God gives us to tempt us to become earthly and forget about heaven. God has blessed us richly. We have good homes, good families and friends, good jobs, and a good standard of living. How easy it is for us to fall victim to the false thinking that we have it all right here. Why do we even need heaven? How easy it is to start waiting for even better homes, better jobs, bigger paychecks, bigger vacations, and other earthly blessings more than we wait to be with Jesus in heaven. But people who know what heaven is like don’t kill themselves in trying to make their heaven on earth. People who know that there can be no heaven on earth never forget that Jesus said: “*Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*” (Matthew 6:19-21). Jesus Christ, his forgiveness, and his promise of everlasting life in heaven is our Treasure. “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*” The more of heaven there is in our lives right now, the less of this earth we will covet. Knowing that there is a new heaven and a new earth coming makes a big difference in how we live in the old one.

## II. In heaven we will be with God

The second thing that Isaiah teaches us about heaven is that God is there. God is already

here on this earth, isn't he? Jesus promised: *"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age"* (Matthew 28:20). Yet in heaven God will be visible. Although God is on this earth, St. John rightly reminds us: *"No one has ever seen God"* (John 1:18). In heaven we will see God as clearly as we see each other right now. The reason we cannot see God on this earth is because we are sinful. To see the holy and almighty God in this sinful state would mean certain death for us. But in heaven we will be perfect. The Psalmist writes: *"And I—in righteousness will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness"* (Psalm 17:15). St. Paul wrote: *"Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known"* (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Seeing God face to face in heaven brings about perfect happiness. Isaiah wrote about heaven concerning this promise of God: *"I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy"* (18). The thought of seeing our God face to face never has to frighten us. God promises to make us joyful. He will remove from us the guilty conscience, the skeleton in our closet, and the filthy sins that make us afraid. He will give us a new body—a glorified one just like Jesus Christ. Christians look forward to this happy time in heaven. Don't be afraid to die. Don't be afraid to have Judgment Day come. You and I can say with the confidence of Job: *"I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"* (Job 19:25) Nothing will subtract from the joy of seeing God, not the remembrances of trouble on earth, not some friend or relative missing from heaven—nothing will subtract from the joy of seeing God.

Along with being perfect and seeing God face to face will also be perfect knowledge. For the first time we will see clearly. For the first time we will think perfectly. For the first time we will be as holy as God himself. That means we will understand why he did all things the way he did. We will see and rejoice that God is fair and just in punishing the unbeliever and in rewarding the believer for Jesus' sake.

Knowing what heaven is like makes a big change in how we live on earth. Is it possible to know that one day we will see God face to face, and turn our face away from him on earth? Knowing the joy that will be ours seeing his face, can we now on Sunday morning turn our faces from the joy of worshipping him to our pillows, to our TV sets, or to our own work and recreation? Can we ask his blessing at the end of our service to make his face to shine upon us and to look upon us with favor, and then go out of this house to live as though God's back was turned by being greedy, quarrelsome, angry and selfish behavior, and talking behind backs and doing our own thing behind closed doors? I don't think so. Neither did St. Peter. He wrote: *"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming"* (2 Peter 3:11-12). Who can know what heaven is like in their hearts and not live for the Lord with their hands? Who can love heaven and live like hell is better?

### III. In heaven all sorrow will be gone

There is one more thing about heaven that we should know. There is no sorrow there. Isaiah wrote: *"The sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more"* (19). St. John expanded this beautiful description in Revelation chapter 21: *"He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"* (4). Nobody has to have this explained to them. But wait a minute.

It's not just that in heaven we are going to be happy. Our gracious Lord gives us some happiness on this earth too. But here's the difference: the joys of this earth are so short. We are happy, but then we are sad. We smile, but then we frown. We are healthy, but then we are sick. We laugh, but then oh so soon we cry. We are alive, but then so soon we are dead. What is so great about the joy of heaven is that it has no interruptions. It never goes away. It lasts forever.

It is because you and I so often forget about heaven being that way that you and I aren't always as strong to face the trials and problems of this life as God wants us to be. You see, that absence of sorrow in heaven brings about one of the most dramatic changes in the life of every Christian while he or she is still on this earth. St. Paul put it this way: "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18). Paul says to take all the sorrow in a Christian's life, all the difficulties, all the troubles, all the distress, and then stack it all up against the glory Jesus Christ will one day share with his faithful Christians, and the result will always be: No contest. I read a story about a Christian who was told by his doctor that he had a terminal disease. That Christian said to his physician with a smile: "Thank you for telling me. I have always wondered how the Lord would take me home." Of course that Christian wasn't looking forward to the pain of dying and of leaving his loved ones, but that Christian understood what Paul was talking about when he said: "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.*" It's the same way with each and every one of us. Because of that future glory Jesus Christ will share with us, we can still be optimistic even in the worst of times. Our walk with Jesus is not a bed of roses, but a rocky road. Yet because of Jesus this time of trial and trouble is only temporary. Because of Jesus there is a cross, but there also is a crown. Here is a word of encouragement for all of us when we become discouraged in our lives: "*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy*" (KJV Psalm 126:5).

Heaven is not a pie in the sky promise to those who are down and out. It is the reality of a Savior who says: "*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In 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. And 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*" (John 14:1-3). Amen.