

What Will Heaven Be Like?

1. Warm-up Question: On Sunday, we began a new sermon series on heaven. When you hear the word “heaven,” what image first pops into your mind?
2. Theologian Henri Nouwen told a parable about twins who have a conversation in their mother’s womb before birth. The sister tells her brother she believes in life after birth. Her brother insists there’s nothing beyond the dark cozy womb and the cord that feeds them. After all, that’s all they’ve ever experienced. His sister insists there must be more, a place of light and freedom. She tells her brother she believes there is a mother. She says the squeezes they feel are getting them ready to encounter a beautiful place where they will be face-to-face with their mother. What lessons do you think Nouwen was trying to communicate through this parable?
3. Nouwen’s parable reminds us how difficult it is to imagine something we’ve never experienced – something completely beyond our frame of reference. Heaven is like that, as the Bible makes clear.
 - a. Read II Corinthians 12:1-4. As best we can tell, the “person” Paul speaks about here is himself. What do you glean from verse 4 about heaven?
 - b. Read I Corinthians 13:11-12. In the original Greek, the first phrase in verse 12 says, “Now we see fuzzy reflections in a mirror that are like a riddle.” What do these verses tell us about heaven and our ability to imagine it?
 - c. Read I Corinthians 2:9. What does this verse tell us about heaven?
4. By definition, God’s dwelling exists outside space and time. So imagine the challenge God faces trying to describe to us a place that is completely different than anything we’ve ever experienced. God telling us about heaven would be like us trying to explain something from our modern world to a caveman.
 - a. Suppose you travelled back in time and tried to explain jet planes and airports to a caveman. Roleplay it. Someone be the caveman and another the explainer.
 - b. Once the roleplay is finished, consider this question: Does the caveman now know the truth about jets and airports?
 - c. The only way to explain something to someone who’s never experienced it is through metaphor. A metaphor is where you compare something someone has experienced to something they’ve not. Jeff suggested that the only way the Bible can explain heaven to us is by using crude earthly metaphors. Do you buy that? If so, what are the implications for what the Bible tells us about heaven? Should we take the biblical metaphors for heaven literally?
5. Every thoughtful conversation about heaven begins, Jeff suggested, with the recognition that heaven is so completely other, human words can point to it, but never

capture it. Words and word pictures will always fall short. But words are all we've got. So recognizing our limitations, God offers us a series of word pictures in the Bible. On Sunday we looked at one of those word pictures. Read John 14:1-7.

- a. The King James translation of verse 2 says, "In my Father's house are many mansions," which created one of the dominant images of heaven. We've been taught to picture heaven as being full of lavish mansions. If you were to receive a mansion in heaven, describe what you hope it would look like? Does the idea of mansions in heaven appeal to you? Why or why not?
 - b. The Greek word used in verse 2 is *monai* [mon-AY], which means abodes, dwelling places, rooms. Modern translations render verse 2 as, "In my Father's house are many dwelling places." Archeological findings indicate that Jesus was referring to a typical form of housing in his culture where multiple single-room dwellings were built around a single shared courtyard. The entire compound was regarded as a house (singular) though many families lived there in their individual rooms. Entire extended families and friendship circles might occupy a single "monai." Nunnally says, "It wasn't fancy . . . , but it was home! It represented the close-knit, supportive, loving, extended families that ate, worked, played, and worshiped together. In this respect, it served as the ideal picture of heaven that Jesus sought to convey – an ongoing (eternal) 'Walton's Mountain.'" How do you feel about this way of picturing heaven? Does it challenge your old way of seeing heaven? Is this a better way to picture it? Why or why not?
6. John 14:3 tells us something even more important about heaven. There Jesus says, "I go to prepare a place for you . . . , and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." In other words, heaven is a place where we will be forever in the presence of Jesus. It's as if he's going to have his own room right there in the family compound with us, at the dinner table each night and lingering afterward to swap stories and insights.
- a. Down here on earth, many of us have a deep sense of being separated from "our Source." Even the best experiences on earth leave us wanting more. We've never felt a timeless, infinite love. When we're with Jesus we will. Those who've had near-death experiences often describe an indescribable feeling of complete love and contentment. Down here on earth, do you feel a longing or loneliness for God? How would you describe that longing or loneliness?
 - b. To help us imagine being in the presence of Jesus, Jeff shared the story told in the movie "Hachi," which is based on a true story of an Akita dog who bonded deeply with his beloved master, Parker. After his master's death, Hachi kept returning to the train station each day for 10 years hoping Parker would get off the train. If any in your Oasis haven't heard the story, tell it to them, including the ending scene where Hachi reunites with Parker. Jeff said, "That's what heaven will feel like to us. We're Hachi and Jesus is Parker." Describe how you think Hachi felt when in the presence of Parker here on earth. Describe how you think he felt when he was reunited with Parker in heaven. What do you think infinite love feels like? How do you feel about that way of picturing heaven?