

# HEAVEN

*(Matthew 4.13-17, Revelation 4 and 1 Cor 15.40-49)*

This morning's message is about heaven and I have chosen 3 passages for us to engage with. Starting with the gospel, then Revelation and finally thinking about how heaven will become home for us.

Heaven as our home becomes our central thought when we lose a loved one. When my mother passed away 15 years ago, I phoned a close friend :- ) and said mum's gone to be with the Lord in heaven. He said short visit or long stay? This made me realise that life with God includes the possibility of experiencing spiritual short visits and an eternal long stay. The thought of that warmed me in the cold days of sorrow and reminds me of the words "We were born on the earth; we cling to the earth as long as we can – yet as Christians we do not actually belong here at all. Our legal domicile is in heaven".

Many other people have attempted to talk or put in to song their ideas of heaven. Fred Astaire, singer and dancer of old, sang a song of love for his partner Ginger Rogers. "I'm in heaven and my heart beats so that I can hardly speak.

I wonder how many times we feel this way about heaven, that something we see or hear or feel, makes us excited and speechless. For me it has been reflections of God's creative power, the majestic sunsets, the stars and the moon, where we look up at night and can't say anything for it is all heavenly. Again, my heart is warmed as I think about the pursuit of Father in heaven and how he impacts on my whole life and experiences.

Reading the Bible is part of that pursuit. The Bible starts with the words God created the heavens and the earth and finishes with life in heaven. So all that God has revealed about heaven is so important to us all; Heaven is God's abode. His dwelling place:  
That the Father Son and Holy Spirit dwell in perfect union with the Son seated at the Father's right hand side.

That Angels and Archangels, the Seraphim and Cherubim all worship God and do his bidding.

That heaven is not of the earth but is spiritual and its design and creative form is otherly, they who participate in heaven are equally spiritual beings and otherly.

That heaven is the perfect city whose ruler is Jesus and whose words sustain all life here on earth, especially the lives of his universal Church and all who believe in his name.

That heaven is the final home for all Christian believers and for us the doors of heaven are always open. The doors of heaven are always open. And for this reason the writer George Swinnock said Heaven must be in thee before thou canst be in heaven.

#### **Mathew 4**

To begin with: let us think about the Gospel reading. What a wonderful moment when Jesus took upon himself the ministry of the suffering servant, he who knew no sin obeyed the Holy Spirit's work through Baptism of John, and was baptised - We see that at that moment heaven was opened, again signifying that idea that God's home is open.

Not sealed or gated off like Buckingham Palace, but opened up because Jesus the Son has been sent out through open doors to reveal God's salvation to us. Since that time heavens doors have been opened to us and for us. To us because God's Spirit is at work in perfecting his church, and for us, so that we can come through open doors and into the very presence of God cleansed from sin because of Jesus, so that we can enter into a full relationship with Father God.

Then we are shown that at that moment the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus like a dove and lightening on him. For the disciples this was a profound moment to be never forgotten and for me this reflects the otherly and wonderful state of God and is a similar expression to the Jesus that we read about in the book of Revelation.

## **Revelation 4**

We must remind ourselves that John is given a very full tour around heaven, he tells us that the experience was in the Spirit and that he felt that he had died and left his body. For our good he is given the experience of the throne room of God where he sees Jesus in resplendent glory, he see's the Spirit of God and the seven fold ministry of the Spirit, which some have said symbolises the perfect work of the Spirit of God for us.

As I look at this imagery and spiritual picture I am reminded of the orderliness of God, everything is in place and all things are held together in the glory of God. We are toured around the throne and we see Jesus seated, and his appearance is otherly. His appearance reminds John of the ancient gem stones jasper and cornelian, for his face appears like no other and is glorious to behold. Are these the lasting thoughts we have of Jesus that he is precious to us now, and even more when we see him for ourselves when he calls us home.

There is more to say about this passage; of the four living creatures and their role in heaven, instructed with the honour of keeping before all the importance of the holiness of God, and that sin will not be found in heaven. Then the 24 elders, robed in royal attire to lay their crowns before the throne and to offer hearts ablaze with worship to God the Father Son and Holy Spirit.

So why do we need to be reminded of this precious sight? I feel these words sum it up. Those who have the New Jerusalem in their eye must have the ways that lead to it in their heart. Matthew Henry.

I believe that faith in the Lord must always bring us to the feet of Jesus and into the very throne room of God. Faith in an open heaven is so ital if we expect God to answer our prayers and the desires of the heart.

Also, if we lack faith in heaven how will we ever reach that final destination? There are many people whose faith is not strong enough to

get them to church, yet they expect that it will be strong enough to get them to heaven. Just as John saw the wonder and majesty of heaven we also can explore with our eyes of faith to place in focus the wonders of God and our eternal home in heaven.

How do we move from this life and into open doors of heaven? The Apostle was given a short stay in heaven but for a long stay the Bible gives to us every hope and encouragement.

### **1 Corinthians 15.40-49**

The passage points us toward the resurrection of the dead and the resurrection body; that a time will come when the earthly body that is sown perishable will be raised in glory and power. It will be raised a spiritual body, and we are promised a body like Jesus. We will experience a change in form just as Jesus did after he rose from the dead, and we will be recognisable by those redeeming Spiritual qualities that God placed in us in this life.

One writer said, "The world is full of wonderful and beautiful things. God's inventiveness reveals itself in a myriad of different organisms- it is by his will that the golden head of wheat is fairer than the little brown seed cast in the furrow; so it is his pleasure that the body which is to be shall surpass the present in glory."

This writer had been captivated by the very thought of the heavenly body, that pleasure would be eternal.

So do we make part of our Christian experience times when we think about Heaven?

When I was in my infancy I was comforted so much by my family who spoke in faith about the passing of my granddad. On his final night of sleep he spoke of heaven and that other word to describe it; Paradise, the word that means the King's walled garden. My grandmother woke him from that final sleep and as he stirred he talked with passion about being in the most beautiful of gardens. We all enjoyed recalling that final

word from him and thought often about the deep pleasures that he was now enjoying for all eternity now that he was clothed in a new body. These thoughts have been a positive comfort, and thinking about heaven is always an experience that warms my spirit.

Thomas Manton said Christians are more cold and careless in the spiritual life because they do not often think of heaven.

Another said; You must not only seek heaven; you must also think heaven.

So in our worship this morning let us think often of our eternal Home, of the door that is now open to us, of the Spirit sent to change us and make us ready for heaven, of Jesus who as Saviour is God's Son resplendent and worshipped by the angels in heaven and a great sea of people for all eternity. Thinking always that one day we will have an immortal body and that heaven will be our eternal home.