

INTRODUCTION

We will continue our study on Christ's return. Our message today will be about heaven. You may have heard many jokes about the topic. Here is another one. A pastor was riding in a cab. There was a tragic car accident and both he and the driver passed away. They went to heaven and met the apostle Peter at the entrance. "Come with me." Peter said to the cab driver. They walked by a huge mansion. Peter told the man, "This will be your new home. It has a bowling alley and a swimming pool." The cab driver was overcome by joy. Then Peter led the pastor to a rugged old shack with a bunk bed and a small television. "Sir, wait a minute. I think there is a little mix-up," the pastor protested. "Shouldn't I be the one who gets the mansion? After all I was a pastor and I preached God's Word faithfully my whole life." Peter replied, "Yes, that's true. But during your sermons people slept. However, when the cab driver drove, everyone prayed." This is only a joke and so don't take it too seriously. If we need to know about heaven we should go to the Bible, instead of books on jokes about heaven. If you spend time doing research about the places you plan to go on vacation how much more should we study the Bible to know about heaven? The Bible tells us that heaven is the eternal resting place for the believers.

EXPLANATION

1. 天堂的真實 The Reality of Heaven

When we talk about heaven the first thing we should bear in mind is that the Bible tells us that heaven is a reality. It is not a fairy tale. At the Last Supper Jesus told His disciples that He would be leaving them soon. Seeing their agony the Lord comforted them in [John 14:1-3](#) by saying: 1 "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am." Jesus asked His disciples to trust Him. Based on their three years' of relationship they knew that Jesus' words were true. Jesus told His disciples that He left to prepare a place for them. Jesus described this eternal home for the believers as "my Father's house." It is more than a building for people to live permanently. It is the home where our Heavenly Father dwells. Home gives us a sense of love, acceptance and security. In due time Jesus will come back to receive all His believers. This assurance gives believers much hope especially when they are undergoing difficulty in life. In chapter 11 of the book of [Hebrews](#) the author listed a number of heroes of faith in the Old Testament – Enoch, Noah, Abraham and others. Because of their faith in God they could endure the challenges they faced. [Verses 15-16](#) describe their hope of heaven: 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country - a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. They had hope that God has prepared a place for them. Because of this hope these heroes of faith willingly forsook their earthly home to follow God's calling. They looked forward to a better and eternal home in heaven.

Heaven is a reality. Jesus came from heaven to die for us on the cross and went back there to prepare an eternal home for all the believers. We put our trust in His Word that heaven is there waiting for us. Jesus' Word is like a tourist guidebook that describes an attraction for visitors to plan a trip. Last year our family went to the Niagara Falls in the summer. To my kids it was hard to imagine how a waterfall actually looks like. They could not comprehend how magnificent it would be like. By coincident a wall calendar in my home featured a picture of the Niagara Falls in the same month when we had our trip. I showed them the picture and told them that we would get on a site-seeing boat just like the one in the picture to get close to the water. The photo was taken by someone at the waterfall. It gives my children a glimpse of the natural wonder. No one has even been to heaven except Jesus. His Word in the Bible is like a guidebook that assures us heaven is a reality. I mentioned earlier that since heaven is a reality it gives us hope when we face difficulty, because we understand that no matter how big the hardship may be it is only temporary. The agony of this life only makes us feel more home-sick about our eternal home.

2. 天堂的美好 The Beauty of Heaven

Heaven is not only a reality, it is also beautiful. The book of Revelation depicts the beauty of it. The apostle John told us in **Revelation 21:1-2** that: 1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. John gave us a few pieces of information here. This future and eternal home for the believers will come down from heaven. It will be a brand new creation of God. It is also called the new Jerusalem because the current Jerusalem will be gone. The name signifies that it is the city of God. John described that this new city will be like a bride getting ready for her future husband. Its beauty is beyond comparison. Then John continued to tell us in **verses 18-19** that the city is made up of precious materials: 18 The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. 19 The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone... What follows is a list of twelve gemstones that decorate the walls. Then let us skip to **verse 21**: The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. Can you imagine that? I can't. But I believe it will be more marvelous than any jewelry store you have ever been to. The beauty of heaven is not only in its construction, but more importantly, it is because God is there. John told us in **verses 3** that: ...“Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.” The word “dwelling” is the Greek word equivalent to “tabernacle” in the Old Testament. When the Israelites were still wandering in the wilderness God gave them instructions to build a tabernacle where they could worship God. The tabernacle was essentially a portable temple. It symbolized the presence of God. When they saw the tabernacle it reminded them that God was with them. In heaven there is no need for a tabernacle because God will be there forever. John tried his very best to use terms he could muster to paint a picture to communicate with us. When we get there we will see for ourselves the true beauty of heaven. It will be fascinating to us! A story was told about a little girl who was born blind. Her mom spent much effort to portray the scenery in nature to her daughter. But how can you describe the green in the grass, the red in the flowers and the blue in the sky to someone who cannot see? Thanks to the advancement of medical technology finally a surgery was performed to restore the eye-sight of the girl. For the first time in life-time she saw the myriad of color pattern on a butterfly's

wings and the splendid tapestry of sunset. She exclaimed: “Wow! Mom, why didn’t you tell me that it is this beautiful?” Our pursuit for excellence drives us to look for better things in life. We can never be content with earthly things. So-called new things can quickly be superseded by newer stuff. We lament that parties will eventually be over, and relationship will be broken by separation. Why? It is because we are created after God’s image. We have a longing in our hearts for perfection that only eternal things can truly satisfy us. We can find contentment when we have an everlasting relationship with Christ.

3. 天堂的進入 The Entry to Heaven

The Bible tells us that heaven is a reality, and that heaven is a beautiful place. Now it comes to an important question – who can gain entry into heaven? We read from John 14 earlier. After Jesus comforted His disciples that He would certainly come back to bring His believers into heaven he said in [verse 6](#): Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” The definite article “the” in the English Bible highlights that Jesus is the only way, the only truth and the only life. He is the only entry point to the Father in heaven. Also [Acts 4:12](#) tells us Jesus is the only way to salvation: Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved. A secular saying tells us that every road leads to Rome. However, there is only one way to heaven, it is through salvation in Christ. People may wonder if there are other possible ways to heaven. But the truth is, it is not up to us to determine how to get to heaven. It is the Lord of heaven who has the final say. If you go the wrong way you will not reach the destination. Once there was a man watching the local evening news on TV. There was a breaking news that someone was driving in the wrong direction on a particular freeway. The man knew that it was the usual route his wife took to get home. So he called her immediately. “You have to watch out,” he said, “there is a car driving in the opposite direction on highway 40.” She replied: “One car? You must be kidding me. There are hundreds of cars going the wrong way in front of me!” If you think that you are going the right way, then logically you will assume that others are going the wrong way. Jesus made it clear in [Matthew 7:13-14](#) that not many people will be saved: 13 “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Christians are always the minority in this world. However, if you take a survey perhaps 9 out of 10 people will say that they hope that they will enter into heaven when they leave this world. But ironically for people who do not have interest in knowing God, who reject God’s moral standard and even do not want to hear any mentioning of God do they really want to go to heaven? Their view of heaven may be a place with unlimited leisure activities for fun. But the Bible tells us that heaven will be where we live with God forever. If some people feel that they married the wrong person they do not love and is stuck in a marriage, what kind of torture it would be to get “stuck” with a God they do not love, not just for a life-time but for eternity! For some people who cannot sit in a church worship once a week for an hour it will be the utmost imprisonment to stand before the throne of God to worship Him every moment through eternity. To people who do not know God that kind of heaven is the worst hell they can imagine! Therefore, dear friends: let me ask you – do you love God? Do you have a desire to follow Jesus and do what pleases Him? Salvation is not about getting an entry ticket to heaven. It is about building an eternal relationship with our Lord. It is about committing your life to Him in your daily walk with Him. If you enjoy Him as your Lord in this life, then you cannot wait to stay in

His presence for eternity. Many times there is a misconception that eternal life begins after a person goes to heaven. According to the Bible, eternal life begins the moment when you confess your sins and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord.

CONCLUSION

Heaven is the eternal resting place for Christ's believers. Jesus Christ has prepared a place for His followers. It is a place so beautiful that it exceeds our imagination. We will be with the Lord who loves us forever. Jesus is the only way to get to heaven. When a Christian passed away he will be with the Lord. Being a Christians for over 30 years I have attended many funerals. I observe that a funeral for a believer and a non-believer can be very different. I remember in one particular funeral service for a non-believer many friends and family members showed up to pay tribute to the deceased. As you may expect, everyone said a lot of nice things about that person – what a good colleague, a good husband and a good father he was. But then there was a deep sense of sorrow in the separation. Also, there could only be wishful thinking, hoping that this non-believer would be in a blissful place. What can you say to comfort this family, knowing that this person would not be in heaven? I prayed for God's wisdom on what to say. Finally, the funeral concluded and everyone lined up to console the family. I walked up to the widow and said to her: "You should be proud of your husband." That was all. For a person who left this world without Christ all we can talk about is his past. There is no hope for the future. By coincident a few weeks back I went to elderly sister Ko's memorial service at the same funeral home and even in the same room! Mrs. Ko was the late mother of Pastor Billy Ko of the Christian Witness Center. The family did not even call the meeting a funeral. They named it a celebration of life. The atmosphere in the service was completely different. There was only one person I saw who cried, and she was not even a member of the family. There was sharing about the life of Mrs. Ko. However, the focus was not on her, it was on our Lord. Mrs. Ko had a blessed life, though it was full of hardship. She came to know Christ because of her husband and her in-laws were all believers. Pastor Ko is the youngest of the four kids. When Pastor Ko was only four-month-old his dad passed away. Because of great financial stress Mrs. Ko could only afford to raise her oldest daughter. The three younger kids were sent to different orphanages. Mrs. Ko never re-married. Life was tough but she was full of joy from the Lord. She is now re-united with her beloved husband in glory.