

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 1st Oct 2018)**Read - Revelation 21:1-7**

(God) 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. v4

This week we focus on those great and important questions that are on most people's minds at some time or another, "What happens when I die? Is death the end of it all? Where do we go? What is heaven like?"

The Old Testament seldom speaks about heaven, and when it does, it is not a very inviting place. Look at these words of Job, *"Are not my few days almost over? Turn away from me so that I can have a moment's joy before I go to the place of no return, to the land of gloom and deep shadow, to the land of deepest night, of shadow and disorder, where even the light is like darkness."* (Job 10:20-22). Certainly not a lot to look forward to! Or think about these words from Psalm 87; *"Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction? Are your wonders known in the place of darkness, or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?"* (v10-12). Not much hope here either!

But that picture changes dramatically in the New Testament. Heaven is a place of joy and victory because of what Jesus has done. It is a place we can look forward to going to because it is our true home, a state of new life and being that is infinitely better and more glorious than this life. Just think of the words of Revelation in our reading for today.

Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace, and I'm going to see my Saviour's face, 'cos heaven is a wonderful place.

DAY 2**Read - John 14:1-6**

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. v2

I stark contrast to the picture of heaven in the Old Testament stands the picture that Jesus gives us. Heaven is a place (or rather a new state of being) that we can look forward to, not with fear, but with a sense of joyful anticipation.

We can do this because, as he assured his disciples, he has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us. He said this on the night before he died of the cross. So it is easy to conclude that he was saying that his coming sacrificial death would open the way for us to be able to come to him there. Heaven is a wonderful place because Jesus is there, and when we die we will go to be with him.

He also said that there are many rooms in heaven, by which he meant that there is lot of "space" in heaven. Not space in physical terms, because heaven exists in much greater and more glorious dimensions than the limiting dimensions of the world in which we now live. I take this to mean that there is a place (space) for anyone and everyone who has ever put their faith in him, both now and for all time. How big is the heart of God!

He also promised that he would come and take us to be with him there. Jesus comes to us in the present moment through the power of his Holy Spirit. He comes as our Heavenly Friend to walk beside us in this life, to give meaning and purpose to our days on earth, and to lead us into that greater life beyond when we die.

Jesus, thank you for this assurance of heaven.

DAY 3**Read - John 14:1-6**

And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. v3

Heaven is our home, our ultimate destiny. I believe this because I have come to understand that we are not primarily material and physical beings who happen to have a spirit and a soul. We are primarily spiritual beings who happen to have a physical and material body for the time we spend on this earth. And because we are primarily spiritual beings, heaven, those greater spiritual dimensions where God exists, is our true home. One day this earthly body will fall away, like the booster rockets of a space-ship, and we will soar into our wonderful home in heaven. This life on earth is important and we must live it fully. But this life is essentially a preparation for that greater and more wonderful life, our eternal life in heaven with God. That is why it is important for the spiritual part of our being to connect with God in this life. Eternal life begins now when our spiritual being opens itself to the Spirit of God.

An old man and a young boy, strangers, were fishing on the banks of the mighty Mississippi river when a large river-boat came by. The young boy began to shout to draw attention. The old man said, "How foolish you are to think that boat will stop for a small boy". But the boat did stop. The gang-way was lowered and the little boy climbed on board. "See, I'm not so foolish. My father is the captain of this ship and we are moving to a new home up the river". Sometimes the ship of death stops along the river of life to pick up someone. But we can be confident of one thing. Our loving Father is the captain of the ship.

Father, teach me the true meaning of my life.

DAY 4

Read - Psalm 139:1-18

Where can I go from your presence? Where can I flee from your presence? v7

What is heaven like? Where do our loved ones go when they die? Where will you and I go when we die? In a way we are dealing with a huge mystery that no human mind can ever fully understand. But we have many pointers in scripture. Let me share with you what I have come to believe.

First, heaven is not a place. It is not far away somewhere among all the galaxies, somewhere in the universe. Heaven is not up there (and neither is hell down there). Heaven is a new state of being with God, not a place. Let me try to explain this in terms of dimensions. All physical objects exist in the dimensions of space (they have length, breadth and height). They also exist in time. Time is part of creation. Einstein showed that if you can do away with time, matter will disappear. Around these dimensions put the dimensions of sense experience and reason (the rational) which give us knowledge. And there you have the "scientific rational" world view. How we understand the world through reason. Atheists believe that's all there is.

But to people of faith there is much more. There are infinitely greater dimensions; the spiritual; the spiritual realms (where angels and demons exist). And finally there is heaven where God's presence is, and where there is peace and love. So when we die we leave the space-time world behind and we go into these greater spiritual dimensions where God is. Heaven exists on the other side of now. Heaven's space touches and interpenetrates our space. It is not far away.

Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace; and I'm going to see my Saviour's face, 'cos heaven is a wonderful place.

DAY 5

Read - 1 Corinthians 15:35-49

The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. v42-43

Yesterday's meditation may have seemed a bit academic and dry to you. If that was the case, please remember that heaven will be the most warm, personal and love-filled place you have ever experienced. You will be in the presence of a God, who loves you with an ever-lasting love. He will put his arms around you, and Jesus, who loves you, will be there too. Christ-followers and all who have ever loved you will be overjoyed to see you. You will be surrounded by love.

Paul also asks the question, what kind of body will we have in heaven. Obviously not a physical body. It will be a new spiritual body, a more glorious body that fits in with the greater dimensions of the heavenly realms. Paul uses the picture of the difference between a seed and its flower to help us understand. The main thing is that you will be the same **person** that you are now, though infinitely more glorious. People will recognize **you** and know **you**, and you will be reunited with others you have known and loved. You never lose your individuality. You will still be you.

But **time** will be different. Time as we know it, is part of creation. It is limiting. We are trapped in it. Eternity is not endless time, rather it is the absence of time. It may be difficult for us to understand this, but that is how it will be.

In heavenly love abiding, no change my heart shall fear, and safe is such confiding, for nothing changes here. Hymn 678

DAY 6

Read - Romans 8:18-25

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption, the redemption of our bodies. v23

Lord Baden Powell, who founded the Scout movement, died in Kenya, and on his grave-stone there is engraved a small circle with a dot in the middle. This is a scouting sign that stands for "I have gone home". Heaven is our eternal home; it is what the deepest things in us long for.

Can I offer you this poem to think about as we close this week's meditations on heaven:

*I've found a new place where I am now free
A whole new beginning just made for me
I know a deep peace and I feel no more pain
Days full of sunshine and never of rain*

*I'm no longer old, I've recovered my youth
And all of my dreams have become my new truth
I can smile, I can laugh, I can love, I can run
I can hear every whisper, I can see past the sun*

*My body is whole and my mind is now clear
I know all the answers and I'm free of all fear
I know that you mourn me, I see how you weep
A deep ache in your heart from a love that runs deep*

*And I'm grateful for loved ones who hold me so dear
But remember, I've found a much better place here.
And I'll be there beside you, always nearby
So don't mourn me too long, or continue to cry*

*And whenever deep sorrow bears down on your heart
Think not of my ending, think of my new start
For on earth there's no joy that I ever did see
To compare with the joy of God smiling at me*