Dreaming of Heaven

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I encourage you to daydream about heaven. Go ahead. Close your eyes and dream about heaven for five minutes and see if it doesn't transform your whole outlook for the day.

Meditating on eternity is one of the most powerful antidotes for the many maladies that we suffer as believers. My goal here is to fuel your imagination with Biblical information about heaven so that you can fill your vision with eternity.

It is very curious to me that many Christians are so hesitant to speak about heavenly rewards. They say things like, 'Oh no, I'm not interested in rewards in heaven. Jesus is reward enough for me.' And other such humble-sounding things. The problem with this kind of language is that it is patently unbiblical. The Bible says things like, 'And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.' (Hebrews 11:6) And part of what it means to 'live by faith' is to live for the reward that we will receive from the hand of Christ!

So what does the Bible have to say about heaven, and what does it have to say about our reward?

Heaven in The Bible

When the Bible speaks about heaven, it often describes it as two things: a city and a garden.

A City

Revelation 21 and 22 give us an awe-inspiring glimpse into heaven. Let's pick up in Revelation 21:1-3,
'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, a for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."'

So the first picture we get is of a 'holy city' described as 'the new Jerusalem'. This language is picking up on one of God's favourite ways of speaking about His people, which is frequently invoked in the Psalms. The 'holy city' and the 'city of God' come to represent God's holy people, God's inheritance – the place where God has a vested interest. It is the place and the people who enjoy the special favour of God.

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As a small sample of this kind of language, consider Psalm 48:8, 'As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God: God makes her secure forever.' The language of a city, God's city, inspires a wonderful sense of security and intimacy with God. How blessed is the city with God residing in her midst!

A Garden Paradise

We pick up the story again in Revelation 22:1-3,
'Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.'

This passage is invoking Eden language. The story of the Bible begins in Genesis with a river and a tree, and here we have a picture of Eden restored. The story of salvation has come full circle!

There is the explicit reference to the sin and the curse that ruined it all, ‘no longer will there be any curse.’ That dreadful ‘fall from grace’ that caused separation from God and brought upon us the judgement of God will finally be lifted as God’s redemption of His creation and His people will be made complete.

Our English word ‘paradise’ translated literally means ‘garden’ or ‘park’ and so it describes the pristine, unspoiled garden paradise that we get a glimpse of in Eden, where perfect fellowship is enjoyed with God and men.

There are a number of applications of this revelation of heaven for us as believers that should shape the way we think of our lives and futures:

1. Heaven is Our Home

It is tempting to think of heaven as being radically different to everything we have ever known. In one sense this is true, it will be full of glory to a degree that we have never experienced, but the language of Scripture suggests that heaven will be strangely familiar – like coming home.

Heaven is described as the ‘new earth’, which suggests that it will have an ‘earthy’ feel about it. Like the earth we know, only more glorious.

Furthermore, the current earth doesn’t fulfil the deepest longings of our heart. It feels so close to being home sometimes, but there is always a sting in the tail here. This is what Peter is getting at when he describes us believers as being ‘aliens and strangers’ on this earth (1 Peter 2:11). We are journeying through this life to the familiar fields of heaven where we will truly feel ‘at home’.

2. God With Us

Jesus said He was going to prepare a place for us to live. Why? So that we could be where He is (John 14:1-3).

What is heaven? Heaven is where God lives. This is a remarkable truth with some mind-bending applications. Consider this, when God moves house, wherever He moves to is called heaven. It is for this reason that after God has created the new earth and comes to take residence on it with His people, the new earth is called heaven!

We are told that, at that time, we will no longer see God in dim reflections but ‘face to face’. In fact, His presence will be so real and tangible that His light is said to replace the sun on the new earth!

3. The Promise Fulfilled

Christ has betrothed Himself to us. So another way to think of our experience on earth is like a

really long engagement! In fact, the book of Revelation describes our arrival into heaven as 'the marriage feast of the lamb.'

The hope that we live in is that Jesus has pledged Himself to us and we wait in expectation for the day when He makes good on His promise to come and fetch us to Himself.

It is in this hope that we are making ourselves beautiful for Him, keeping ourselves pure for Him. This requires great discipline, restraint and trust on our part. The great exhortation of Scripture, therefore, is don't grow weary while you wait!

What Rewards Will There Be in Heaven?

Yes, there's more! Eternal life with God is a huge reward in itself and we are saved by remaining faithful to the end, but some people limit 'rewards' to this. The Bible often speaks about being rewarded for the specific actions that we do in this life. Jesus spoke about 'storing up treasures in heaven' (Matthew 6:20). Literally 'piling it up'.

> Did you know that you can be rewarded more or less in heaven?

There are degrees of punishment in hell and degrees of reward in heaven. Consider this verse in 2 Corinthians 5:10, 'For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.'

Did you know that you can be rewarded more or less in heaven? I hope so. What will we be rewarded for? When we look at the words of Jesus, there is an emphasis not only on what we do but how we do them (Matthew 6:16-18). Consider these examples from Mathew 6, where Jesus speaks about the reward we will receive for how we:

- Give to those in need
- Pray
- Fast

In every case, if you do it for the affirmation of men, then you have 'already received your reward'. The promise of reward is for those who do what they do **to please the Father**.

Here are some more examples of specific things for which we will be rewarded:

- **Martyrs** receive a special status in heaven
- There is a special glory given to **soul-winners** – '[they] will shine like the stars' (Daniel 12:3)

- There is an inheritance in **the saints** – 'our hope, joy, the crown in which we will glory' (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20)
- For every **testing and trial** we endure (James 1:12).
- For everything you have had to **sacrifice for His kingdom** (Mark 10:29)

Rewarded with Responsible Tasks

But now I want to mention something exceptionally significant. Jesus said that our faithful service in this life would determine our responsibilities in the next. Consider these words from Jesus: 'His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master." (Matthew 25:21)

The parallel text in Luke 19:19 says, 'Well done, good slave, because you have been faithful in a very little thing, you are to be in authority over ten cities.'

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Imagine the incredible honour of being entrusted with special tasks which require men and women who have proven trustworthy and faithful on earth. Can there be any greater reward than God expressing His trust in me on the back of a track record of faithfulness? What an honour!

Our Graduation

I would like to end off with a word of encouragement. Heaven is not a retirement village for tired Christians. Heaven will be a type of graduation! This is the hope that inspires and reinvigorates us. For those of you that have grown weary in doing what is good, take heart! Your hard work, your love, your perseverance is achieving for you a reward that will far surpass any of the sacrifices that you have made in this life.