

SERMON: 11 June 2017 – Rev Dr Brenda Robson

Revelation 21:1–5 & 22:1- 6

Last month, about four weeks ago, I spoke about heaven and what happens when we die. People are fascinated by heaven, they ask all sorts of question, some with answers, some leading to speculation, some with no answers - yet.

Scripture tells us that “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face.” Then we will have all the answers to our questions about heaven and we will wish we did not fret so much in this life!

What will heaven look like?

There are times when we catch glimpses of heaven on this earth. Why would that not be so – God created this earth and the universe, it is full of the wondrous things created from his imagination.

Iona

Grand Canyon

Yosemite – El Capitan – climber this week

You will have your own places of awesome beauty

It might be your own garden – flowers and trees and birds and bumblebees and sunlight

God made incredible things we cannot see or fathom – the wings of a butterfly or dragonfly, the colours of birds, the social life of a bee hive or ant colony, the osprey that flies to Africa and returns to its nest in spring, the salmon that crosses oceans and returns to the river where it spawned.

He created the earth within an amazing universe. Everything is perfectly balanced on earth to sustain life. A degree of change in any dimension would mean no life could survive.

The man made world can also be beautiful – the grandeur of Cologne Cathedral and the quiet simplicity of Iona Abbey, the new Forth Bridge, city buildings and monuments

But of course the world also contains ugliness and sin and disease and pollution and crime and terrorism and pain and all the things of darkness.

God promises a new earth – it will be as he had intended – all beauty and no sin and ugliness.

And in our resurrected life with Jesus we will live on that new earth, and heaven and earth will be one.

Then the dwelling of God will be with men and women and he will live with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

All things in heaven and on earth will be brought together, under one head, Jesus Christ.

And so heaven might look like the perfect earth, earth as God intended it

Should we expect to maintain our identities in heaven?

God made each one of us unique with our own identities and personalities and eccentricities. Even identical twins are not identical. God created us to be individuals. In heaven we will be individuals, not some spiritual mass without body and identity.

Matthew 17 - Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and with them ascended a high mountain, where he was transfigured (changed in form) before them. His face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light. In connection with this glorious event, there appeared Moses and Elijah, who talked with the Lord.

In spite of the fact that these Old Testament saints had been dead for centuries, the apostles clearly recognized them, for Peter proposed the building of three shelters — one for Christ, one for Moses, and one for Elijah (Mt. 17:4).

If this context teaches that those whom we have not personally known on earth can be recognized after death, then surely it must imply that those whom we **have** known will be familiar to us in the future state.

Jesus said in **Matthew 8:11** that when we sit at the great banquet in heaven, we will eat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, sitting with particular individuals.

Those who receive this promise will associate with these Old Testament worthies in heaven. If that were not so, it would be no promise at all. And it follows that we will also associate with our past generations, those who have gone before. Otherwise the promise would be no promise at all.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

In the narrative concerning the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), a very important truth is emphasized. Death does not abolish earth's memories.

First, the rich man saw and recognized Lazarus (Luke 16:23). There is personal recognition after death!

Second, he was challenged to remember his own past.

Finally, he recalled his unprepared brothers back on earth.

Luke 16 - In one of his famous parables, Jesus told of a certain “**unrighteous steward**” who was dismissed from his position. Knowing he was about to lose his job, the steward reduced the debts of certain men who owed his Lord. Though the business ethics of this servant were not noble, nevertheless, the man’s master recognized a certain shrewdness in his action, in that he had used his present resources to make preparation for the future.

What Jesus said about this story was this - “Use your worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone (your money, life itself) you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings” (Luke 16:9).

The principle being taught is this: use your financial means to do good now [i.e., work for the saving of souls], so that when it [your money] fails [by reason of your death, or the end of time] they [your converts] will welcome you into heaven.

This certainly indicates future recognition of present associates. As one theologian wrote in 1881 -

It is well to mark the hint we have here that we shall meet and know in heaven the friends whom we have known on earth. If those whom we have benefited on earth shall meet and welcome us in heaven, surely also will beloved friends and relatives do the same (How, 1881).

Will we be called by our present names in heaven?

The names of God’s children appear in the Lamb’s book of life (Revelation 20:15; 21:27). These are our earthly names just as God refers to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. The earthly names of the 12 sons of Israel are written on the city gates.

In addition to our earthly name, we will receive a new name in heaven – (Isaiah 62:2, Isaiah 65:15, Revelation 2:17; 3:12) – like Jacob who was also Israel, Cephas who was Peter, Saul who became Paul.

We will be individuals in heaven with our original names in the book of life and our new names given to us

Will we become angels in heaven?

This is a question I have often been asked. People will say after a death that heaven has gained a new angel, particularly in the case of a child. But this is not the case. In death the person moves from one place to another. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5: 8, at death we are away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Angels are angels and humans are humans. Angels are beings with their own history and identities reflected in the fact that they have personal names – Michael and Gabriel to name two.

Angels are directed by God to serve us on earth – **Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14).**

In heaven humans will govern angels (1 Corinthians 6:2 -3)

The fact that angels have served us on earth will make meeting them in heaven fascinating. They have been with us from birth, protecting us, standing by us, doing whatever they could and God commanded. They may have seen every moment of our lives. They have guarded us, gone into battle for us, served as God’s agents in answering our prayers. These amazing brilliant creatures have lived with God from the beginning.

Are our loved ones looking down on us? What do they see?

It is speculation to wonder how much the saints in heaven know about events on earth. We don’t know. The Roman Catholic Church is going beyond the bible when they pray to the saints for help or to intercede on their behalf with God. Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and men and women.

God is providing the greatest joy and happiness for those with him in heaven. It is unlikely that they need to know what is happening on earth. If they need to know something for their joy to be complete then no doubt God will reveal that to them.

What will our bodies be like in heaven?

The only bodies we have ever known are weak and diseased remnants of the original bodies God made for human beings. Our bodies are frail, limited, increasingly not fit for purpose! Our spirit inside remains strong and willing but the body declines. Our resurrection bodies will be free of the curse of disease and brokenness, weakness and frailty. Our senses will be heightened to take in all that God has planned for us. The resurrected Jesus saw, heard, felt, cooked and ate. The bible is full of references to eating in heaven

We will work, be active and occupied. Unemployed people are generally not happy and We will rest and sleep and be refreshed. We will be creative, we will make things, practical and artistic. God has given us incredible gifts and abilities and

talents on earth, why would he remove these in heaven? We will know greater and new gifts and abilities and greater fulfillment in achieving.

Accept the promises of God about our glorious and complete life in him after we end this life. God has set a highway before us – a highway of blessing and comfort and strength and hope. We do not need to go down little alleyways, dead ends, asking questions of heaven and eternal life that we don't need the answers to.

We can be satisfied that all we need to know is found in the Bible. There have been many books and articles in recent years written by and about people who have died, gone to heaven and come back again. One that comes to mind is "Heaven is Real." If you read these books, hold onto them lightly. I always ask myself, is this story real, is it authentic, is it genuine, is it consistent with what the Bible says. With so much fake news around and the changing of facts to suit situations, I tend to remain sceptical and would usually not read these books beyond the first pages. They often don't feel right. Why would we need more than the Word of God that is authentic, complete, God breathing.

It says in the last verses of Revelation that if anyone adds anything to the words in the Bible or removes any words, then God will deal with them severely. The Bible is sufficient.

The promises of God about our eternal life in heaven are all we need to live this life with joy and hope and expectation that the best is yet to come.

Philippians 1:21 – For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in this body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know. I am torn between the two. I desire to depart and to be with Christ which is better by far but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

Luke 20:36–38 People can no longer die; for they are like angels. They are God's children since they are children of the resurrection....even Moses showed that the dead rise for he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for to him, all are alive.

1 Corinthians 15:54-58 (The Message)

51-57 But let me tell you something wonderful, a mystery I'll probably never fully understand. We're not all going to die—but we are all going to be changed. You hear a blast to end all blasts from a trumpet, and in the time that you look up and blink your eyes—it's over. On signal from that trumpet from heaven, the dead will be up and out of their graves, beyond the reach of death, never to die again. At the same moment and in the same way, we'll all be changed. In the resurrection

scheme of things, this has to happen: everything perishable taken off the shelves and replaced by the imperishable, this mortal replaced by the immortal. Then the saying will come true:

Death swallowed by triumphant Life! Who got the last word, oh, Death? Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now?

It was sin that made death so frightening and law-code guilt that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!

58 With all this going for us, my dear, dear friends, stand your ground. And don't hold back. Throw yourselves into the work of the Master, confident that nothing you do for him is a waste of time or effort.

Amen