

HEAVEN

Lesson 1 w/Answers

Realizing Our Destiny

We all have questions about Heaven. "What is the theology surrounding Heaven?", "What is heaven like?", "What heaven are we speaking of?", and many other questions quickly confront us when we contemplate this subject. Perhaps you are like so many other believers who are confused about heaven, or believe that heaven isn't really all that exciting a place, just standing around the throne of God, 24/7, worshipping and praising Him. Or perhaps you are not even sure that you will go to heaven, or what it will be like when you get there. I pray that this twelve-week study that will enlarge your understanding of our heavenly home, what it will be like, who will be there, and much, much more.

As a teaching aid, I am using Randy Alcorn's book, "Heaven" and the accompanying Study Guide as a roadmap for our study. As with every study that we undertake on a topic in God's Holy Word, the Bible is always our ultimate resource; so if you do not have access to Randy's book (it's available from several on-line book stores), you can still study with us simply using your Bible.

In our first lesson, we will cover Section 1 of our text. This section is entitled "Realizing Our Destiny" and covers Chapters 1 through 4. In our class study, we will select some of the Study Guide questions to discuss, and we will also examine the questions below. I encourage you to study along with us; the Bible has a lot to say about heaven and our eternal home with the Lord.

Randy points out in his book that most Christians have an unbiblical view of heaven, referring to a popular misconception that heaven is basically an eternal church service. As he points out, if that was the true essence of heaven, it would be difficult to equate that to "good news". While we may all sincerely love our Lord and God, we may not really be looking forward to an eternity comprised solely of worshipping Him. Fortunately for us, this expectation does not match with the imagery and plans of God for His creation in eternity.

What we have to look forward to on the other side of this life, according to the Bible, is a resurrected body, a resurrected life with a resurrected Savior, and a resurrected creation – a new heaven and a new earth – that will be our eternal home. We will spend it as God originally intended us to when He created us: with a purpose, with structured activity, with a sense of fellowship and family, and in a never ending relationship with God.

Consider the following questions:

1. How do we know that heaven even exists, and if it does, that we will actually go there and live there? (see John 14:1-4)
 - a. ANSWER: Christ plainly assures us of this when he says that he is going to "prepare a place" for us, so that we can someday go and live with him - and in our own place.
2. How do we know that heaven is a real physical place, and not simply some mist-filled vacuum where spirits with no bodies dwell? (see Revelation Chapters 21 and 22)
 - a. ANSWER: From the descriptions provided in these passages, you can see that it is a physical place, measured out, planned, and built so that all who follow Christ will have a home there. It is a "place" where we will live and walk and worship with God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. What a beautiful place it is that Christ has gone to prepare for us!
3. Since none of us has gone to heaven, how can we know anything about it? The Apostle Paul said that he saw heaven, but he was not allowed to tell us what he saw. So how then can we know about something that we have never seen? (see 1 Corinthians 2:9-10)

- a. ANSWER: We could ask the same question about many things we have not seen but still believe: Christ, God, The Holy Spirit, Angels, Satan, etc. How do we know about these beings, or about Hell or Heaven? God reveals them to us through His Word and His Holy Spirit. In 1 Cor. 2:9-10, we read "However, as it is written: 'No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' - but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God."
4. Is heaven even something that we should study about, or is this one of those "taboo" things that we should leave alone and not look into? (see Colossians 3:1-2)
- a. ANSWER: Paul exhorts us to set our thoughts on things above, and not earthly things. God wants us to think about Him and our home in heaven. He wants us to pray, study, meditate, and imagine those things above that we cannot see. He will guide us in our understanding, but first we have to think on the "things above" (something that we do not do enough of). Col 3:1-2 exhorts us as follows "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."
5. When it comes to man's approach to understanding the universe and God, two world views or schools of thought emerge that are mankind-centered, and not Biblically-centered. They are "Naturalism" and "Universalism". Define each of these terms.
- a. ANSWER 1: Naturalism, according to C.S. Lewis, is "...the belief that the world can be understood in scientific terms, without recourse to spiritual or supernatural explanations."
- b. ANSWER 2: Universalism reflects the belief that, in the end, God will save everyone.
6. Will we have a physical body in heaven? Read Luke 16:19-31 and list some of the references in Jesus' parable that indicate we will have a physical body and presence in heaven or in hell.
- a. ANSWER: We can see references to rest, thirst, agony and other emotions that indicate we will be fully conscious and have a physical body. We also see that identities are retained - including the sinner's identity; he continues to have desires and memories of the family he left behind, he can reason, and he longs for relief.
7. How can we know with certainty that following Christ will mean spending an eternity in heaven with him? Read the following verses and note what each tells us:
- a. 1 John 5:13
- i. ANSWER: God's Word tells that this is the case: "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life."
- b. John 14:6
- i. ANSWER: Jesus also tells us this: "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"
- c. Revelation 21:6-8
- i. ANSWER: Jesus also tells us that we will inherit all that he promised: a resurrected body, a resurrected New Earth and Heaven, and an eternal life with a resurrected Lord: "He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars - their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.'"

The truths discussed in this lesson assure us of our salvation through following Christ, and attest to the reality of our eternal destination, heaven. In the lessons to follow, there will be much more to discover of heaven, death, hell, life after death, and the coming New Earth and New Heaven. From our study so far, be assured that we have a joy unmatched by anyone else: the joy of knowing that we are destined for heaven.

Have a great week everyone, and thanks for studying with us.

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