

When the Christian Goes Home

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A Lesson on what Happens
After we Die

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INTRODUCTION

Admittedly, I have heard a lot of stories from credible people about things that have happened after a loved one dies that raises questions that I can't answer. It certainly highlights the fact that there are things we don't understand about life after life. I want to acknowledge that. I also want to say that God gave *stern warning* to the Israelites to stay far away from 'consulting the dead' or those that will do it for you. (**Deuteronomy 18:10-13**). This gives clear direction, but answers no questions. Knowing what, or what not to do is far more important than trying to understand things we cannot find the answers to. The scripture is clear that you should NOT try to make contact with the dead. It clearly leads us into place we cannot understand and ought not to go. Now that we have that clear, let's see what we *can* learn from Scripture about what God has in store for the believer.

We all like to think about what will happen when we die, what our eternal home will be like, and what relationships will be like when we graduate into the next life. There is not a plethora of information in the Scripture, at least not all in one place; but there is enough scattered throughout the Bible to give us a pretty

good glimpse into what lies ahead. The Apostle Paul, who had paid a brief visit into the heavens himself, explained the problem: *However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" — the things God has prepared for those who love him.*" **(1 Corinthians 2:9)**. The totality of what God has in store for the believer is inconceivable to the limitations of our human understanding. It is so far beyond what we can relate to from our earthly experience that we can't grasp it. What we can discern from Scripture is amazing enough.

Bible scholars tend to agree that Paul was speaking of himself when he wrote this: *"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know— God knows.*

3 And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—4 was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell." **(2 Corinthians 12:2-4)**.

So, the apostle knew what he was talking about. There are things that we can learn from him and others as we peruse the Scripture.

PARADISE

When Jesus hung on the cross of Calvary, He had a man on each side of Him; both on their respective crosses. One hurled insults at Jesus while the other acknowledged that he deserved to be there; but Jesus was without sin. Jesus responded to the second man: *“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”* (**Luke 23:43**)

There are three simple truths here. The **first** is that people who have a faith relationship with God, through Jesus, go to paradise when they die. The **second** is that there is little lag time. The **third** is that Jesus was going there as well. Jesus dwells in paradise. For the man who hung beside Him, it would happen that day. The Apostle Paul wrote this: *“Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 For we live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.”* (**2 Corinthians 5:6-8**). That means that when the believer leaves their body, which is merely a vessel that carries soul and spirit, they take up residence with Jesus who is in paradise.

How are we going to get there you ask? Will it be a “*Beam me up Scotty*” kind of moment? No! The Heavenly Father’s Name is not ‘Scottie’, it is Howard. The Lord’s Prayer is clear. It starts by saying: “Our Father, who art in heaven, Howard by Thy Name” (joking). Will we be instantly transported? Will there be a tunnel to walk through with a white light at the end? When Jesus told a story about two men who died, a story recorded in the Gospel of Luke, He said this: “*The time came when the beggar died and **the angels carried him to Abraham’s side.***” (Luke 16:22). So, the answer to how we will get to paradise is that we will be accompanied there by angels.

Paradise is Heavenly

What will it be like living there? As stated, our human, finite minds cannot conceive the beauty, the glory, or the nature of what life will be like in paradise or our eternal home. This is the answer: “*no human mind has conceived the things God has prepared for those who love him.*”

Jesus told the disciples: “*In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.*” (John 14:2, NASB). This raises a question in itself. If going to paradise is immediate after the death of the believer, and there were already many dwelling places there; and since Jesus is going to paradise Himself, what is this place that He will ‘prepare’ for us?

In my booklet entitled “Hell. Is it Real? Is it Eternal?” I spend a fair bit of time discussing **Luke 16:19-31**. The story that Jesus told is both sobering and revealing. Let me remind you that Jesus did not use names in Parables. In this case, it was **not** introduced in the Gospel as a parable, and Jesus **did** use names. This seemed to be the record of a real event.

It’s a story of a wealthy man and a beggar named Lazarus. They both died. Lazarus went to a place referred to as “Abraham’s bosom” or “Abraham’s side”. This seems to be another term used for “paradise”. The wealthy man went to hades or hell.

If you read the story you will see clearly that both he and Abraham (whom he conversed with) have clarity of thought, normal speech, emotions, and memories. There is no reason to believe that it will not be the same for us.

We will get back to the question of what Jesus is preparing for us **on page 14 & 21**. In the meantime we will look at life in paradise.

We’ll Know Each other in Paradise

From another event we refer to as ‘*The transfiguration of Jesus*’, Peter, John and Andrew were present with Jesus. This event happened in a secluded place on the side of a mountain. The disciples dozed

off, and when they woke up, there was Jesus along with Moses and Elijah. Those two men had both lived many hundreds of years prior, yet in this moment where the eternal and the temporal bumped into each other; no introduction seemed to be required. If this is a hint into life in paradise, it seems like those who have gone before us will be recognizable, whether we knew them on earth or not.

It's reasonable to assume that if, while still in the natural, the disciples could recognize those gone before them - when we arrive in paradise we will recognize both those we knew in the flesh and those we did not. We will know people that we only knew about while on earth. Obviously, we will be able to communicate and have fellowship with them.

Won't it be amazing to have a conversation with some of the characters in the Bible? I wonder who will be the first to ask Noah if he had wished he took more than two worms. Won't it be wonderful to see and chat with those we've loved that have gone before us? Truly it will.

Relationships in Paradise

To many, the following passage of Scripture is somewhat disturbing. Couples want to know that they will get to spend eternity with the one they have chosen to give their life to here, on earth. This is what Jesus said

about that: *“The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. 35 But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, 36 and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.” (Luke 20:34-36).*

Unfortunately, Jesus doesn’t tell us what our relationship with our spouses will be like after death; but He is clear that it will not be the same as it is on earth. For those of us who are crazy about our spouses, our first response is to reject or dislike Jesus’ answer. Why would things have to be any different?

First, humanity was created to be in relationship with God. At the very core of our being, the primary purpose of the emotion we call “love” is to be between us and our Creator. That is why Jesus responded as He did to the question of the Pharisees, as to what the greatest commandment in the law was. He said: *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment.” (Matthew 22:37-38).* If that is true now, how much more true is it that God will be our first-love when we are in paradise? In paradise, all men and women will most naturally fulfil our highest calling; to love God.

Second, one of the primary purposes of marriage is to be a picture of the love and unity that we as a church can have with Christ. We, the church, are the

bride of Christ. Our marriage on earth is intended to portray what that relationship is to look like (**Ephesians 5:21-33**). We strive for perfection in our relationship with our spouses so that we adequately paint a picture to the world around us of what a perfect relationship with God is like. In heaven, a picture is not required to portray the perfect relationship between man and God. That relationship will be our reality.

Thirdly, another primary function of human marriage on earth is procreation. This too will be unnecessary in paradise.

So, if these purposes for which marriage on earth exists are redundant following life on earth, it makes perfect sense that marriage as we now experience it will not exist in paradise.

Other than our relationship with God being all encompassing and fulfilling, we know little about what our relationship with one another will be like in our future home. Since earthly relationships between husband, wife and family are all we know in this life; it is hard for us to think of things being any different than they are now. We imagine that the relationships that exist between ourselves and those closest to us will continue in paradise in a way that is similar to the present. Possibly similarities will exist. Jesus suggests that our relationships in heaven will differ from what we know now, but He doesn't give detail.

What we do know is that it is called paradise for a reason, and that no mind can conceive the wonders of what is in store for us. Whatever our relationships will be like; it will be wonderful.

Resurrection Bodies in Paradise

There are a few misconceptions about what we will be like when we get to heaven. We have to be careful about being too dogmatic, since we just don't know very much. **1 John 3:2** makes it clear that "*what we will be has not yet been made known.*"

In our humanity we were created in the image of God, meaning that we have intellect, emotion and will. That is the **soulish** part of man, and it is immortal. Once given life the soul will spend eternity in one of two destinations; heaven or hell. We were also given a spirit. The spirit is still born because of the imputation of Adam's sin. King David said it: "*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.*" (**Psalm 51:5**). The reason we will be in paradise, despite having been born in sin, is because that Spirit came alive when we were 'born again' through faith in Jesus Christ. It too is eternal. Our earthly body, however, is mortal, and is simply the vessel that houses the soul and spirit, a vehicle through which they express themselves.

Many have in their mind that we become angels when we get to heaven. There is no biblical support for such an idea. We will not be angels. We will be like

them only in the sense that we will have spiritual bodies. Angels are a distinct form of created being unto themselves. Their home has always been in the presence of God, and they have never been human. In fact, the apostle Paul teaches that we will have a part in the judging of angels. *Do you not know that we will judge angels?* **(1 Corinthians 6:3).**

Many console themselves, after a loved one dies, by believing that the spirit of that loved one is constantly with them, watching over them. They think of their loved one as like a guardian angel of sorts. There is no scriptural support for such a belief. Our faith is to be in God. He does send angels to watch over us, but they are angels, heavenly beings - not those who have gone before us.

Listen to what Paul teaches us: *“There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.*

41 The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

42 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable;

43 it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; 44 it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. (1 Corinthians 15:40-44)

We will have bodies, but they will be spiritual bodies. We will not be angels, but we will be like the angels in that our spiritual body cannot die. It is imperishable. There is no expiry date on our heavenly body. Jesus said: *“They can no longer die; for they are **like** the angels. They are God’s children, since they are children of the resurrection.”* **(Luke 20:36)**

The little bit that we know about the resurrected Christ is helpful, because our resurrected body will be like His resurrected body. *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, **we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is.”* **(1 John 3:2)**. This is what we know:

- He seemed to have extra-dimensional qualities. Mary Magdalene, one of His best friends, did not recognize Him in the garden outside the tomb, until her eyes were opened. **(John 20:14-16)** The two men on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Him until they had a revelation. **(Luke 24:30-31)**
- He had the ability to disappear, and seemingly to teleport. He disappeared in Emmaus and was seen later that night in Jerusalem. **(Luke 24:30-31)**
- He passed through a locked door. **(John 20:19)**
- He invited His disciples to both look and touch Him, so His body had physical qualities. **(John 20:27)**

When the Christian Goes Home

This gives us just a glimpse into the splendor of the heavenly body, for we shall be like Him.

PARADISE IS TEMPORARY. HEAVEN IS ETERNAL

It is commonly thought that, when the Christian dies, we go from earth to heaven. There is no doubt that paradise is 'heaven-like'; so it is a fair conclusion and kind of almost, maybe, possibly correct. However, we should not confuse the place that is referred to as "paradise" by Jesus on the cross, or "Abraham's bosom" in Luke 16, with our eternal home. Please follow along to the end. **Revelation 20-21** speaks of four future events, one of which is the revelation of a new heaven.

The Millennium

One event spoken of in Revelation 20-21 is a thousand year period during which Christ lives and reigns on the earth. Whether or not earth will be our home for that period, it seems obvious that we will serve Christ on earth during that time. *"Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years." (Revelation 21:6-7).*

Satan's Final Judgment

At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released from his temporary imprisonment for a brief time; and then cast into the Lake of Eternal Fire.

The Judgment of those in Hades, the Second Death

Immediately following Satan's judgment, comes the judgment of those whose home has been in Hades, and whose names are not written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (See my booklet entitled "Hell. Is it Real? Is it Eternal?" and/or read Luke 16:19-31) These are people who have rejected Jesus' offer of salvation and who have not repented of their sins. As a result they must be judged according to their sins. Their bodies are called out of their resting places, and their souls are summoned from their temporary home in hades to stand before the judge of all mankind. It's a horrifying picture: *"The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire."* (**Revelation 20:12-15**). Hades was a temporary home after death. The lake of fire will be their final 'hell'.

The Judgment Seat of Christ, the Judgment of the Believer

Sometime between the rapture of the church and the second coming of Christ to earth; those who have chosen Christ as their personal Saviour will be judged. *“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:10).* The exact timing is unclear, but there is enough Scripture to help us know that it is somewhere in this seven year time span; probably sooner rather than later. At the conclusion of John’s vision, or Revelation, Jesus speaks of the rapture. He says: **“12 “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.” (Revelation 22:12).**

The wedding supper of the Lamb seems to be an event that happens close to the return of Christ to the earth for a thousand years. We will be wearing clothing that is evidence of the rewards received. *“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.) (Revelation 19:7-8).* Clearly, we will have received our reward at some point between those two events.

Many Christians worry about judgment day. Let me assure you that you will NOT be judged for your sins. However, that is not an excuse to keep on sinning.

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? 2 By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” (Romans 6:1-2). That being said, Jesus took the punishment for our sin upon Himself. Remember? Your sins are cast as far as the east is from the west; which is the geographical location of God’s sea of forgetfulness. Jesus will be our judge, and He will not bring up one single sin. His blood has covered them all.

So why do we need to be judged at all? **We are judged to determine what our eternal reward will be.** Our sins are covered, but make no mistake: what we do and why we do it, is very important.

- **Psalm 62:12** “...and with you, Lord, is unfailing love”; and, “You reward everyone according to what they have done.”
- **Romans 2:6** “God “will repay each person according to what they have done.”
- **Revelation 22:12** “Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done.”
- **2 Corinthians 5:1-10** “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.”

The Apostle Paul gives us great insight into this:

“11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person’s work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.” (1 Corinthians 3:11-15)

Paul is teaching here that we will be judged by the motive by which we do things. The good things that we do with the motive of:

- Getting attention
- Gaining the favour of others
- Attempting to earn salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- Rising to a position of power or control
- Selfish gain
- Getting our own way

...these things are wood, hay and straw. They may have perceived value to you here, but they have no eternal value. It will be as if you never did them. At the judgment seat of Christ, the motivation behind all we have done will be determined, and you will be rewarded according to the true value of your acts. There is no punishment involved.

The things that we do that have spiritual and eternal motivation; things that...

- Are done as an ambassador for Jesus
- Draw attention to God and His glory, leading people to worship Him
- Contribute to the planting of seed, watering of the seed, or bringing in a harvest of souls
- Contribute to the growth of God's kingdom
- Help individuals grow in their walk with God
- Contribute to the completion of God's will for our lives

These things have value that will benefit us for eternity. Here is a word picture, painted by Jesus that helps us understand: *“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne.*

32 *All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*

33 *He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.*

34 *“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.*

35 *For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’*

37 *“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink*

38 *When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?*

39 *When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’*

40 *“The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one*

of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.”
(Matthew 25:31-40)

No More Paradise. Heaven is Heavenlier.

At the end of time as we know it, there is a new everything. It seems clear that the place referred to as ‘paradise’ or ‘Abraham’s Bosom’ in the Scripture, as well as hades, are temporary locations. Hades will be destroyed and those in it will be cast into the lake of fire, their eternal hell. Similarly, our heaven-like home called ‘paradise’ will be replaced with our new and eternal home, the new heaven.

“Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4 He will wipe 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.”

5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” **(Revelation 21:1-5)**

ETERNAL REWARD

Heaven itself is a reward

The nature of our reward in heaven is largely unknown. We will take a look at what we do know. Living in God's presence, having our residence in heaven, eternal life, the absence of physical and emotional pain, and our heavenly body should all be considered undeserved, unearned rewards. *"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him."* **(James 1:12)**

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (What Paul is speaking of next is the earthly body verses our heavenly body) *"For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. 2 Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, 3 because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. 4 For while we are in this*

tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. 5 Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.”(2 **Corinthians 4:16 – 5:5**)

A Crown of Righteousness

The New Testament speaks of a few different crowns that are potentially awarded to believers. The Greek word used in reference to these crowns is ‘stephanos’, which historically was a wreath placed on the head of the winner in an ancient athletic event. Presumably the word ‘crown’ is used figuratively as a symbol of honour or recognition we will receive for exceeding in an area of our life that had a positive spiritual and eternal impact.

In **1 Corinthians 9:24-25** the Apostle Paul encourages us to “*Run in such a way as to get the prize.*” He goes on to say that as Christians we do this to get a crown that will last forever.

There is a ‘crown of glory’ for those who excitedly anticipate the Lord’s return, and a crown of righteousness for those who have kept the faith in challenging times. “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who*

have longed for his appearing.” (2 Timothy 4:7-8)

People are Our Crowns

Meeting those we have led to Christ or ministered to in some life changing way is a crown in itself. The Apostle Paul wrote *“For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?”*

20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy.” (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)

In general, heaven itself will be a reward greater than anything we could ever imagine. In addition to that we will be eternally recognized for...

- Being Christ’s Ambassador and reflecting His nature
- The things we have done on earth that have eternal value
- Being excited about His return

OUR ETERNAL HOME

How could I describe it any better than the Apostle John who was welcomed into the heavenlies and given this amazing revelation? I can't.

1 Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

4 'He will wipe 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."

5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

7 Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. (Revelation 21:1-7)

“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” (Revelation 21:27)

That day will be the beginning of endless days of never-ending, indescribable bliss for the believer. Why wouldn’t we want to be Christians? Why wouldn’t we want to live for Him? Why wouldn’t we want to tell others that this hope of heaven can be theirs too?