



Heaven – the home of saints

That heaven is a place is clearly taught in the Word of God. Heaven is not a mere state of existence like unconsciousness, sleep, mental delight or spiritual intoxication. The souls of believers actually do go somewhere after death. They are *'absent from the body'* and *'present with the Lord'* (2 Corinthians 5:8). But we know that the Lord is in a place or locality. The body of Jesus went upwards to a location described as *'the right hand of God'*. The body of the Lord Jesus is not omnipresent or ubiquitous because he is incapable of being everywhere at once in his human nature, glorified though it now is. That body of Jesus is in the place where angels see it, where Jesus himself acts as the sole Mediator for his people till the end of time (Revelation 4:5; Hebrew 4:14). Therefore, if the souls of believers are said in Scripture to be *'present with the Lord'* it must follow that that is a true place.

We cannot subscribe to the theory, held by some, that the souls of men are not distinct things or entities. The soul cannot be made of 'stuff' of any kind, but it is an entity just as truly as the body is. The body is material; the soul is spiritual. To suggest that what is spiritual is not a distinct entity would land us in the position of having to think of angels as nonentities, to say nothing of God himself, who is a pure spirit.

Heaven is a place of holiness

Nothing that defiles shall enter into it (Revelation 21:27). Unpardoned sinners will never be admitted into heaven; they shall have their part in the lake of fire which is *'the second death'* (Revelation 21:8). Those who were merely formal Christians will knock on the door for admittance in the last day but they will find it shut against them (Matthew 7:23; Luke 13:25). Those who imagined they would be safe to venture into heaven's company without the wedding-garment of Christ's righteousness will be found out and solemnly excluded (Matthew 22:11-13). Heaven will be absolutely pure and holy. All its inhabitants will be all righteous (Isaiah 60:21). Sin will never find an entrance there. This single great truth is a profound sermon to us all.

Heaven is a place of security

There will be no element of risk or danger there. That is why the gate of that place will not be shut (Revelation 21:25). There is no enemy any more either without or within. The world as we know it will be no more. The devil will be confined entirely and forever to the lake of fire. The sin which we have as believers will be eradicated from our natures at every conceivable level. There will be nothing to disquiet or ruffle the endless peace and security of the redeemed. They will be saved both *'to sin no more'* and to fear no more.

Heaven's security is represented by various terms used in Scripture to depict it. It is to be a city with foundations *'whose builder and maker is God'* (Hebrew 11:10). It is a kingdom (Colossians 1:13) There *'they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, says God'* (Isaiah 11:9). It is a paradise, or royal garden, as this Persian word denotes ([Revelation 2:7), a choice park far removed from the noise of war or conflict. It is *'a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens'* (2 Corinthians 5:1). It is, above all, the *'Father's house'*, in which are *'many mansions'* (John 14:2). And where is the power which could begin to disturb the peace of God the Father, the almighty, the ancient of days, the omnipotent? Or who shall disturb the comfort of his redeemed family?

If sin or evil could ever enter into heaven we could never truly enjoy a moment's peace there. But God has so abounded in love towards us as Christians that we shall at last be immutably holy. Sin

will be impossible to believers there. Hence, heaven cannot possibly be lost. Its security will be absolute, eternal and complete.

Heaven will be a world of glory

The word 'glory' is so much associated with the notion of heaven that it is almost a synonym for it. Everything about heaven will be suffused with this supernal and lustrous quality. The information supplied by the Word of God leaves us with a very clear impression that this is to be so. When the seventy elders of Israel went up with Moses and the other leaders towards the presence of the Lord on Mount Sinai, we read that *'they saw the God of Israel: and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it was the body of heaven in his clearness'* (Exodus 24:10). Isaiah saw the glory of the Church of Christ in its perfect condition in these terms:

'Behold, I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones.'

(Isaiah 54:11-12)

The Psalmist declares that *'they shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom'* (Psalm 145:11).

Daniel receives this vision of the upper world where God's presence is manifested:

'I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like a fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth before him: thousand of thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened.'

(Daniel 7:9-10)

A little later he goes on: *'I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.'*

(Daniel 7:13-14)

Similarly, in their well-known visions Isaiah and Ezekiel refer to the glory and majesty of God's heavenly palace above (Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1 and 11:22-23).

This constant representation in the Old Testament is confirmed more vividly still by the description given in the New. Christ at his transfiguration is said to have appeared *'white and glistering in his raiment'* (Luke 9:29). Moses and Elijah who were then visible speaking with him also *'appeared in glory'* (Luke 9:31). This amazing and supernatural event was a glimpse of the glory of heaven. For a moment God lifted the veil. At once numinous awe and dread fell upon the three disciples who were present to witness this brief divine drama. When Christ returns from heaven it will be very emphatically in glory (Matthew 26:64). Even now he sits in glory at the right hand of God and is the endless delight of those blessed spirits who encircle the sacred and august majesty of God and of the Lamb (Revelation 4-5). When the holy Jerusalem is fully revealed as descending out of heaven from God it will appear as *'having the glory of God'* (Revelation 21:11). More explicitly, its glory will not be the reflection of any created luminary for *'the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light (or lamp) thereof'* (Revelation 21:23).

To the same effect it is further added that *'there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever'* (Revelation 22:5). And all this will be so because of the love of Christ towards his people, as he himself says: *'And the glory which thou gavest me I have given to them'* (John 17:22). The term 'glory' is not to be regarded as one of brightness simply, although it very certainly includes that idea. It is suggestive also of holiness, divinity, the immanence of the supernatural. It is resplendent

with sacredness, awesomeness and with the numinous, mysterious presence of God himself. It is quality which will render heaven exhilarating to its inhabitants and replete with interest and delight beyond what eye has seen here below or what the tongue of man could possibly express. Heaven will be a world of sanctified excitement.

A place of perfect fellowship

There will be nothing lonely, impersonal or clinical about heaven. It is to be peopled by an *'innumerable multitude whom no man can number'* (Revelation 7:9). These are described in the same book as *'ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands'* (Revelation 5:11). Less literally and more symbolically the same persons are said to number *'a hundred and forty four thousand'* (Revelation 7:14). It is the height of absurdity to attempt a literal interpretation of this number in the way Jehovah's Witnesses do in their literature. This is not to throw light on the Scriptures but to darken them. The Revelation of the Apostle John is apocalyptic in its nature and uses language frequently in a symbolic and not in a prosaic way.

Furthermore, there will be the most delightful, enriching and beneficial fellowship between the inhabitants of the heavenly kingdom when it comes in its fulness. The very best of earth's inhabitants will be there, for *'they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it'* (Revelation 21:26). The honourable of the earth shall be there for *'the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it'* (Revelation 21:24).

The union and communion of God's people in glory is foreshadowed here in this life. Here they have *'fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ'* (1 John 1:3) and with one another. Even here on earth this fellowship of the saints is a rich and a royal experience. They break their hearts to have to part from one another (Acts 20:38). Their hearts burn within them as they talk with and about their heavenly Lord (Luke 24:32). It is a constant mystery to non-Christians to see the Lord's people always so delighted with one another's company and appearing to have an endless appetite for spiritual conversation and fellowship. The secret lies in that they know Christ and share in the wonder of his felt and personal dealings with their souls.

How much more will the redeemed in glory commune one with another in the upper world when all their present failings and imperfections are gone forever! There at long last, with the Lord himself and with angels will the ransomed of the Lord hold sublime converse. Each word will add to the comfort of heaven because there will be no 'idle words' there and no 'corrupting conversation'. All eyes will be directed towards the vision of the Lord Jesus Christ and the other persons of the ever-blessed Trinity. Every thought will then be captive to him. God will be in every heart, mind and imagination. All hearts will beat in a common unison. The Almighty Jehovah will be the goal of every man's aspiration and every desire for God will be reciprocated by him. A sacred fellowship will be held between God and people which no fear of sin, Satan or death will ever mar.

Heaven a world of love

It is the glory of heaven that it will be a world of love. God will then indeed *'rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing'* (Zephaniah 3:17). In similar vein the people of God will experience unspeakable consolation in the enjoyment of the love of God for them. In that way the believer will know in all its fullness the meaning of such words as these:

'Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth, and shalt not remember the reproach of thy widowhood any more. For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; the God of the whole earth shall he be called. For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment I have forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer.'

(Isaiah 54:4-8)

The child of God will then be '*dandled upon the knees*' (Isaiah 66:12). '*As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you, shall the Lord say to them*' (Isaiah 66:13). Such terms of endearment will not exhaust the expression of God's love but he will further declare to his people:

'I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.'

(Hosea 2:19-20)

In this way will the petition at the close of Christ's great high-priestly prayer be fulfilled towards his people: '*And I have declared unto them my name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them*' (John 17:26).

Every motion of every heart in heaven will be animated with this love of God, a love which he has for them and which they have for him. Hence the heavenly brotherhood will be eternally capable only of a well-ordered mutual affection in which God is at long last loved with all the heart and mind and soul and strength and all others are loved equally with ourself. Love is the highest attribute of heaven because it is of the very nature of God himself, who is love (1 John 4:8).

Who would not pant after such a God? And who would not long to be counted worthy at last to enter such a place?

Maurice Roberts

© 2014

www.christianstudylibrary.org