

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## “Heaven: Our Misconceptions”

Revelation 21:1-27

2006

### Introduction

#### We're Almost Home!

In 1952, a young woman named Florence Chadwick stepped off Catalina Island, into the Pacific Ocean. Her goal was to swim to the shore of mainland California, 21 miles away.

It was foggy and chilly. She could barely see the boats alongside her. Florence swam for fifteen hours. She begged to be taken out of the water. Her mother, in a boat alongside, told her she could make it. Finally, physically and emotionally exhausted, she gave up and stopped swimming. They pulled her out. Then, when Florence Chadwick was on the boat she discovered the truth: the shore was less than half a mile away. She was 98% of the way home. At a news conference the next day she said this: “All I could see was the fog. . . . **I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it.**”

Today I want to begin a sermon series on Heaven that is designed to blow away the fog and enable you to:

1. See the shores of God's celestial city and your eternal home
2. Have a fuller understating of what the Bible actually teaches about Heaven
3. Inspire you to invest your life on earth wisely
4. Encourage you to live a life of purity and holiness (1 Jn 3:2-3)
5. Be excited about sharing the Good News of God's Kingdom with as many of your family members, co-workers and friends as possible.
6. Look forward with great anticipation to Heaven, which includes a resurrected life in a resurrected body, with the resurrected Christ on a resurrected Earth.

In this series on Heaven, we will discover many things about eternal life:

1. What Heaven will be like
2. Who will be there
3. What our bodies will like
4. What will we remember from our life on earth
5. What life will be like and where we will be living
6. What we will be doing
7. What our physical capacities will be
8. What kind of relationships will we have with God and with each other
9. What the environment will be like and whether there will be animals there
10. What it will be like to rule and reign with Christ over heaven and earth

But most importantly, we will discover that God never gave up on his original plan for human beings to dwell on earth. In fact, the climax of history will be the creation of new heavens and a New Earth, a resurrected universe inhabited by resurrected people living with the resurrected Jesus.

## I The Content Of Our Misconceptions

A. Sitting on clouds with harps wearing white robes and crowns

B. Watching fat little cherubs floating by

C. Spending all of eternity:

1. **Worshipping** God and Jesus Christ - Rev 4-6

2. Recounting the experiences of past saints - Hebrews 11:1-12:1

a. Biblical heroes: Moses, Joshua, Caleb, David, Daniel, and his mighty men, Josiah, Jehoshaphat, Peter, John, Stephen, Paul, Timothy, etc.

b. Saints of the past: Polycarp, Martin Luther, William Cary, Adoniram Judson, David Livingstone, Hudson Taylor, Jim Elliot, etc.

3. Peppering God with:

a. Our “**Why**” questions

1. Why did you make mosquitoes and why is the avocado pit so big?

2. Why do bad things happen to good people?

3. Why do we lose socks in the dryer and where do they go?

4. Why is the food that tastes the best the worst for us?

5. Why did JFK have to die and who really killed him?

b. Our “**Theological**” questions

1. How does the Trinity exactly work?

2. How can you hear everyone’s prayers at the same time?

3. Did Jesus measure twice and cut once or just go ahead and cut?

4. Which English translation of the Bible was the most accurate?

5. Did Adam and Eve have belly buttons or not?”

4. Living a life disconnected from the **past**

Some have taught that since Heaven won’t be a place of tears, sorrow or sadness, we won’t remember very much of our past since so much of it involved pain and suffering. And we won’t remember our dead unbelieving relatives, since that too would involve a certain grief.

The common misconception: “I’ve been a Christian since I was five. I’m married to a youth pastor. When I was seven, a teacher at my Christian school told me that when I got to Heaven, I wouldn’t know anyone or anything from earth. I was terrified of dying. . . . It’s been really hard for me to advance in my Christian walk because of this **fear of Heaven and eternal life.**”

5. Anticipating an endless, monotonous, unfulfilling **future**

**John Eldredge in *The Journey of Desire*:**

"Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service.... We have settled on an image of the never-ending sing-along in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and ever, amen. And our heart sinks. *Forever and ever? That's it? That's the good news?* And then we sigh and feel guilty that we are not more 'spiritual.' We lose heart, and we turn once more to the present to find what life we can."

**Quote:** Calvin Miller

"I once led a man to Christ who loved the sunny country of common sense, but he could not put up with the mysteries of godliness. He kept shoving common sense at me, while I kept trying to show him that the mysteries held the meaning of faith.

One day he said, "Pastor, you know this new eternal life I have—well, I've been thinking about it. What are we going to do all day long for eternity?"

"We'll praise the Lord," I said.

"Forever—for 10 million years we're going to stand around and praise the Lord?"

"Well, yes," I said, although heaven was beginning to sound like cable television.

"For millions and millions of years?" he said. "Couldn't we just stop now and then and mess around a while?"

I kidded him about his "dumb questions," but I have to admit similar questions of my own at times. How meager our understanding of praise—and heaven!"

## II The Sources Of Our Misconceptions

### A. The world:

#### 1. History and **culture**

Every culture throughout human history has a God-given belief in the afterlife.

a. Ancient Egyptians: Heaven is a physical place far above the Earth in a "dark area" of space where there were no stars.

b. Australian aborigines: Heaven was a distant island beyond the western horizon.

c. Finns: Heaven was a distant island in the faraway east

d. Mexicans, Peruvians and Eskimos: Heaven is on the sun or moon

e. Native Americans: Heaven is an eternal Happy Hunting ground

f. East Indians: Heaven is the paradise of Shiva on Mt. Kailasa located in Tibet.

g. Polynesians: Heaven is in Hawaiki which means "our homeland."

Rom 1:21 "For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."

#### 2. False religions and philosophies:

"While there are abundant and varied sources for conceptions of Heaven, the typical believer's view appears to depend largely on his particular religious tradition.

- a. False Theistic religions: Mormonism, Jehovah Witnesses, Islam all have a twisted and distorted version of what the Bible teaches about the afterlife and Heaven.
- b. Eastern religions: Heaven is Moksha or Nirvana, the state of eternal nothingness ... where reincarnation is no longer needed and spirit dissolves as an individual entity and joins the collective cosmic essence, as "a drop of rain joins the ocean." i.e. become one with the Universe.
- c. Cults including Christian Science: Heaven is a state of mind -- not a place. People experience their own heaven or hell right here on earth."

Matt 24:10-11 "At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people."

### 3. **Media:** Literature, film

**Barna Research Group poll:** "An overwhelming majority of Americans continue to believe that there is life after death and that heaven and hell exist."

But what people actually believe about Heaven and Hell varies widely. A Barna spokesman said, "They're cutting and pasting religious views from a variety of different sources—television, movies, conversations with their friends."

The result is a highly subjective theology of the afterlife, disconnected from the biblical doctrine of Heaven.

- a. Movies: Most movies about God or heaven like "Oh, God", "Heaven Can Wait", "It's a Wonderful Life" have a consistent message that Heaven is what you make of your life on earth.
- b. Near-death experiences

One of the most common characteristics of the so-called near- death experience involves encountering a being of light, Jesus Christ, who informs the person that:

1. Death is good and is not to be feared.
2. Sin is not a problem.
3. There is no hell to worry about.
4. All people are welcome to heaven, regardless of whether they have placed faith in Christ.
5. All religions are equally valid.

Most people buy into this stuff not realizing that the person in their vision is not Jesus, but rather Satan, posing as an Angel of Light (2 Corinthians 11:14-15) in order to lead people straight into Hell.

## B. The church

### 1. An undeveloped theology of Heaven

1 Thess 4:13 “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.”

**Quote:** Randy Alcorn, Heaven

”John Calvin, the great expositor, never wrote a commentary on Revelation and never dealt with the eternal state at any length. Though he encourages meditation on Heaven in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, his theology of Heaven seems strikingly weak compared to his theology of God, Christ, salvation, Scripture, and the church. A great deal has been written about eschatology—the study of the end times—but comparatively little about Heaven.”

Theologian Reinhold Niebuhr wrote an in-depth two-volume set titled *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. Remarkably, he had nothing to say about Heaven.

William Shedd's three-volume *Dogmatic Theology* contains eighty-seven pages on eternal punishment, but only two on Heaven.

In his nine-hundred-page theology, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones devotes less than two pages to the eternal state and the New Earth.

Louis Berkhof's classic *Systematic Theology* devotes thirty-eight pages to creation, forty pages to baptism and communion, and fifteen pages to the intermediate state. Yet it contains only two pages on Hell and one page on the eternal state.

Does Scripture really have so little to say? Are there so few theological implications to this subject? The biblical answer, I believe, is an emphatic *no!*”

We'll discover together in the weeks ahead just how much the Bible has to say about the subject of Heaven.

### 2. A lack of biblical teaching on Heaven

The truth is, despite the fact that the human heart cries out for answers about the afterlife and was designed by God to anticipate it with great joy, the church has often failed to give attention to the place and condition of our eternal destiny.

Many Christians who've gone to church all their adult lives (especially those under fifty) can't recall having heard a single sermon on Heaven. It's occasionally mentioned, but rarely emphasized, and *almost never* is it developed as a topic. We're told how to *get* to Heaven, and that it's a better destination than Hell, but we're taught remarkably little about Heaven itself.

Some of the verses that are used to justify not exploring this topic include:

1. Deut 29:29 “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.”
2. 1 Cor 2:9 “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”
3. 2 Cor 12:3-5 “And I know that this man-whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows -- was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.”

### C. Satan

The primary explanation for why so many Christians have such a vague, negative, and uninspired view of Heaven is Satan himself.

#### 1. His person

- a. The ancient serpent - Gen 3:1; Rev 12:9; 20:2
- b. The father of lies and the **deceiver** of the world - John 8:44
- c. The one who leads the whole world astray - Rev 12:9

Some of Satan's favorite lies are about Heaven:

Rev 13:5-6 “The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. 6 He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to **slander his name** and **his dwelling place** and **those who live in heaven.**”

#### 2. His purpose

- a. To **usurp** God’s authority and glory - Is 14:12-15
- b. To thwart God’s plan of redemption  
After being evicted from Heaven, the devil has made it his ambition to undermine God’s eternal plan to redeem mankind and to restore the earth.
- c. To **blockade** the way to Heaven  
Matt 23:13 “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.”

#### 3. His plan

- a. To deter **salvation** though faith in Jesus Christ
  1. He tempts us to doubt and disobey God - Matt 4:1-10
  2. He steals away the good seed from unbelievers - Matt 13:19
  3. He desires “only to steal and kill and destroy” - John 10:10

b. To discourage service and evangelism

Acts 17:13 “When the Jews in Thessalonica learned that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea, they went there too, agitating the crowds and stirring them up.”

c. To depress godly **anticipation** of Heaven

Satan doesn't need to convince us that Heaven doesn't exist. He only needs to convince us that Heaven is a boring, monotonous, disembodied experience. If we believe that lie, we'll be robbed of our joy and anticipation.

### III The Consequences Of Our Misconceptions

A. An **undeveloped** understanding of Heaven

**Quote:** Richard Baxter

“My knowledge of that life is small,  
The eye of faith is dim,  
But it's enough that Christ knows all,  
And I shall be with him.

**Quote:** James Packer, *Your Father Loves You*

“We know very little about heaven, but I once heard a theologian describe it as “an unknown region with a well-know inhabitant,” and there is not a better way to think of it than that.”

As Paul said in 1 Cor 15:19, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”

B. A distorted and flawed view of Heaven

Nineteenth-century British theologian J. C. Ryle said, “I pity the man who never thinks about heaven.”

We could also say, "I pity the man who never thinks *accurately* about Heaven."

It's our inaccurate thinking, I believe, that causes us to think so little about Heaven.

2 Tim 2:15 “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

C. An **unappealing** view of Heaven:

1. Resulting in a low drive for **eternal** things

Col 3:1-4 “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

2. Resulting in a high drive for temporal things

Matt 6:19-21 “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

3. Resulting in a **neglect** of the Great Commission - Matt 28:19-20

Why should we share the "good news" that people can spend eternity in a boring, ghostly place that even *we're* not looking forward to?

## Conclusion

### Are You Looking Forward to Heaven?

J. C. Ryle illustrated his point this way: “The man who is about to sail for Australia or New Zealand as a settler, is naturally anxious to know something about his future home, its climate, its employments, its inhabitants, its ways, its customs. All these are subjects of deep interest to him. You are leaving the land of your nativity, you are going to spend the rest of your life in a new hemisphere. It would be strange indeed if you did not desire information about your new abode. Now surely, if we hope to dwell for ever in that "better country, even a heavenly one," we ought to seek all the knowledge we can get about it. Before we go to our eternal home we should try to become acquainted with it.”

Over the next 5 weeks, we are going to get better acquainted with our future home in Heaven by looking into God’s Ultimate Guide to Heaven -- the Bible. Along the way, we will find ourselves amazed at what we discover, excited about the trip, looking past life’s daily challenges and properly prepared for the glorious life to come!

I encourage you to bring some friends and be ready for some remarkably Good News! Let me whet your appetite for next week by saying that Heaven is going to look an awful lot like Kauai -- only without any sin, sickness, sorrow, suffering, struggle, etc.

### Resources used in Heaven series:

Alcorn, R. (2004). *Heaven*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

MacArthur, J. (1987). *Where Heaven Is and What It Is Like*.

<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/90-13/where-heaven-is-and-what-it-is-like>

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