

SERMON – PASTOR GREG GRAHAM
ADVENT 1 3.12.2023

HEAVEN IS OUR FUTURE. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. In a recent conversation I was asked: “What is heaven like?” How would you respond? Let us pray.

What is heaven like? It is a great question. It is foundational to our faith. In Genesis 1:1 we hear: “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*” In the prayer that Jesus gave to us we have: “*Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.*” In the Apostles Creed we confess: I believe in God the maker of heaven and earth. Earth we know- we are born, we live and we will die living here on earth. But we believe that we will live forever in heaven. What is it like?

In answer to any question about the Christian faith I go to God’s holy and trustworthy word- the Bible. It is a big book- in fact 66 books and it contains thousands of words- apparently about 800,000 words! But strangely there are not many descriptions of heaven.

Isaiah 11 speaks of God’s holy mountain where the wolf will lie down with the lamb...a place where there will be no more harm or destruction and the whole earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD/YAHWEH.

Ezekiel 40-44 speaks of a new and perfect Temple where the Glory of the Lord will live among the Israelites forever.

Mark 12:24. Jesus said: “*When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage.*”

And of course Jesus gave many parables about the Kingdom of heaven but the descriptions are minimal.

And then there are the last two chapters of Revelation: *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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem...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. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying of pain, for the old order of things has passed away...The wall was made of jasper, and the city pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone...I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp...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...No longer will there be any curse.*

A few hundred words out of the nearly 800,000 words in the Bible which describe heaven. Not much is it? Out of these words, which strike you the most? What are you looking forward to in heaven? Think about it as I read the Revelation reading again. *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. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem...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.*

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Personally I am looking forward to NOT SINNING, to perfect and eternal PEACE AND HARMONY. To LIFE and LIGHT. To being with God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Heaven motivates me and helps me to persevere in the Christian faith. But there are two other motivations for me:

THANKFULNESS. I know what hell is like. I know what it is to not know that Jesus loves me. I know that I should be going to hell. But I am not. Because: *Even though I was dead in my transgressions and sins...God, because of His great love for (me and you) made (me and you) alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions- it is by grace we have been saved (Ephesians 2).*

TODAY. Heaven is not just for eternity- it is for today and every day that we live here on earth. Luther speaks of this reality in his Small Catechism: (God) is truly our Father and we are truly His children and so we can approach him boldly and confidently in prayer...Our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit so that by His grace we can live a godly life. And the Apostle Paul spoke of the reality of God with us TODAY: *I have learned the secret of being content whatever the circumstances...I can do everything through Him who gives me strength.*

But how can we be sure of going to heaven? Revelation 21:27 proclaims: *Nothing impure will ever enter (into the City of God), nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

Our names were written in the Lamb's book of life when we were baptised. Since then we all have struggled to live the holy life even as Christ has made us holy. But we have strived, we have prayed, we have repented and we have trusted in the One who said: *I AM the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?* And with Martha we have already confessed: *Yes, Lord. I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God.*

And on the basis of our baptism and our God given faith in Jesus Christ- we will live forever in peace and harmony, in love and light and with God- Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For ever and ever. Amen.