

In the Heavens

by Daniel Steele

In this sermon, Daniel Steele explores the concept of The Heavens as a spiritual realm where believers can experience divine blessings and communion with Christ while navigating spiritual challenges.

Scripture: John 16:33, Ephesians 1:3-4, Ephesians 1:20, Ephesians 2:6, Ephesians 3:10, Ephesians 5:18, Ephesians 6:12

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Holy Spirit"

Description

Daniel Steele preaches about 'The Heavens,' a spiritual realm accessible to believers in Christ, described by the apostle Paul in Ephesians. This heavenly realm is a place of spiritual blessings, holiness, and constant communion with Jesus through the Holy Spirit. Despite the existence of infernal powers in 'The Heavens,' believers are victorious over them as they are strengthened by God's Spirit. The terms of admission into 'The Heavens' include being chosen by God before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in His love.

Transcript

Ephesians i. 3, 20; ii. 6; iii. 10; vi. 12.

FOLLOWING the custom of tourists in foreign lands, I give you a description of the country in which I have happily sojourned nearly five years. I must confess that I have more than a traveler's interest in this land, since I have become a naturalized citizen, and have settled down in it for life.

This country was named by one Paul, a daring explorer who flourished at the beginning of the Christian era, and who, like the writer, became so enamored of its charms that he ever after made it his permanent abode. It so closely resembled heaven that he took that term and transformed it into an adjective noun, "The Heavens," and wrote it down on his chart as the new country. This new name he uses five times in his report to the Ephesians, and nowhere else.

Some recent travellers, who have not diligently studied Paul's chart, either driven by severe storms from the ordinary track of voyagers, or through an enterprise rivaling that of the great Genoese discoverer, or, more likely still, through the guidance of Paul's pilot, whom he took on board in Damascus, have found this earthly paradise, and, assuming the right of original discoverers, they have christened it "The Higher Life." This new name, though rather confusing to the novice, has not altered the thing. "The rose would smell as sweet under any other name." This Rose of Sharon, this isle of verdure and orange blossoms, fills with fragrance all the air for leagues and leagues around.

My great surprise, after entering this Eden and feasting on its sweetness, was at the sparseness of its population. For the land is exceedingly broad and fruitful, capable of sustaining with its abundance all the millions who are moistening the unwilling earth with their sweat, and compelling it to yield them a scanty sustenance. Why do they not migrate to these salubrious climes? This question I have been pondering ever since I drove my tent stakes into the mellow soil of these flowery plains. At last I think that I have got at the truth of the matter. The false report has been industriously circulated through all the world that Paul's discovery was an optical illusion, a mirage in the distance, with bubbling fountains, shady trees, rich vineyards, and olive-clad uplands, all painted with fiery fingers on the clouds through a peculiar state of the tropical atmosphere. It is confidently asserted that he sailed on and on, chasing this visionary paradise, and never actually set foot upon its shore and demonstrated that it is a veritable terra firma. "Did he not," it is asked, "once acknowledge this humiliating fact -- 'not that I have already attained?'" [* Paul refers not to evangelical perfection, but to the victor's crown]

Now, it so happens that the great real-estate owner, or "ruler of the darkness of this world," who boasts, with too much truth, that he possesses all the kingdoms of this world and their glory, keeps this falsehood going with a very lively step round and round the world, lest the truth should be believed, and his tenants should all emigrate to this Eden world, and leave his estates a habitation of bats and a "place of dragons." This wily despot dislikes to see his dominions depopulated to colonize "Paul's Heavens," and so he is ever busy denying that any such place exists on the face of the whole earth, asserting that it is like the Ultima Thule of ancient geography, which ever receded toward the north pole, till at last it was suspected by all sensible men that it existed only in the eye of Pythias, the discoverer. Now, it is nothing wonderful that this mythical theory almost universally prevails today, since the aforesaid world-ruler has actually succeeded in accomplishing so adroit an act as to get thousands of Paul's successors solemnly to aver that they have diligently sought for "The Heavens" in all latitudes and longitudes, and to publish as God's truth that no such place exists under the heavens. The lie which millions believe of their own accord myriads will surely believe if it falls from the lips of their religious teachers.

Another reason for the sparse population is that, of the few who do believe that this land is a reality and no myth, a large number are deterred from entering by reason of the narrow channel through which they must force their way, and they are afraid that in entering "The Heavens" they will lose too much of their idolized earthly. This narrow pass is The Way of Holiness. Hear Paul: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in The Heavens in Christ. . . that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love." Holiness is the only gate into this blessed region, which many are afraid to enter.

But you are hungering for a description of the country itself. As its name indicates, The Heavens includes heaven. The glorified Jesus is said, in chap. i. 20, to be at the right hand of God in The Heavens, "in human form, locally existent." In chap. iii. 10, "principalities and powers, or spiritual intelligences of a high order, are located in "The Heavens." But in chap. i. 3, Paul and the Ephesian believers are represented as "in The Heavens," and in chap. ii. 6, they are sitting "together in The Heavens in Christ Jesus," the "sitting" implying permanence of abode. This phrase, then, must include more than the heaven which centres in the radiant person of Jesus. Heaven laps over upon the earth. A segment of earth has been annexed to heaven. In my youthful days, before I had looked into international law, I one day asked Father Taylor, of the Seamen's Bethel, where in the Atlantic was the boundary within which the child is born an American citizen. His weather-beaten face lighted up with a smile that rippled from the centre to the circumference, as he replied. "My boy. there is no such line in mid-ocean; we own

clear across."

Locate heaven wherever you please, it stretches clear across to these earthly shores, and even takes in a slice, which Paul calls "The Heavens;" King James' version, "heavenly places;" and Bishop Ellicott, "the heavenly regions." This is nothing less than a high and serene Christian experience in which the gracious Jesus manifests Himself to the spiritual eye of the perfect believer, and he enjoys constant communion with the glorified Head of the Church through the Holy Spirit, which makes him "a habitation of God."

The Heavens is that region called by Bunyan the land of Beulah, "clear out of sight of Doubting Castle," in the very suburbs of heaven, where the shining ones walk, and the gates of the celestial city are in full view, and the sun shines day and night all the year. Jesus had this land in view when He said He would send the Comforter to His disciples, who would abide forever, and that the Son of God would manifest Himself unto them, and the Father and the Son would make their permanent abode with them.

This doctrine, that believing souls, still in the flesh, may dwell in The Heavens, is confirmed by Dean Alford, who puts such souls into heaven itself. "Materially, we are yet in the body; but in the Spirit, we are in heaven -- only waiting for the, redemption of the body to be entirely and literally there.

"Though heaven's above and earth's below,

Yet are they but one state;

And each the other with sweet skill

Doth interpenetrate

Yea, many a tie and office blest,

In earthly lots uneven,

Hath an immortal place to fill,

And is the root of heaven."

-- Faber.

Stier, on Eph. i. 3, says: "The blessing with which God has blessed us consists and expands in all blessing of the Spirit -- then brings in heaven, the heavenly state in us, and us in it -- then, finally, Christ personally. He, Himself, who is set and exalted into heaven, comes by the Spirit down into us, so that He is in us and we in Him of a truth, and thereby, and in so far, we are with Him in heaven." An old writer says that there are three heavens: *coelum gloriae*, the heaven of glory; *coelum naturae*, the heaven of nature: and *coelum gratiae*, which we understand to be Paul's heaven of grace.

Do Christians know that they need not die to know what heaven is, and that it is their glorious privilege to dwell there by dwelling in Christ, the perfect Saviour? At the funerals of dead saints we sing:

"Where should the dying members rest

But with their dying Head?"

The rhythm will be just as charming, and the words will perfectly define the condition of living saints in full trust, if we mend the couplet, and sing:

Where should the living members rest

But with their living Head?

The citizens of The Heavens speak always "in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," the natural language of the fullness of the Spirit. "And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord" (Eph. v. 18, 19).

But in Paul's last mention of The Heavens (Eph. vi. 12). he seems to dash all our theorizing into pieces by introducing infernal principalities and powers and wicked spirits, and by representing that there is a grand wrestling match going on there between these grimy fellows and the white-robed saints. How is this? Does not this spoil the beauty and mar the joys of the place? What advantage, then, have The Heavens over The Earthlies, where so many professed Christians "grovel here below?"

Good old Bengel, who is styled by John Wesley "that great light of the Christian world," here comes to our aid with a spiritual insight truly marvelous, and a hermeneutic gift almost divine. He says, "Even enemies, but as captives, may be in a royal palace and adorn it." When Jesus ascended "he led captivity captive." All who have risen and ascended with Him through sanctification of the Spirit, dwell where Satan is a captive, chained to the triumphal chariot of the Son of God. They wrestle with a fettered and handcuffed antagonist, and easily throw him in every contest. This is because they are "strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man."

While all dwellers amid the Earthlies are exposed to the devouring mouth of the roaring lion who runs at large there, those who live

"Where dwells the Lord our Righteousness,"

are kept

"In perfect peace

And everlasting rest;"

for He has conquered Satan for them since He Himself triumphed over him openly. Hear His paean of victory as He marched to the cross: "Be of good cheer: I have overcome the world." Well does Rutherford say: "Faith may dance because Christ singeth; and we may come into the choir, and lift up our hoarse and rough voices, and chirp, and sing, and shout for joy with our Lord Jesus."

Beautifully, indeed, does the same quaint writer express the gain which the believer may make out of the assaults of the tempter: "The devil is but a whetstone to sharpen the faith and patience of the saints. I know that he but heweth and polisheth stones all this time for the New Jerusalem."

For the terms of admission into The Heavens, see Eph. i. 3, 4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.

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