

What Is Heaven Like?

ILLUS – When Fred arrived at the Pearly Gates, Peter stood there waiting to process his entry data. “Tell me one purely unselfish king deed you’ve done on earth.” Fred thought about it for a moment and then said, “Oh, yes. I think I have something you might be interested in. One day I was walking along and I came upon this little old lady who was being mercilessly beaten by this huge bikie-type guy.” “What did you do?” “First I ran up to his bike and kicked it over, just to distract him. Then I kicked him in the shins really hard. Then I punched him in the solar plexus as hard as I could, and I told the old lady to run for it.” “That’s amazing,” said Peter, pen in hand. “Could you tell me when this happened?” “Oh, about 2 or 3 minutes ago.¹”

I want to talk about what heaven is like.

According to the Bible, Heaven is an amazing place.

1 Cor 2:9 But as it is written: “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.”

In other words, it’s beyond our imagination.

But we get some weird ideas about Heaven.

So what’s it like there?

1. John 14:1-4 Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. (2) In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. (4) And where I go you know, and the way you know.

“In My Father's house are many mansions.”

Or rooms if you have the NIV.

The word actually means dwelling-places.

But what exactly is it talking about?

Because I’ve got to tell you that sometimes it seems to me that we have the strangest methods of interpretation.

Someone comes along and says, “Heaven’s dotted everywhere with mansions laid up for the righteous.” And we say, “Yeah, I believe it. I believe it.”

ILLUS – You’ve probably heard the joke: Three men died and went to Heaven. Peter said, “Come on in guys. I’ve got to show you your homes.” The first got a beautiful mansion. So did the second. When it got to the third, he was shown this little grass hut. “What! Is that all I get?” he asked in amazement. “Sorry pal, but that’s all we could do with the materials you sent up.”

There’s a great truth in this little joke; we need to store our treasure in heaven, not on earth.

But it also shows how our concepts of the next life are based, not on what Scripture says, but on our understanding of this life.

And we've got the idea that this verse refers to all the mansions that God has waiting for us up in Heaven.

ILLUS – So can you imagine, someone has just arrived in Heaven at the Pearly Gates, and I'm St Peter? And I say to him, "You have been selected for the most beautiful mansion. See those hills? Have we got something for you! Are you excited? Just beyond that first hill, nestled into the side of the mountain is a mansion. And I mean mansion. 42 rooms, scenic views, internal staircase, indoor swimming pool, sauna, spa. All this and more for you. You won't even know you're alive."

That's the most ridiculous thing!

Tell me, what are you going to do with 42 rooms? Sleep in a different one every night?

Your wife isn't going to be there to share it with you.

The Bible says that in Heaven there is no giving or taking in marriage – so she's going to be off somewhere else rejoicing in her new freedom.

Your kids aren't going to be hanging round.

So what are you going to do with a mansion? – You're going to spend the rest of eternity sweeping the floors!

Why would you need a mansion up there anyway?

Let's think this through.

Well, why do you need a house down here on earth?

Let's have a look at some of the basic reasons why people have houses and see if they apply to Heaven.

A. To store your possessions.

Now, what makes you think that you'll have possessions in Heaven?

Jesus taught us to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven." [Mat 6:10]

Then we see that the early church didn't bother to claim private property.

Acts 4:32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.

I think it's very likely that we won't have any personal possessions in Heaven.

Why would we need to claim anything as our own when all of Heaven lies before us?

B. To protect your things from the elements.

We've just seen that we won't have any possessions, but even if we did, why would we need to protect them from the elements?

Or why would we need to protect ourselves from the elements?

Is it going to rain up there?

The Bible tells us that when God first created the earth there was no rain. [Gen 2:5]

It's reasonable to assume that it might be like that in Heaven too.

Nor is there any sun in heaven.

Talking about the heavenly city: Rev 21:23 says, “The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.”

C. To protect our belongings from thieves.

Mat 6:19-20 Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; Mat 6:20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.

As to the identity of those treasures that we can lay up in heaven, that’s another story.

But the point here is, there aren’t any thieves in heaven, so you don’t need a house to keep them in.

So what are the many mansions or dwelling places?

To work this out, I want to take you through a few Bible verses, and I think that before we get to the end, you will have worked it out for yourself.

John 2:19-21 Jesus answered and said to them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” (20) Then the Jews said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” (21) But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

Figuratively, Jesus referred to His body as a temple.

2 Pet 1:13-15 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, (14) knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. (15) Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease.

This next one’s just a little bit more complex, so try to stay with me.

2 Cor 5:1-4 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, (3) if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. (4) For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

Paul talks about our earthly house (our current bodies) being destroyed and says that we will receive “a building from God”.

So when Jesus talks about the mansions that we will receive, what was He talking about?

It’s pretty obvious that it’s referring to the new bodies we’ll receive after our resurrection.

If you want a full description of what these bodies are going to be like read 1 Cor 15:42-49.

In this passage it contrasts the body we’re going to get with the ones we already have.

It uses words like powerful, glorious, incorruptible.

The next body we get will be immortal – it won’t be subject to sickness, infirmity or weakness.

2. All the negative things of earth will be gone.

Rev 21:3-5 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. (4) 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.” (5) Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, I make all things new.” And He said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

This is the place to be, isn't it?

Heaven is a place where there is no more suffering.

In fact, it's the exact opposite: (Ps 16:11) You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

3. We will be rulers.

We don't even know over what, but listen to this:

Rev 22:3-5 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. (4) They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. (5) There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.

This idea of our ruling is also contained in the Parable of the Talents in Matt 25:14-23.

4. Even entering Heaven will be special.

It's funny how we've been sold this idea that when you die, you go up to the Pearly Gates and St Peter's there waiting for you.

ILLUS – A bus driver and a minister were waiting in line to get into Heaven. When the driver approached the gate St Peter said, “Welcome, I understand that you were a bus driver. I'm in charge of housing, and I have just the place for you. See that mansion on the hill top? It's yours.” The minister heard all this and began to stand a little taller: “If a bus driver gets that, I can't wait to see what I'll get.” He approached the gate and St Peter said, “Welcome, I understand that you were a minister. I'm in charge of housing, and see that shack over there? It's yours.” “What! A bus driver gets a mansion! I was a minister. I taught people about God, helped people, and preached the Gospel. And I get a shack?” Peter responded sadly, “Well, it seems that when you preached, people slept. But when the bus driver drove, people prayed.”²

But this kind of belief, where Peter is checking off the names, doesn't make any sense.

ILLUS – Imagine at the Pearly Gates. Peter says, “Name?” You tell him your name. He says, “Okay, no problem. You're in.” Then the next person comes along: “Name?” He tells Peter his name. “Let's see. Nooo. Oh, here it is. You're in.” Now the next guy that turns up is Adolph Hitler. “Name?” “Mein name is Billy Graham.” “Mmmm. Yup, no problem.” What happens when Billy Graham gets there and finds out his name has already been taken?

What does the Bible say really happens?

First of all it says that even in this life, there's a whole cloud of witnesses watching our lives.

In Hebrews 11, it talks about all these people of faith that have gone before – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samson, David, Samuel – then:

Heb 12:1 Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,

These guys are all watching on right now; don't you think they're going to be waiting to meet us when we die?

Second, we don't have to go via the Pearly Gates or anything else.

When we leave this life, we enter immediately into the presence of the Lord.

2 Cor 5:8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

To be absent from the body means to be present with the Lord.

When you die, if you're a follower of Jesus, you go straight to be with Him.

Just close your eyes and try to imagine this.

ILLUS – Dying is like closing your eyes and going to sleep, then opening them and finding yourself in Heaven. Thousands of people are cheering and clapping and congratulating you. You're wearing the biggest grin you've ever had in your life. Then the crowd parts, and suddenly, Jesus is walking towards you, smiling, arms outstretched and you instantaneously realise two things.

First, you're overwhelmed with the feeling that you've just come home.

This is the place where you've always belonged.

And second, everything you've ever **suffered**, every **hurt**, every **pain**, are nothing compared to the wonder and beauty and awesomeness of the eternity that now stretches before you.

If you know Jesus, this is what you've been promised – eternal life in Heaven.

And if you're going to be there, don't you want all your friends to be there too?

And finally, if you don't belong to Jesus, then you need to get right with God, otherwise you're going to miss out.

¹ Hodgin, Michael *1001 Humorous Illustrations* – p445

² Hodgin, Michael *1001 Humorous Illustrations* – p665