

## **Our Eternal Home: The Best Thing!**

What will be the best thing about heaven? I did not take a survey of the young people of our churches or of professing Christians. If I were to poll people from many different churches a plethora of answers would be given. Some might say the best thing about heaven will be seeing their husband, wife, child, parent, or friend who died. Others might relish the opportunity to talk to heroes of the faith such as Abraham, Joseph, David, Daniel, or Paul. Still others might say half-jokingly that they look forward to fishing or golf. Maybe some of us would say the same.

None of these things can compare to what is truly the best thing about heaven. The highest blessing of heavenly life will be seeing our Savior Jesus Christ and living in fellowship with our heavenly Father. This is what we are told in Revelation 21:3, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." Revelation 22:3–4 explains more fully how we will experience fellowship with God: "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: and they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads." Imagine that! We will see the face of God!

The essence of heaven is God's dwelling with his people. God and his people will live in the same place, the new heavens and new earth. This will be the fullest and most intimate fellowship we can have with God because this is the fullness of God's covenant of friendship with us. God's people experience fellowship with God on this earth. Adam and Eve experienced this fellowship when God came down to the earth to walk and talk with them in Paradise the first. Adam and Eve knew intimate fellowship with God before they sinned. But even then, for them to have this fellowship, God had to come down to them. They did not have the fullness of God dwelling with his people.

God's people in the Old Testament experienced fellowship with him at the tabernacle and temple when they gathered for the feasts and offered sin offerings and thank offerings. But this was limited. The people were not allowed personally to enter into the most holy place. Instead, they entered by the representation of the high priest once a year.

Intimate friendship with God was revealed and experienced more fully in the New Testament with the coming of the Son of God in our flesh. The beauty of this fellowship is revealed in his name, Immanuel, which means God with us. Now we have God in us, as the Holy Spirit dwells in us. But still there is separation between heaven and earth, bride and groom, the church and Christ. We experience fellowship with God in Jesus Christ, but not face

to face. Face to face is always better. You experience this. If you have friends in different parts of the country, you are thankful that you can text, call, Skype, or FaceTime. But seeing your friends at a convention or at school is always better. The same is true in our relationship with God. In the new heavens and new earth, we will experience the fullness of fellowship with God by seeing him and his glory.

The fullness of fellowship with God is described as seeing God's face (Rev. 22:4) and seeing the glory of God (Rev. 21:23). Seeing God's face and his glory is shocking to anyone who understands God's glory, majesty, and holiness, as this is revealed in scripture. How can this be? When Moses requested to see God (Ex. 33), God said, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." In the vision Isaiah sees in Isaiah 6, the angels covered their faces with two of their wings in the presence of God. How then shall we see the face and glory of God in the new heavens and new earth? We will see God and his glory like we have never seen him before. God's glory will fill and permeate the new heavens and new earth.

What does it mean to see God's face and glory? Does this mean we will see God in a physical form, as when he came to visit Abraham and Sarah? No. Seeing God's face and glory is knowing him more fully. Moses could see only the back side of God's glory. This is like when you stand in the back of church and your family is already sitting. You can pick them out simply by seeing the backs of their heads. Although you can recognize them from the backs of their heads, you cannot see facial expressions or communicate with them. From the back side, our knowledge of people is limited compared to seeing them face to face. While we live on earth, our knowledge of God is like seeing him from the back side. We know everything we need to know about God from his word, but our knowledge of him is limited. In heaven we will see God more fully. Our knowledge will still be limited, for only God knows everything about himself. But we will know him better, for we will see his glory. This means we will see more fully in heaven what God is like and what he does.

Especially we will see and know more of God's goodness, mercy, and grace. When we see the face of God, we will not see disappointment in his face that will drive us away. Instead, we will see his love, grace, and mercy, which draw us to him. We will see and understand infinitely better how much God loves us.

How will we see this in the new heavens and new earth? Remember that we will not see God physically because he is a spirit. We will see the greatness of God revealed in all things in the new heavens and new earth. Scripture teaches us that creation declares the

handiwork of God. Although the creation is severely marred by sin, we continue to see the glory of God in a thunderstorm, in flowers, and in a sunset. We see the greatness of God in science and mathematics. We see the power of God in his providential rule over all things in this world. If we see God in this creation, certainly we will see the glory of God in the new heavens and new earth, in which will be no effects of the fall.

In the new heavens and new earth we will see the glory of God in each other. We are recreated in the image of God because we are being conformed to the image of Christ. This means that we see the righteousness and holiness of God in each other. We see the love of God in our relationships with each other. We learn about our Father's love when our parents discipline us and hug us after we sin. In the new heavens and new earth we will see the glory of God in each other more fully because there will be no more sin there. This does not mean we will become little gods. God's work will be evident in our perfection. In this we will see the majesty and excellence of the God who has worked righteousness, holiness, and love in our hearts.

Especially, we will see God in the face of Jesus Christ. In our changed, resurrection bodies we will see Jesus. When we see Jesus, we see God. This is what Jesus told us in John 14:9: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." The primary way we will see the face and glory of God is when we see Jesus.

Seeing God's face and glory in Jesus Christ will be the best of heaven. This should be why we want to go to heaven.

Maybe when you have thought about heaven, you have thought about people you would like to interview. Maybe you would choose Abraham, Moses, David, Paul, Martin Luther, or John Calvin. Why them? You would choose them because of their spiritual beauty and the gifts God has given to them.

Who is more spiritually beautiful, talented, knowledgeable, and interesting than Jesus? Therefore, Jesus should be the first person we want to see. He is the master artist of the universe, the inventor of music, and our Savior. Of course we want to be with him. He died on the cross for us. And the good news is that Jesus wants us to be with him forever.

Forever we will sit at the feet of Jesus, enjoying fellowship with God as we fellowship with Jesus. This is a great wonder because think of the millions of people who will be in heaven. (remember that the number of the saved is compared to the sand on the seashore). I believe that we will all be able to spend personal time with Jesus in heaven, receiving

instruction about the greatness of our God. How this will take place I do not know. This is part of the wonder of heavenly life that we do not understand now.

The chief joy of heaven is that we will have a fuller knowledge of God without sin. Because we are redeemed from sin with Christ's blood, we are welcomed into the presence of our Lord to see Him face to face. This is the joy of God's people in heaven—to look into the loving, compassionate eyes of God. Heaven will be knowing and seeing God. It is not about doing the things I want to do, such as golfing or fishing. In the new heavens and new earth we will constantly be growing in our knowledge of God through Jesus Christ.

When we understand that the chief joy of heaven is growing in the knowledge of God at Jesus' feet, this will affect the way we live our lives on this earth. We are part of heaven's community, the church triumphant that rejoices in the glory, grace, and beauty of God. We read in holy scripture that the desire of God's people is to know him and be with him. In Psalm 27:4 David confessed, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple." When we understand that in heaven we will be with God and we will grow in the knowledge of him, we will desire the same thing in this life. We will be in the word and worship because we want to dwell with God and behold his beauty. Is this our desire?

Asaph expressed his desire for God this way in Psalm 73:25: "Whom have I in heaven by thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." The central desire of the believer's heart is God—to be with him and to know him. We might think that this means that our eyes should only be on the giver of all our gifts and not the gifts themselves. We must not think that God is good and all that we have on this earth is bad. When we seek God, we will see the gifts that God gives rightly. God is not displeased when we enjoy a good meal, a good book, a relaxing vacation with family, and so many other things. The problem for us is that we often seek joy and satisfaction in these gifts instead of the giver of these gifts. But God is not frowning in heaven when we enjoy these things. He is displeased when we detach them from him, the giver of every good and perfect gift. It may be that in heaven we will enjoy some of these activities, but we will enjoy them in perfect friendship with God, in which there will be no sin.

Because our ultimate goal in heaven will be seeing God, our ultimate goal in this life must be to see and know him. This is why we need to be in the word of God and under the preaching. This is the way God reveals himself to us.

When we understand theology and doctrine rightly from the holy scriptures, then we will see everything else rightly also. We will give thanks for the multitude of blessings we have in Jesus Christ. We will observe the glory of God revealed in math, science, or a cardinal we watch in the backyard. We will enjoy the friendships we have and the pleasures of family and hobbies we enjoy. But none of them will ever eclipse our enjoyment of the faithful covenant God who gives us these blessings. We will use them in the service of him.

One day we will enjoy the perfect life with God in heaven. May this be why we long to go to heaven. We will see God, live with God, and serve God forever without sin!