

## Heaven – John 14

In 1952, a young Florence Chadwick stepped into the chilly waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island and started swimming toward the shore of mainland California about 30 miles away. She was wanting to set a record and be the first woman to make that swim. The weather was very foggy and cool. She could barely see the boats that were there next to her. She swam for fifteen long hours until she told those in the boats that she couldn't go on any longer.

Her mother was in one of those boats and encouraged her to keep going. She told her daughter she was almost there. But Chadwick couldn't see the shore for all the fog and begged to be taken out of the water. She was mentally and physically exhausted. It wasn't until she was on board the boat that she discovered the shore was less than a half mile away. At a news conference the next day, she said, *"All I could see was the fog. I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it."* (Heaven, Randy Alcorn, pg. xx)

Maybe some of you feel like that woman today. Maybe you are having a hard time seeing through the fog of your mental, physical, financial and relational problems. You can't see the end goal because you're tired and distracted by this world and the things of this world and you are having a hard time going on. Well, I want to help you see through the fog this morning and see something that will be a great encouragement to you. It should motivate you and elevate you up and beyond the terrible but temporary problems that you have in this world.

For Christians, our end goal is eternal life in Heaven with Jesus. That is what this life is about. This life is about the next life but it can be hard to see the next life while you are in this life, right? So, I think it's important that we take some time every now and then to focus on what we should be focused on. **Colossians 3:2** says, *"Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth"*. So, let's talk about Heaven for a little while. Shall we?

I heard the joke about a guy who dies and goes to Heaven and when St. Peter says he can come in, he is so happy he starts to tell St. Peter a joke. The guy talks and talks and the joke just goes on and on and finally St. Peter says, **"Look, Jimmy, get to the punchline. We don't have forever up here."** Some of you are thinking that about the sermon this morning already. But so much of our thinking or theology about Heaven is wrong because it is based on dumb jokes or well-meaning but incorrect hymns or it's based on paintings or sculptures that may be beautiful but are not biblical.

I want to encourage you this morning to turn to the New Testament book of **John**. It's one of the four Gospels of **Matthew, Mark, Luke and John**. John tells the story of Jesus and it's probably my favorite Gospel. In **chapter 14**, Jesus is talking to His closest disciples. He has just told them that He is going to have to go away. He is speaking of His coming death but they don't understand that and they are just really bummed out that Jesus is going to leave them. So, Jesus gives them (and us) this encouragement. Let's read **John 14:1-4**.

*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. 2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that 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. 4 You know the way to the place where I am going."*

I have to admit I was encouraged a while back when I read a sermon by the late, great W.A. Criswell who said, and I quote, *"Preaching on Heaven is hard."* That made me feel a little bit better. I feel the same way. It's hard to preach on Heaven because there is a lot we don't know and some of what we know is to be taken literally and some of it is symbolic. Timing is also an issue. Great theologians will argue over what happens when and what comes next and

what happens after that. Sometimes finding application for a sermon on Heaven can be difficult if you just lay out a bunch of facts but even though it can be difficult, I believe it is important.

Yes, I'm curious, as you probably are, about what Heaven is going to be like. And we are told to set our minds on things above. (Colossians 3:2) We are told to store up treasure in Heaven (Matt. 6) so we have to prepare for it. When **Ephesians 6** says to put on our helmet of salvation, it means, in part, meditating on our eternal home in Heaven. So we should at least know a little bit about this place where we are told to think about and prepare for.

One of the problems, part of that fog that makes it hard to think about Heaven is what most people know or think they know about Heaven. What is the stereotypical view of Heaven? What do all the cartoons show people doing in Heaven? Sitting on a cloud strumming a harp. How boring! I don't want to do that. That would not be Heaven for me and probably not you.

Gary Larson was the artist for the Farside cartoons and I remember a cartoon he drew one time with that picture of a man sitting in Heaven on a cloud with a harp in his lap. The caption read, "*Should have brought a magazine.*" Why is it that Heaven seems to get such a lame rap? Why is it that Heaven, the place of all joy, all happiness, all health, all fulfillment, all everything we want is depicted as a place that makes people say, "**So what if there is a Heaven?**"

It's not the Bible's fault. The Bible is full of information about Heaven and we will discuss some of what it says today. But where does this misinformation come from? I'll tell you where it comes from. It comes from the father of misinformation, the father of lies, the opposer, the accuser, the adversary Satan. Satan doesn't have to prove to us that there is no Heaven. He just has to convince us that Heaven is a boring place and if we believe that then we will be robbed of our joy and anticipation. We will set our minds on things of this life and not the next and we won't be motivated to share our faith. (Heaven, Randy Alcorn)

**Revelation 13:6** says that Satan opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in Heaven. What better way for the devil and his demons to attack than to whisper lies about the very place that God tells us to set our hearts and minds? Of course our hearts will be troubled when all we focus on is the here and now. So, let's talk about the then and there.

Every culture that has ever existed has had some sense that this life was not all there is. Anthropological evidence shows that everybody from the Australian aborigines to the Mayans to the Native American Indians has had some kind of God-given sense of the eternal. That's why you may have heard before that it takes more faith to be an atheist than it does to believe in God.

It is natural for us to consider an after-life even if we have never read the Bible because God put that in us. We are wired to see creation and realize there must be a Creator. And if there is a Creator then there must be more to this life. That is especially important to those who go through life in great pain or need or without ever feeling fulfilled. And this nasty old life can sure be that way for a lot of folks. If this is all there is to life then I would have to think it's not really worth it.

The problem is that too many people see the afterlife just as bad if not worse. It scares people to think of the great unknown especially if we are going to fly around like Casper the ghost singing "Holy Holy Holy" all day up in the clouds. When Jesus told His disciples, "*In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you*" He deliberately chose common, physical terms to describe where He was going and what He was preparing for us. He wanted to give His disciples and us something tangible to look forward to – an actual place where they and we would go to be with Him.

He did this because of the fact that Heaven is a place. It is not a state of mind. It is not some spooky, spiritual spectrum of consciousness. People often say things like, "*Well, we just can't know much about Heaven until we*

get there.” Or, “*She’s in a better place; a place of the great unknown.*” “*We can’t even imagine what Heaven is going to be like!*”

Well, actually we can imagine it. We might not be able to do it complete justice but we have an idea because it is going to be similar to how we live right now. When Marco Polo returned to Italy from China he described China as a world that his audience had never seen. They felt he was making it up but it wasn’t that China was a fairy tale or a lie. It was similar to Italy in that it had streets and mountains and trees and people but it was just different.

The Bible teaches that Heaven is a familiar, physical, tangible place; a place that we will be very similar to what we know here on earth. Heaven is described as having streets, buildings, cities and countries. It is said to have walls, gates, real gardens, banquets and bodies. Yes, we will have physical bodies. Just as Jesus was resurrected and then came back in His physical body in **Acts 1**, so will we. Moses and Elijah appeared physically with Jesus at the Transfiguration and so it makes sense that we, too, will have physical bodies in a physical world.

The Bible teaches that we will be known in Heaven as we are known on earth. Jesus says in **Matthew 8:11**, “*many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven*”.

Obviously we will somehow recognize each other even though we will have perfect bodies as it says in **Philippians 3:21**, in heaven Christ “*will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body*”. So, while we can’t know everything about Heaven we can know that it is a real place.

And not only is it a place but it is a prepared place. In **verse 2**, Jesus says that He is going to prepare a place for you. I wanted to know exactly what that meant so I looked it up in the giant concordance I have of biblical words. I looked up “prepare” and “place” and do you know what? I didn’t learn a thing. It means to prepare a place, just like we would use those words.

I’ve told you before about going up to Wyoming to see Yellowstone Park years ago. It is an incredibly beautiful place and I would love to go back there sometime. In some places it feels like another world because it is so different than anything I’ve ever seen. I stopped at some point just along the side of the road to look over a mountain range and I decided to walk down the mountain I was on just a little way. There was no path and this wasn’t a rest stop. Nobody else was around and I’m quite sure nobody would ever find me if I fell down the mountain into the heavy brush. (That may be why there was a fence with a warning sign right there now that I think about it.) But anyhow, I walked down a little ways and looked around and then started back up and I saw on the backside, the downhill side, of one of the trees was a vine growing with a big, beautiful flower growing on it. It was a huge flower with bright yellow and orange and red and green. And it was growing way down the mountain on the backside of a tree.

I stared at that flower for a long time and I wondered if God had put that flower there just for me because He knew I would be the only one dumb enough to walk down there...or if He made it just for Him and I just happened to see it. At another solitary place out in the desert with nobody around for miles and miles he prepared an incredible sunset and it was like God said, “*Here, Todd, this is for you.*” And those were just fleeting moments of God showing me His handiwork. Can you imagine what Heaven is going to be like? He has prepared a place for you; just for you, customized by Jesus just for you.

**Hebrews 11:10** says that Abraham “*was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*” Can you imagine what the buildings are going to look like in Heaven? But there will be more than just buildings he is preparing for us. In **1 Timothy 6:17** we are told to “*put our hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*” I believe we can expect to find continued enjoyment in Heaven. In **Isaiah 25:6** it says, “*On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—*

*the best of meats and the finest of wines.*” I would like to point out what is not mentioned here. There is no mention of vegetables! No veggies. There’s no broccoli in Heaven. Nope.

God has prepared a place for you; you personally; not one generic place for everybody but He has hand-prepared a special place just for you. In other words, God loves you so much that He wants you to enjoy your place in Heaven just like a good father here on earth would want his kids to enjoy their place.

Have you ever given somebody you love a really good gift; something that is just perfect for them? Did you enjoy their response? Of course you did. Can you imagine the joy it will bring to Jesus to know that you are enjoying your place, your mansion, your room, whatever it is? It is just the right color and has everything you want and more. What kind of a father would welcome his child home saying, *“Well done my good and faithful child! Now here is your old tool shed to crash in. Don’t mind that old mower. Just push it over to the side but don’t step right there. That board is loose.”* No! The same God who loved you so much that He sent His only Son to die for you has prepared a place for you in heaven close to Him for eternity.

That should bring great joy and anticipation to all of us. Well, it should bring joy to those who are prepared. Because just as Heaven is a prepared place, it is a prepared place for prepared people. **Revelation chapter 20** says, *“Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”* Those who are not prepared will not have their name written in the book.

**Ruthanna Metzger**, a professional singer, tells a story that illustrates the importance of having your name written in the book. Several years ago she was asked to sing at the wedding of a very wealthy man. The invitation said the reception would be held on the top two floors of Seattle’s Columbia Tower. At the reception, waiters in tuxedos offered luscious hors d’oeuvres and exotic beverages to the guests. The bride and groom approached a beautiful glass and brass staircase that led to the top floor. Someone ceremoniously cut a satin ribbon draped across the bottom of the stairs. They announced the wedding feast was about to begin. Bride and groom ascended the stairs, followed by their guests.

At the top of the stairs, a maitre d’ with a bound book greeted the guests outside the doors and asked for their names. “I am Ruthanna Metzger and this is my husband Roy”

“Would you spell it please. I can’t find it.” Searching some more, the man said, “I’m sorry but your name isn’t here.”

There must be some mistake. I am the singer. I sang for this wedding!”

The man said, “It doesn’t matter who you are or what you did you cannot come in because your name is not in the book.” “Waiter, please show these people to the service elevator.”

She said she was humiliated as they walked toward the elevator and passed by beautifully decorated tables with shrimp, salmon, and incredible ice sculptures. They passed through the area where the orchestra was practicing with all the musicians dressed in dazzling tuxedos.

They made it to their car and her husband asked her what happened. She told him she got busy and didn’t think she would need to RSVP since she was the singer.

To be cast out of Heaven won’t just mean having to go home. It will mean being thrown into the lake of burning sulfur. And no explanation or excuse will matter. You can explain that you were a member of a Baptist church and that your Mama was a Sunday School teacher and Daddy was a preacher but God is going to say, *“You can’t come in. I never knew you.”*

God has prepared a place for you if you have prepared a place in your heart for Him. John said in **I John 5:13**, “*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*” But what does it mean to believe? It means that you have given your life to Him in full faith and trust and that since your sins are now forgiven you have devoted your life to Him. Does that describe you? If so, then you should be looking forward to Heaven with all your heart. It is a real place that Jesus has prepared for each one of us. But you have to be prepared. Why not do that right now?

All you have to do is believe in your heart that Jesus is God and that he is the only way to Heaven. His sacrifice on the cross was enough to pay for all your sins. So, right now just ask Him to forgive you of all your sins and allow His Spirit to come into your life and start to change you like only He can. Do it right now as the music plays.

\*Special credit to Randy Alcorn’s book entitled Heaven for much of the information in this message.