

## QUESTIONS WE WANT ANSWERED

### 36 What Evidence Is There for Believing in Heaven?

*Scripture: Revelation 4:1-6, 7:9-17, 14:1-5, 21:1-27, 22:1-5; John 14:1-3*

The first Christian missionaries arrived over thirteen hundred years ago in that portion of England known as North Umbria, and proceeded to the courts of King Edwin. In this great hall ablaze with the light of many torches, with huge logs in the fireplaces, and bearded chieftains looking on, these ambassadors of Christ delivered the first discourse on the Christian faith in that land. When they had finished one chieftain asked, "Can this new religion tell us anything about life after death?" He continued, "The soul of man is like a sparrow flying through this lighted hall. It enters at one door from the darkness outside, flits through the light and warmth, and passes out at the further end into the dark again. Can this new religion solve for us the mystery?"

The purpose of our study today is to assure our hearts that this new religion, now on in age, very definitely solves the mystery of human immortality. Christianity teaches there is a life after death. Christ determines every human beings destiny. There is a place called heaven, and final individual destiny fulfills Divine justice. Christians are people who believe in heaven. The reasons are manifold. Not all of them bear the same weight but together weave as threads to fashion a cord which is sufficient to bear the weight of doubt. Consider first certain objections raised in reference to believing in the existence of heaven.

#### I. SECULAR CULTURE QUESTIONS A HEAVEN AND THE FULL MEASURE OF JUSTICE:

Perhaps the first and most important question about heaven is whether or not it really exists. The secular culture in which we live reacts in the following ways. **First**, it denigrates the concept of reward. Reward implies the existence of a personal and rational absolute being. **Secondly**, secularism allows for only capricious hazard. The good or bad which comes to us is without cause and governed only by chance. **Thirdly**, it is held that results are temporal only. There is no eternal significance. **Fourthly**, justice must be reduced to freedom and a fair share of life's materials. **Lastly**, secularism affirms that the only immortality there is issues biologically or in some type of pantheistic, universal or non individual way.

Thus, for many people who live in this world heaven is viewed as a fond wish. It is simply the collective desire of mankind to go on. The wish is the father of the thought. Belief in heaven has no real foundation and there is little or no concrete evidence for holding such a belief. Even some theologians today consider heaven a myth. Rudolph Bultmann, when he listed the great myths that had to be taken away from the kernel of truth, had at the top of the list, heaven. Others admit to a heaven of sorts, I mentioned biological immortality which see an individual living on in the dissipation or his personality into a sea of personalities from the beginning of history, or as present identities are formed by heredity or modeling.

Despite the fact that many question the existence of heaven, there is a certain importance which surrounds the subject. There was a great Greek philosopher who wrote many pages in the observation that “the thing people fear most is not death and the end of everything that is. What people fear most is that death is not the end.” That is what is feared most. If we could be certain that to die physically meant automatic annihilation, then we would indeed know what priorities we should take in this life. But it is the agony, and for some, the hell of not knowing, that causes them to be filled with all sorts of conflict, for perhaps physical death is not the end. If you therefore find yourself coming to some conclusion about this matter of heaven, it surely is the better part of wisdom to consider all of the arguments very carefully.

## **II. SCIENTIFIC DATA IS IN KEEPING WITH THE EXISTENCE OF HEAVEN:**

We have made reference in the past to the second law of thermodynamics which is the principle of increasing entropy or disorder. This is a firmly proved, universal law of science to which every process must bow. Mass-energy is running down and simply stated, one day there will cease to be sufficient energy to perform the work of supporting the universe. Things are running down and becoming disorganized with the passing of time. The first law is of importance here. It states that matter cannot be created nor destroyed; that energy or matter cannot be destroyed. They may be transformed one into the other, but they cannot be destroyed. This was taught by Einstein. Burriss Jenkins explains it this way, “No single atom in creation can go out of existence, according to scientists; it only changes in form. We cannot burn up anything; we simply change it from a solid to a gaseous state. Neither is any energy or force ever destroyed; it is only changed from one form to another.” This is the first law of thermodynamics, it is the law of energy, of preservation. It teaches that nothing can be destroyed. If a man goes out of existence and ceases to be, he will be the

only thing in this universe that does. Therefore, the probability to begin with is that we shall continue to exist. Of course we distinguish between, body and soul. A material world cannot be a spiritual world but the two can exist simultaneously, even as in one man's head we have material brains yet spiritual thoughts. They are different orders of being. It is reasonable to assume that the essence of our being will live on even as science now insists that matter is indestructible.

### **III. THERE IS AN ANALOGY FROM NATURE TO CONSIDER:**

This inference has never been better stated, in my opinion, than in the words of William Jennings Bryan. He said, "Christ gave us proof of immortality and yet it would hardly seem necessary that one should rise from the dead to convince us that the grave is not the end. If the Father designs to touch with Divine power the cold and pulseless heart of the buried acorn and to make it burst forth into a new life, will He leave neglected in the earth the soul of man, made in the image of his Creator? If He stoops to give to the rosebush whose withered blossoms float upon the autumn breeze, the sweet assurance of another springtime, will He refuse the words of hope to the sons of men when the frosts of winter come? If matter, mute and inanimate, though changed by the forces of nature into a multitude of forms, can never die, will the spirit of man suffer annihilation when it has paid a brief visit like a royal guest to this tenement of clay? No, I am as sure that there is another life as I am that I live today!"

### **IV. THERE IS A UNIVERSAL LONGING TO LIVE ON:**

This constitutes for mankind the basis of soul sorrow. Man is both body and soul. As body he knows that death approaches, as soul-spirit he desires at all costs to stay the process in order to live on. Carnell in his **Introduction To Christian Apologetics** writes, "Qua body man is an animal, while qua spirit he is a celestial being. As a creature of time and space, man is limited by death; while as a creature of spirit, man is able to live eternally. Meditation upon these conflicting realities is a basic cause of soul-sorrow. The friction, if severe enough, brings suicide."

It is interesting to note that the longing for eternity does not exist in the breast of any part of brute creation. One author writes, "The flocks and herds upon a thousand hills, the myriad forms of insect life, every winged fly and tuneful beetle, the fish that gaily snort and gambol in the rivers and seas, all can find the end of their being; not a thought of future want disturbs their perfect tranquility.

But never so with man. He is not satisfied regardless of his wealth, or fame, or knowledge, or power, or earthly pleasures. From the king to the beggar, man never is, but always to be blest." What is the reason for this longing toward eternal Life? I believe God has placed immortality, eternity, in the breast of man. It is a universal concern. Emerson has well written, "The blazing evidence of immortality is our dissatisfaction with any other solution."

There has never been a race of men upon this earth, be it in the depths of Africa upon the islands of the sea, or at the point of earth's most remote place, where there has not been the concern for a future life. The beliefs of every ancient religion from the Egyptians to the Persians to the Assyrians and Babylonians, the Chinese and the Hindus, everywhere there exists the conviction that man lives on. Earth's most profound thinkers contribute their feeling of compulsion. Crito said to Socrates on the night of the latter's death: "But in what way would you have us bury you?" To which the Athenian seer replied, "In any way that you like; only you must get hold of me and take care that I do not walk away from you." Poets and authors too numerous to mention are of the same frame of mind. Goethe wrote, "How strongly we may be chained and attached to this earth, by thousands and thousands of appearances, a certain intimate longing compels us to lift up our eyes to heaven; because a deep inexplicable feeling gives us the conviction that we are citizens of another world, which shines above us." Tennyson affirms "For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place, The flood may bear me far, I hope to see my Pilot face to face, When I have crossed the Bar." I simply conclude this evidence by saying that from the jungles of the world to the dens of the philosophers, it has been believed that man will live on.

#### **V. THE DYING BEAR WITNESS TO FUTURE LIFE:**

I have in my library a number of books which contain the dying statements of people from all walks of life. One thing appears clear, those who died with a faith in Christ died in a way remarkably different from those without faith. The final words of the worlds outspoken atheists are enough to make one's blood run cold. Stripped of defenses and the trappings which afford a measure of human security, dying people face the naked realities of life, both good and evil, and of eternity beyond. Contrast the words of Andrew Jackson, seventh president and in later years a devout Christian, with those of Perogood-Talleyrand, French statesman and contemporary of Jackson. The President was heard to murmur, "my suffering, though great, is nothing in comparison with those of my Savior, through whose death I look for ever lasting life." The Foreign Minister under

Napoleon and known for his infidelity was asked by King Louis XVIII upon his deathbed how he felt. Talleyrand responded; "I am suffering, Sire, the pangs of the damned." It appears thousands and thousands of people have been granted some presentiment of that which awaits them in eternity. In final moments before taking leave of this world heaven has opened to so many and given them a vision of what was to come. A most helpful resource book in this regard is Herbert Lockyer's **Last Words Of Saints And Sinners**, Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids.

#### **VI. JESUS CHRIST GIVES CERTITUDE TO AN AFTERLIFE:**

The Apostle Paul declared that if Christ had not risen from the dead then our faith is vain and our preaching is also vain. (I Corinthians 15:14) Harnack writes, "Christ's grave was the birthplace of an indestructible belief that death is vanquished and there is life eternal. It is useless to cite Plato, it is useless to point to Persian religion and the ideas and literature of later Judaism. All that would have perished; but the certainty of the resurrection and of a life eternal which is bound up with the grave in Joseph's tomb has not perished; and on the conviction that Jesus lives we still base those hopes of citizenship in an Eternal City which makes our earthly life worth living and tolerable. He delivered them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." It was this same Jesus who told his followers that if there was no afterlife He surely would have informed them. (John 14:2)

How is it that at a funeral I can stand before the family of an individual who has died physically, an individual whose attitude was right toward God, who was dependent upon God's grace, and affirm assuredly that the person is with God in heaven. Not maybe. Not hope. Not a good chance, but positively. There is only one reason. It is because of Jesus. It is because of His resurrection from the dead that I can know for sure there is a heaven and that one day heaven will be my own experience. I don't stand here this morning and ask you to believe in heaven on my word, I share with you the good news of heaven from someone who was there, who left there, who has now returned there. That's a great foundation for believing in heaven.

#### **VII. THERE ARE MANY REFERENCES TO HEAVEN IN THE SCRIPTURES:**

The verses in the Bible which speak of heaven cannot be gainsaid. They must be given careful attention. There has never been a skeptic who has been able to overturn or overthrow the evidences for the integrity of Scripture and these

Scriptures declare most assuredly that those who trust in Christ will enjoy heavenly bliss. There are the cosmic implications of the heaven which is to be. A new heaven is explicitly taught in Isaiah 65:17, 66:22; II Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1. We have the five great revealed descriptions of heaven in Revelation 4:1-6 (the indescribable place of God's presence), Revelation 7:9-17 (the glorious abode of the worshipping redeemed), Revelation 14:1-5 (the righteous realm of a faultless social order), Revelation 21:1-27 (the cosmos renewed in the full beauty of utter holiness), Revelation 22:1-5 (the radiant setting for the eternal city, full, free, everlasting).

My friend, there is a life after this. Life does go on. It does not cease. The question is not will but where you will spend the afterlife. For while the Bible makes it abundantly clear there is a heaven, it also makes it clear not everyone is going there. The way to heaven is the way of Jesus' cross. There His blood was shed so that a Holy God might set in motion a way for your sins to be forgiven. You can receive the gift of eternal life by trusting Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. May God grant that you will.

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