

THE POWER OF CHRIST

SERMONS BY TEXAS BAPTIST PASTORS

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SERMON FIFTEEN

HEAVEN

By

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“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me.

“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

“And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.

“Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:1-6).

Our subject for this sermon is one that delights the soul more than any other known to human conversation. Because of the fact that a great sorrow in our home has led the writer to search the Scriptures for everything the Bible has to say on this subject, and because of gratitude to Him for the great privilege of having her sweet fellowship for eleven years, this sermon is dedicated to the blessed memory of our daughter, Kathryn Louise Matthews.

The Old Testament is filled with references to the land beyond called heaven. However, there is little or no information as to what heaven really is until we find recorded in the fourteenth chapter of John its description given to His disciples by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

The occasion was brought about by a near collapse of hope on the part of the apostles when they understood for the first time that the Messiah was to be crucified by His enemies. These disciples knew that Jesus was God, and as such, they did not believe that God could die. They were well acquainted with Old Testament history. They had read of the translation of Enoch and the prophet Elijah. Three of them had witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus and they undoubtedly believed that Christ would not and could not taste of death. They believed that He would be translated when He had succeeded in establishing the earthly throne of David.

This was their ambition and belief concerning Jesus, and words could not express the awful despair that gripped their hearts when they learned definitely that Jesus must die a death of humiliation on the cross. In order to comfort them by reviving hope, our Lord told them about heaven.

What Is Heaven?

In this message we shall attempt to answer the queries of the human mind about the future home of the redeemed. One of the first questions asked by those who are seeking light is, what is heaven?

According to our text, *heaven is a place*. Jesus said, **“I go to prepare a place for you”** (John 14:2). It is just as definitely a place for human beings as is this world.

Heaven is a beautiful place. It is indescribably beautiful. I used to wonder why John failed to have words and understandable descriptive phrases of the world beyond which he saw with the prophetic eye as he wrote the account in Revelation. I could never figure it out until a few years ago when I visited the famous Carlsbad Cavern of New Mexico.

On that day, four hundred and fifty-six people went down a huge hole in the earth to a depth of seven hundred fifty feet. I shall never forget what my eyes beheld, but to save my life, I can't describe it.

Behind my wife and me were a man and lady. The lady had been through the cavern before, but her companion had not. He kept saying, “Isn't this wonderful?”

The farther we went, the more beautiful was the scenery. Finally, our friend seemed to grow irritated because his wife had not told him of the marvelous place.

He asked in a tone of disappointment as we reached the matchless King's Palace, “Why haven't you told me about this?”

She answered, “I couldn't. I could find no words to describe it.”

That is exactly the case of John when he saw the Pearly White City. In the twenty-first and twenty-second chapters of Revelation he tried to describe the portion of heaven which he saw, and in those chapters we learn more of its celestial beauty than can be found anywhere else in the world. Paul had a glimpse of it, and heard some of its language when he was miraculously saved, and he came back to say, **“Eye hath not seen, or ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him”** (I Corinthians 2:9).

Where Is Heaven?

The next question we would discuss is the location of heaven. Where is it?

Heaven is up above this earth somewhere. Of this we can be certain, for Elijah ascended up in a chariot of fire when he was translated, and Jesus was taken up from the earth when he went back to the Father.

When Do We Go to Heaven?

Another, and a very vital question is, when do we go to heaven? Is it at the second coming of Christ or is it at death? Does the soul sleep in the body until the morning of the resurrection? Thank God, the Scriptures are plain on this matter in spite of much false teaching concerning it today. Let us turn to the Bible for our information.

In the story of Lazarus and the rich man, we read, “**And it came to pass that the beggar died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom**” (Luke 16:22).

Here we see the spirit of a humble believer delivered into the home of the redeemed at death.

When the dying thief on his cross felt the quaking of the earth; saw midnight darkness at midday; and heard divine words fall from the lips of Jesus, he was convicted of his guilt in the sight of God. With a penitent heart, he turned to the One whom he suddenly recognized as the Son of God, and humbly begged “**Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy Kingdom.**”

“**And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise**” (Luke 23:42-43).

Some may ask, where is paradise? Is it an intermediate state of the dead? Not the paradise spoken of in the Bible, for that paradise is synonymous with heaven.

Paul, relating his conversion, says that he was “**caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter**” (II Corinthians 12:4).

Preceding this statement, he calls the place where he was caught up to “**the third heaven**” (II Corinthians 12:2).

That is where Jesus is, and in order to be sure that no one should misunderstand this great comforting truth, Paul tells us again, “**To be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord**” (II Corinthians 5:8).

This removes every doubt concerning the question, and assures us that the soul of the child of God goes to heaven at the moment physical death takes place.

Will We Know Each Other in Heaven?

Another important and comforting truth concerning heaven is in this question, “Will we know each other when we get there?”

We should be thankful again that concerning this, we can be certain and we do not have to base our belief on speculation. The Bible is full of information on this point. When we touch anything concerning the future life, we must come to Christ and upon Him build our structure of belief. John said, **“Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is”** (I John 3:2).

From this scripture, some may contend that because we shall be like Jesus that all will be exactly alike after the resurrection. This is not John’s idea at all. He means that we shall have a glorified body like our Lord, but that we shall retain our identity.

The following examples are some which we find concerning this truth:

Jesus was identified by Thomas after his resurrection because he retained not only His earthly appearance in His glorified state, but His resurrected body even had the print of the nails in His hands, and the scar left by the Roman spear was still in His side.

“Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God” (John 20:27, 28).

When Lazarus, the beggar, was in Abraham’s bosom, he was recognized by the rich man in hell.

At the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah came down from heaven to talk to Jesus about His crucifixion. Elijah had been translated nine hundred years and Moses’ disembodied spirit had been in heaven nearly fifteen hundred years, but they both retained their identity and were still Moses and Elijah.

For a concrete statement on this great truth we must look again to Paul. Thank God for the apostle Paul. In his great discourse on the resurrection, he settles the matter once and for all. Here it is: **“For one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead”** (I Corinthians 15:41, 42).

Any astronomer will tell you that no two stars in the heavens are alike. Of all miracles, the greatest is the human family. There are over one billion people living today and no two of them are exactly alike physically.

Neither, Paul says, will they be alike in heaven. We retain our identity.

The Conditions Which Prevail Up Yonder

To me the most interesting thing about heaven are the conditions which prevail in the mansions above. John describes them in his prophetic book of Revelation, chapters twenty-one and twenty-two. The description he makes of conditions up there are the most unique in all literature.

He describes the state of the redeemed of the future Kingdom of God by taking up the curses that sin has wrought on the earth and saying these will be “**no more**” in heaven. His “**no mores**” in heaven create the most jubilant and joyful hope for the believer of anything in the Bible.

He says there will be no more sea. John knew the terror of the sea; its storms, its fathomless depths formed a prison wall about him that shut him off from his beloved land and people and held him a prisoner in exile when he wrote the book. Physical waters will never jeopardize the life of a saint in glory.

There will be no more tears, for God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. It is not that the redeemed will be incapable of weeping, but all causes for a sorrowing heart will be removed.

There will be no more poverty in heaven, for there they neither hunger or thirst any more. Oh, for that land that will put an end to the starving of men, women and little children. I doubt if there is anything that moves the heart of a human being to compassion and genuine sympathy like the sight of one starving to death. Heaven will end that.

There will be no more darkness, spiritual or physical. Up yonder they need no sun, neither light of a candle, for the Lord God is the light thereof. They have no clouds to darken the day.

“O they tell me of a home far beyond the skies,
O they tell me of a home far away.
O they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise,
O they tell me of an unclouded day.”

There will be no more death. Of all the curses wrought by Adam’s sin, there is none so universal as death. “**It is appointed unto men once to die**” (Hebrews 9:27).

We know when our children are given to us that some day they shall die. We look at mother when we leave her to go for a day, a week, or a year, with the knowledge that perchance we shall never see her again in this world. We lie down at night to sleep, never knowing if we shall awake. Everywhere we are stalked by death, but heaven will end it all.

There will be no more nations, and only one language in heaven, for we shall be like Adam and Eve were before the fall. It was sin that caused more than one language to be spoken. Man committed that sin at the building of the tower of Babel. All nations will truly be of one blood and one color up there.

“In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

“**And there shall be no more curse.**” Every curse known to the human race is removed in heaven by the power of God, and the redeemed will all be true brothers and sisters together, and God shall be our Father and Christ our elder Brother and King.

How to Get In

We close with the most vital of all things concerning heaven. If we could sum up its glory, its music, its beauty, its magnitude, and all of its nameless wonders together, they could not amount to as much in their importance as this one great fact. Miss it and you miss it all. What is this fact?

It is the fact that there is only one way into heaven. Somehow, I feel that there is not one person living now, or who ever lived, who is in his right mind who does not want to go to heaven when he dies. That was the longing of Thomas when Jesus told him of his Father's house of many mansions.

“Thomas said unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?”

“Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me” (John 14:5, 6).

My dear lost friend, don't forget these words, Jesus is the way into heaven. **“If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved”** (Romans 10: 9).

May the desire to point the lost soul to Christ be the hunger, the longing, the ambition, and the aching throb of every Christian heart who reads these lines.

Dr. Charles Evert Matthews was born in Gasconade County, Mo., March 23, 1887. Education, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Ordained, June 15, 1921. Pastorates: Birdville, Tex., 1921-23; Travis Ave. Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, Tex., Sept. 1, 1923 to date.

Travis Ave. Baptist Church, Ft. Worth, has 3,993 members. Since Sept. 1, 1923, under Dr. Matthews' ministry, there have been 7,043 additions. Total contributions have been \$574, 842.80. Their record S. S. attendance is 2,541 (All statistics as of Dec. 15, 1937).

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