

What and Where Is Heaven

by J. Vernon McGee

The sermon explores the biblical understanding of heaven, emphasizing its spiritual attributes and the church's eternal abode.

Duration: 44:36

Scripture: John 13:1-17, John 14:1-3, John 15:1-8, John 16:7-15, John 17

Topics: "Heavenly Realm", "Eternal Life"

Description

In this sermon, Dr. J. Vernon McGee discusses the topic of heaven and its significance in the Christian faith. He emphasizes that while the Bible contains limited information about heaven and hell, it has much to say about living a Christian life on Earth. Dr. McGee highlights the appeal of heaven as a place without tears or death, where believers will receive new bodies and all things will be made new. He concludes by emphasizing the importance of understanding the true nature of heaven through studying the Word of God.

Transcript

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word! What more can He say than to you He hath said, To you who for refuge to Jesus hath fled? What do you know about heaven? Do you know what it will be like to live there? The old children's song says, Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace. But does this really teach us anything about the reality of what heaven is going to be like for those of us who are going to spend eternity there? Well, on this edition of our Sunday Sermon Broadcast, Dr. J. Verna McGee's message will answer two key questions concerning the Biblical teaching about heaven. The two questions are also the title of his sermon, which is, What and Where is Heaven? Dr. McGee first gave this sermon at the historic Church of the Open Door in downtown Los Angeles, where he served as the pastor for twenty-one years.

Now let's pray. Heavenly Father, We thank You that You have provided a way for us to dwell with You for all eternity. Reveal to us the true nature of heaven as we study Your Word.

In Jesus' name. Amen. The Bible contains very little concerning heaven and hell.

There is actually less concerning hell, but really there is very little concerning heaven. I get rather weary of these folk today who are always criticizing the Christian faith, and especially those of us that are fundamental, that we spend all of our time talking about heaven or hell, and that the Bible is that kind of a

book. Well, it actually has very little to say about these two, but it has a great deal to say about living down here right now.

Every epistle has to do with Christian living. All of them deal with that great subject. Now the very amazing thing is that when you go back to the Old Testament, you will find practically nothing relative to heaven, and the Bible uses the word heaven, at least we have the translation, in three different areas.

It speaks in the Old Testament, as well as the New, of a first heaven, and that first heaven, we find it at the very beginning in Genesis, where He opened the windows of heaven. Well, that means the air spaces that we live in today. It speaks of the clouds of heaven.

It speaks of the birds of heaven. That is the air space that is immediately above us. That is where man travels today, when he travels in a plane.

And tonight there are three men that are out beyond these air spaces. Now beyond the air space, there is the second heaven, and the Old Testament speaks of it as the stars of heaven. And that takes in a vast universe, so vast that today it could be infinite.

And there is no reason to believe tonight that the universe in which you and I live is an infinite universe. The time apparently is. Time is bordered on both ends, the beginning and the end, by eternity.

And the Scripture speaks, the psalmist said, Thou who art from everlasting to everlasting, from the vanishing point in the past to the vanishing point in the future. And time is bounded by infinity. And wherever space ends, then beyond that we have the infinite God.

And may I say to you that is way up and beyond the thinking of man today. And out there somewhere there is the place that the Old Testament speaks of as the throne of God. Over in the 11th Psalm, for instance, and I think probably I should turn back to that, we are told back there that the Lord is in his holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven, and that is the third heaven.

Paul says he was caught up to that place. He said he was caught up to the third heaven. That is the place of the throne of God.

And up to the time the Lord Jesus came to this earth, no man had ever been to the third heaven. The Lord Jesus made that very specific and definite statement. He said, No man hath ascended up to heaven.

What heaven is he talking about? Except the Son of Man who came down from heaven and he came down from the throne of God. So that the place that we know as heaven, as far as the Old Testament is concerned, you would know very little about it. In fact, practically nothing about it, because the hope of the Old Testament was always on this earth.

And Abraham believed that he would be raised from the dead on this earth. And that is the reason he bought the cave of Machpelah to bury Sarah. And then all of the patriarchs were put there.

And if you go to Jerusalem today, you will find out in front of the Eastern Gate literally thousands of Orthodox Jews that have been buried because they believe the Messiah will come in via at the time that they are raised from the dead. And they want to be there. That's been the hope of these people down through the years.

Now the child of God today in the church has no such hope. It doesn't make any difference whether we are buried in Jerusalem at the Eastern Gate or whether we are buried in Los Angeles. It makes no difference, because our hope is altogether different than that.

Fact of the matter is, when you get to the New Testament, the Lord Jesus Christ introduced something altogether new. It was so new that the Apostles had not heard it. He gave it in the upper room discourse, which is John 13 through 17.

And this upper room discourse that is so vital today for believers and is so meaningful for us today, and I find a great many will piddle around with the Sermon on the Mount and don't misunderstand. It's the words of our Lord, and it's important. But to put the emphasis there and not upon the upper room discourse is to miss a great deal of the blessing of God.

And John 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17, in each chapter, the Lord Jesus introduced something that was brand new. That is, it had never been approached in the Old Testament. It had never been brought out for man to see in the Old Testament.

Now in the 14th chapter, the Gospel of John, that's so familiar to us, our Lord introduced something that was entirely new, and that is that he was going to take a group of people, a body of people, and call his body, that he would remove them someday from this earth and take them to the place that we call heaven. It has another name in Scripture, by the way, and I think a very separate, definite place as he makes it very clear that it will be where the church will be throughout the endless ages of eternity. Now will you listen to him in this very familiar passage, and I'm of the opinion that practically every person here tonight could stand and repeat this chapter by memory.

That is, most of it at least. Let not your heart be troubled. Ye believe in God, believe also in me.

In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you, I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also. Now this is the passage of Scripture in which our Lord mentioned the fact that he would be taking a group of people out of this world, and he was going ahead to prepare a special place for them.

And he made the statement, in my Father's house there are many mansions, and to me that's the most unfortunate translation of all. The word that he uses, moni, and it doesn't mean any more mansion that it means bungalow. It has no reference to that.

Moni means abiding place, and it doesn't mean a mansion. Frankly, I have no zeal or desire to live in a mansion. I was a Presbyterian preacher for a great many years, and the Lord's forgiven me for that, and may I say to you that I lived in what was known as a manse, and that's a shortened form for mansion.

And I want to tell you, I have lived in some very unusual places. Somebody said that the Board of Deacons always met with the Women's Missionary Society and decided the kind of house that the preacher ought to live in, and that's the house they built. I want to tell you, friends, when they get together they come up with some very novel ideas.

I lived in Nashville, Tennessee, in what was known as the manse of the old Second Church. It was an antebellum home that had been to a certain extent renovated, and it was a home built before the Civil War, and they believed in having big rooms in those days. And this was a big house.

It had 14 rooms, and every room was a big one. Some of them I never did get in. I moved in the front room, and I lived there because I wasn't even married then.

And imagine having a 14-room house. And I moved in there, and we had a little grate that you put a fire in to keep warm in wintertime. And the place never thawed out till about the first of August every year.

And I used to tell the folk, on a clear day you could see the ceiling in that room. It was a big place. And frankly, when you suggest to me today to live in a mansion, I'm not interested.

I think of that big house, and I just don't want it. And I thank the Lord that that's not the meaning of the word here. The word here is *moni*, which means abiding place.

And in my father's house there are many abiding places. And I think that night when they went out, you could have looked up into the heavens there at Jerusalem. It was the spring of the year, the sky would have been clear.

And as you could look up into the heavens with the vast number of stars, and we of course see very few of them, but you could look up there and you were looking into the father's house. And you're looking into the abiding places. We do not know this today, but scientists are very seriously today trying to communicate out yonder with somebody.

But apparently they are smart enough to keep quiet, not let us know they're out there. Because I'm not sure they'd want communication with this little earth and with mankind in the sad condition that he's in today. But I am of the opinion, and don't ask me for the scripture, I don't have it, but I do not believe God has a vacancy sign hanging up anywhere in his vast universe.

I think it's occupied. He has created intelligences of a number that when we are given a view of them, what John said, when he got a look at them, he started counting. And he could say 10,000 times 10,000, then he began to look beyond that and he says that, oh I couldn't count them.

It's a number that even you couldn't put on a computer. It couldn't reckon the number of God's created intelligences. So the Lord Jesus said in my father's house there are many abiding places, but I go to prepare a special place for you.

Now the carpenter of Nazareth down here is preparing a special place for those that are his own up yonder. And since you and I are going there someday, may I say we ought to be a little interested in it. If you're going to buy a home in one of the subdivisions in Southern California, you would certainly want to see the place.

In fact, you better see the place before you buy it. May I say to you that certainly we ought to be interested today in seeing and knowing what we can about the place that we're going to. And the only scripture that I know that gives any kind of detail, and actually it's very sparse, it's not very satisfactory.

You see, it's as it were, God pulled the veil down. Hell is so frightful, God said very little about it. Heaven is so wonderful, you and I would not understand it.

I'd like to make two statements concerning heaven. They're paradoxical statements, and I think both are true. I think that when you and I get to heaven, we're going to find it so vastly different than anything that we ever anticipated.

The second thing I'd like to say about heaven is that I think that when you and I get to heaven, we're going to find that it's going to be not very different from what we know of this earth down here. You say that's a contradiction. No, it's a paradox.

But I think that we're going to find that a great many people think of it in sentimental terms, and I don't think heaven is a sentimental place at all. I think it's a very realistic place. They're going to have streets there.

They're going to have many things there that we have here, and it won't be as different as some seem to think it's going to be, and yet it's going to be so vastly different that you and I cannot comprehend it at all, and we can become very, very sentimental about it. I had a letter from a lady back east. I let my wife see it.

This lady, she says, I'm looking forward to being with you in heaven. I think my wife's going to answer her on that. May I say to you that she was very sentimental about heaven.

She had a very sentimental notion that we are going to walk down golden streets. Well, as far as I'm concerned, I'm not interested in asphalt. If it's gold, which it will be, the reason it's given to us, it's clear, and I think the reason it's given to us that it's clear is that heaven is going to be a globe.

I'm almost sure of that, but that instead of living on the outside of it, we'll live inside of it. It's a little awkward living on the outside of this earth today. May I say to you that you don't live on the outside of your house.

Snoopy is the only one I know that lives on top of his house, and certainly you and I don't live on top of our house. We live inside of it. Now, heaven is going to be a place, a permanent abode, and we're going to live on the inside of it, and therefore the street that is there has to be clear because God and Christ will be there, and it'll be the light center of God's universe, and it's of every color, and colors you and I can't even see or know about today.

And today we only get sunshine, and it's lovely, but then you're going to get real color in that day. That, may I say, is the center, that's the place that he is preparing. But that's not the wonder and the glory and the beauty of it by any means.

I want to turn to this passage that has something to say about heaven, and we'll get a look at this place that the Lord Jesus is preparing. It's over in the 21st chapter of Revelation. It doesn't come into view until after the time of the Great Tribulation, the Second Coming of Christ to the earth, and the Millennial reign of Christ, and it comes into view as eternity begins.

But I think the church has been there all the time, but it merely comes in where we can get a glimpse of it while we're here on earth. Now will you listen to John? And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away, and there was no more sea. Now the new earth apparently is going to be vastly different than this earth that we live on today.

To begin with, there'll be no deserts and there'll be no sea. That's the thing that is radical here, and the only thing John mentioned here concerning the earth that is different is that there's no more sea. And you can't think of anything more radical than that.

You and I live in an earth today that life is made possible because of the sea. You and I enjoy this salubrious climate of Southern California with smog because of the fact of the ocean that's out here. Otherwise we would be in a very bad way as far as climate is concerned.

The ocean today gives us a habitable earth, but in that day it'll not be necessary because there'll be such radical changes even made here upon the earth. There'll be a new earth and there'll be a new heaven. And now will you notice here our attention is drawn away from the earth because we're not concerned with that.

It's not our permanent abode, and we see the permanent abode, the eternal home of the church. And I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem. Now if you want to put down your address, I don't know what the zip code is, but it's New Jerusalem, my beloved.

That is the place where the church will spend eternity. And this is it, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for a husband. Now that's the loveliest thing that can be said about the church.

And that description is adequate, by the way. If man had written this, you can be sure of one thing, you'd have page after page of detailed description of heaven. But the Holy Spirit, having revealed less much, reveals so little.

And the one thing he calls attention to, and I think it describes it, it's as a bride adorned for her husband. And to begin with, this is the church that's to be presented to Christ as a bride. This is the home of the church.

And therefore this is the adornment that you see that she's wearing at this time. And I can't think of anything lovelier than that. It's been my very happy privilege down through the years of having several hundred young couples that have come before me to be married.

I met this morning out in front some couples that I married, I think, something like 30 years ago. They're old people now, but I married them 30 years ago. May I say this to you? I have never seen an ugly bride.

Never. I do not know what it is, but there's something about the wedding that when that girl starts down the aisle, she's beautiful. I think God for that one moment does something quite wonderful, and I've never seen one that I thought was ugly.

Now don't think I'm just a sentimental old man myself. May I say to you that I've seen some of these girls before they got married, and frankly I wondered whether they'd make it. And I've seen them afterward, especially after they've been married a while, and you see them washing, washing dishes, or putting out the Monday morning wash.

And I would not say at that time they're beautiful. But when they are married, my friend, they're beautiful. A bride adorned for her husband is always beautiful.

I can't think of a lovelier description of the New Jerusalem as it comes down from God out of heaven than this. Now if you go through this chapter, which we will not do tonight, you will find a detailed description given of the city. It's a place, a very definite place.

It's as much a place as Los Angeles is. The fact of the matter is the city limits are just a little better defined here than the city limits of Los Angeles are defined. So that here is a city that is the eternal abode of the church.

But the thing that interests me tonight actually is not the physical part of it, heaven at all. After all, that's not what makes it heaven, although it certainly is a contribution. But the thing that makes it heaven are these wonderful attributes that go along with it.

And that's the spiritual side, not the physical side. And heaven is a place, as much as this place is right here. Now will you notice what is said concerning it? And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people.

And God himself shall be with them, and he'll be their God. Now notice the things that will take place there. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

You and I live in a world where there are too many tears that are shed in this world. I have been overwhelmed by the number of letters that I received from people who said, When I got the word concerning you, I went to God in prayer and tears. May I say I'm humbled by that sort of thing.

But there are a lot of tears in this world today. I had a member of the staff several years ago. He came into my study one day, and he had done a great deal of counseling.

And he said to me, I'm so tired of talking to people who have shed tears. He said, I did not realize that in downtown Los Angeles there are so many people that shed tears. You and I live in a city that's known as the entertainment capital of the world today.

This is the place you come for fun. This is where multitudes have flocked in as they've gone to no place on topside of the earth, because they thought that if they could only come here, they could get away from their tears. There are more tears in Southern California than any place that I know anything about.

Many people shed tears here. A columnist several years ago on Broadway said, For every light that burns on Broadway, there's a broken heart. Go up sometimes on Mulholland Drive or someplace where you can look down.

Get up on this 42-story building on a clear night and look out at the lights. There are a lot of lights in Southern California, and for every light, there's a broken heart. It'll be wonderful to be in a place where there are no tears.

May I say to you, that itself makes heaven a very attractive place. It'll be a place where there'll be no more tears that will be shed. You notice the second thing he says, And there shall be no more death.

We're told that the last enemy to be destroyed is death. Death means, of course, eternal death, means separation from God. And when the last enemy is destroyed, that means everything is then fixed firmly for eternity.

There'll be no more changes after that. Those that are lost are lost. Those that are saved are saved.

And there'll be no more death. There'll be no more separation from God. And death will have been destroyed.

There'll be no physical death today. There is also in this world in which we live a continual funeral march to the cemeteries. There's never a time of the day or night, but what somewhere on this earth, the march is to the cemetery.

May I say to you, heaven will be a place where there'll be no more death. That makes it a very attractive place. No more separation then from loved ones.

And then the other things that he mentions here, Neither sorrow. There'll be no sorrow there. Not only death, but there'll be no one there to sorrow because of the loss of loved ones, or because of disappointment, or because of these other tragedies that come to us in this life.

Neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain. And may I say to you, pain today is something I'm confident that God uses. And pain and trouble is common to man today.

Job, you remember, put it like this, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. And that's caused by a law of dynamics that is the updraft of the air created by the heat, and sparks will always go up. And by the same kind of a law, man today is born to trouble.

This really said it's the lot of man to suffer. The one thing God uses today, someone has said, pleasure and pain are the only springs of action in man, and always will be. They move man today.

But pain is a very terrible thing. It's a very awful thing. I told this little story the other day concerning Dr. Simpson.

I'd like to repeat it tonight. Dr. Simpson, he was Sir James Simpson of Scotland. He was a great surgeon and a wonderful Christian back in about 1850.

And he did not discover or invent chloroform, a Frenchman did that. And it was brought to Scotland. But this man was the first man to use it in operations.

And you would be surprised at the hue and the cry that went up all over the British Isles because he was using chloroform. And not only did Christians, but non-Christians, and the public said that God has caused man to suffer and to endure pain, and that's heathen and pagan to do that sort of thing. And Dr. Simpson was concerned because he was a Christian and he did want to do the right thing.

And so he withdrew from society for a time and he determined he'd go through the Bible and he'd see what the Word of God really had to say about it. And it's quite wonderful, a conclusion that he came to. He said that he had to, having gone through the Bible, he went back and he said that he read again and again that when God made Eve and took the rib out of Adam, he put him in a deep sleep.

May I say to you, then Dr. Simpson said, if God, when he operated, used an anesthetic, then he says, I think I will use an anesthetic. I'm convinced that pain is something God never intended man to have. It came in because of sin, and because of sin it became in one sense a blessing for us today.

It protects us. You can't leave your hand too long on a hot stove because of the pain. And there are many things that come to us today, and we learn wonderful lessons.

The little child that wants to reach for the light globe, after he touches it once, he's learned the lesson. He'll not be touching it again because of the pain. We learn lessons today through pain, but thank God we're coming to a place where someday, where there'll be no more pain, and what a glorious, wonderful thing

that will be.

Now we're told here, for the former things are passed away. Thank God for that. These things today that besiege mankind, that dog our steps, that doesn't make any difference who you are or where you are, that you can avoid these things.

You couldn't have enough money tonight to miss death. You couldn't have enough money tonight to avoid weeping. It seems today like the rich are the ones that are more dissatisfied with life than anyone else.

But these things will be passed away. But now we come to the last thing I'd like to mention concerning heaven, and I think it's the most wonderful thing of all. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.

And in case you and I were not assured, he said unto me, Write, for these words are true and faithful. What's true and faithful? Behold, I make all things new. That's going to be the wonder of heaven.

There'll be a new heaven. There'll be a new earth. There's the new Jerusalem.

I will get a new body. You'll get a new body. But he says I'm going to make all things new.

I'm going to start over again. I want to start over again. I don't know about you tonight, but I'm not satisfied with my life or you.

I have felt hemmed in, frustrated. I've never been able to accomplish what I want to accomplish. May I be very frank with you? I've never been the man that I've wanted to be.

I have never been the preacher that I've wanted to be. I have never preached the sermon I've really wanted to preach. I've never been the husband that I wanted to be.

I've never been the father that I've wanted to be. I've never been the Christian that I wanted to be. And I said to my wife some time ago that, I said, you know, I have the most glorious itinerary and for the next two years, not only to go to Europe and to Israel, but to Alaska, to South America, to the Caribbean, to the Orient.

May I say to you that again, this frustration may not make it. Always in this life there's been that hindrance, but he says, behold, I make all things new. And when you get to the new Jerusalem, McGee, you can start over again.

And you're going to live for the first time. Paul recognized that. Paul said, I've kept the faith.

I have fought a good fight, kept the faith, and the time of my departure has come. You know what he meant by departure? It's the word that these fellows had to learn in Greek, the verb leuo. And any one of them there could stand up and give you leuo, leues, leues, couldn't you fellas? Leuomen, leueti, leusi.

That means to loose, means to unloose. And anna means to untie. Paul says, the time of my analysis has come.

I've just been a boat tied up to the harbor. I'm going to put out to sea now. I'm really going to start living.

I make all things new, he said. A new life, a new opportunity, no hindrances. And to be able to do the thing that you're able to do.

When I rode in the other morning with my daughter to work, as usual the freeway was clogged up, cars on every side. And I said to her, I said, you ever stop to think that in all of these cars there are people on the way to work and 99% of them are going to a job they hate? Oh boy, back to the rat race, back to the salt mine, Monday morning, how terrible. Thank God we'll get to a place where we're going to do what we want to do.

And we'll have eternity to do it. Not just a brief lifetime down here, but just think of the opportunity and the development that they might be. When Dr. Chafer died, I always felt he had one of the finest minds of any man I'd ever met.

I said to a friend of mine, I said, wouldn't it be wonderful if you could go in and lift out his brain and put it up here where I'm supposed to have one? Wouldn't it be wonderful so that it could carry on? My friend, when you reach 70, 80, or 100 years old, you're still an infant. There you haven't even started. You've just learned your ABCs.

And you have an eternity to grow and develop. It says, of the increase of his kingdom there is no end. It's development and growth continually on out into eternity.

I don't know about you, but that'll be a wonderful place to go to. Let me ask you now in closing, are you interested in going there? Maybe I should ask this question. Are you going there? Maybe there's someone here tonight says, well, look, I want to go there.

Well, the Lord Jesus answered the question back in the 14th of John. I come back and I'm through now after this. The Lord Jesus said, and whither I go ye know in the way ye know.

He says, I go to prepare this place now, and if I go, I'll come again. I'll receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know in the way ye know.

There was sitting there a man by the name of Thomas. We call him Doubting Thomas. He had a question mark for a brain.

Don't get the idea that our Lord called a group of gullible fellows that fell for everything. If you'll go through the record very carefully, I wouldn't want any one of them. There wasn't a one in a lot.

There were always questioning, always raising doubts. Every one of them was a problem child that we know anything about. Simon Peter, you wouldn't want him, would you? He himself told the Lord, go get somebody else.

I failed. Thomas, a doubter. When our Lord says, whither I go in the way ye know, Thomas says, wait just a minute.

You say, you know, we know where you're going. We don't know where you're going. How can we know the way? I don't know about you.

I'm glad he was there. He asked my question. Is that your question? I'd like to say, Lord, this is wonderful.

I want to go, but where's the road map? He answered it. He made it clear there's no road map. He said to Thomas, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man cometh to the Father but by me. He made a dead-end street out of every cult and ism in Southern California. He said, the only way to the Father is by me.

And he answered a question. The way to God is a person. It's not a way.

It's not a system. It's not even a church. It's not a ceremony.

All these are important, but that's not the way to God. The way to God is a person, and it's so simple. And this is not an oversimplification.

As a theologian tried to tell you, he says, that's oversimplification. It's not an oversimplification. Either you have Christ or you don't have Christ.

Either you trust him or you don't trust him. I am the way, he said, the truth and the life. No man cometh to the Father but by me.

May I say to you tonight, the way to this place we're talking about is through a person, and that person is Christ. Shall we bow our heads in prayer? Heavenly Father, we rejoice tonight in thy goodness and grace and mercy to us, and we thank thee that though thou hast told us so little, thou hast told us enough, that though a man be a wayfaring man and a fool, he need not err. We pray, therefore, we may listen to the one who today says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man cometh to the Father but by me. We pray these things in his name. Amen.

The way to heaven is through the person of Jesus Christ. He is the one who has provided for us the salvation we need to spend all eternity in the presence of God. Is the Spirit of God speaking to your heart? Have you come to the realization that you're a sinner in need of a Savior? Then turn to God right now and put your trust in Jesus Christ to save you.

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