

## **WHAT WILL YOU DO IN HEAVEN?      REV. 5:11-14, 7:9-12; MATT. 25:14-23**

“Will we have fun in Heaven?” That was the question an elderly gentleman who had become a follower of Jesus late in his life asked of a Christian employee at the care center where he lived: “Will we have fun in Heaven?” How would you answer that question? The Christian woman he asked was totally dismayed by his question and replied, “Oh, no!” Apparently that dear woman – whoever she was – believed what many followers of Jesus believe: fun is sinful and God is boring; therefore, Heaven will be dull. If so many Christians fall for that lie, is it any wonder that a religious skeptic like the science fiction writer, Isaac Asimov once observed, “I don’t believe in an afterlife, so I don’t have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse.” But the truth is that Heaven will be a place of increasing happiness, eternal pleasure and endless joy. God isn’t boring; we are. We assume Heaven is boring, because – frankly – our own Christian lives are often boring.

Today we continue our study of *Heaven: A Restored Place for Redeemed People* by asking and trying to answer this question, “What will you do in Heaven?” A quick review. When you die, your spirit goes to a very real place - either present Hell or present Heaven – while your dead, physical body stays here. If you’re a follower of Jesus, you are immediately in God’s presence experiencing great joy and rest. You might receive an intermediate body but the Bible isn’t definite about that matter. Both present Hell and present Heaven are temporary places, however. At some point in the future, Jesus will return to this planet. When He does He will create the New Heaven and the New Earth. That’s future Heaven: an incredible merger of God’s home and our home. All of the bodies of dead people will be raised and the bodies of those who are alive at Jesus’ Second Coming will experience transformation. Those who rejected Jesus in this life will be sent off to permanent and future Hell. Those who trusted in Jesus in this life will be ushered into permanent and future Heaven. So, what will you do in this future Heaven? The Bible suggests at least five key activities. First,

### **YOU WILL WORSHIP AND PRAISE.**

Both present and future Heaven will be full of worship and praise of a kind and quality that you’ve never experienced on this Earth. Your worship of God will be direct and all encompassing. In other words, God will be actually right there so you will worship Him directly face to face. The book of Revelation gives us glimpses into worship in Heaven. Let’s look at two passages: Revelation 5:11-14 and 7:9-12. Pretty awesome, yes? I doubt that worship in Heaven will be restricted to a specific time, place or activity. Instead, it will likely permeate your life at every time and in every place. It will be impossible not to worship God in Heaven. You will do many things in Heaven, but worship will infuse everything you do. You won’t have to be compelled or urged to worship God as you are on Earth; it will come naturally and effortlessly in Heaven.

In addition, your worship of God will be fascinating and never boring. The passages we just read indicate that you will worship God alongside angels and other heavenly creatures. How do angels worship God? You'll find out in Heaven! In addition, it suggests that you will be a part of incredible worship gatherings involving other human beings from every ethnicity and background imaginable. Can you imagine the music of Heaven?! God is the Creator of music and Heaven is its home. The Bible suggests the writing and singing of new songs in Heaven, "Then they sang a new song.... Then I heard a sound from heaven that was like a roaring flood or loud thunder or even like the music of harps. And a new song was being sung in front of God's throne and in front of the four living creatures and the elders...." (Rev 5:9; 14:2-3 CEV) You will never get enough of God. Worshipping Him will be endlessly fascinating.

I take comfort in that knowledge today. In Heaven, we aren't going to argue about worship preferences any more! No one is going to be offended by too many hymns, too many choruses, too much organ, too much drums, too formal or too casual a style. Frankly, I've given up on the idea of experiencing perfect worship this side of Heaven. Oh, I've had some incredible worship experiences! The most memorable one was at a pastor's prayer summit at a Catholic retreat center up in Cleveland right on Lake Erie. It was an event sponsored by the Billy Graham Crusade that was held here back in 1993. There were some 50-60 pastors present at that event and I experienced worship there as I have never experienced it before or since. Scripture reading and prayer were offered spontaneously. We sang for hours upon hours without direction or instrumentation. In fact, the leader of the team who facilitated the event said that he refers to that occasion as the time he heard angels sing. He's a musician and he said he distinctly heard musical notes in our singing that were beyond the human range. Nobody wanted it to end. I'm convinced it was a taste of Heaven.

But, most of the time, worship this side of Heaven has its ups and downs. It's good to remember that. I've known Christians who hop from church to church searching for a more fulfilling, better worship experience. It's great for a few weeks or months, but then a sameness creeps into their experience and they're off to the next church. Don't get me wrong! We should strive to present excellent and God-glorifying worship events. We should give ourselves more fully to the experience of worship. And, from time to time, God will be gracious to give us little tastes of Heaven that encourage and bless us. But if you expect Heaven on Earth every time you come to a worship event, you will be disappointed. Instead, realize that only Heaven will completely fulfill that longing God has put within you to worship and praise Him perfectly. Second,

## **YOU WILL SERVE AND WORK.**

It's important to remember that you were created to serve and work for God. That won't come to an end in Heaven; it will be fulfilled. After all, in the Bible's

description of future Heaven, we read, “No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.” (Rev 22:3 NIV) Working is part and parcel of bearing God’s image. Before humanity’s fall into sin in the Garden of Eden, we read, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Gen 2:15 NIV). Jesus said, “... ‘My Father is always working, and so am I.’” (Jo 5:17 NLT) Or consider this verse: “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” (Eph 2:10 NLT). We usually think of that verse in terms of this life only, but why can’t it apply just as much to what you will do in future Heaven as well?

In Heaven, your service and work for God will always be joyful and fulfilling. The curse of sin has made work tedious and frustrating, but God is going to restore the original design for work in Heaven. There will be no failure in your work, no disappointment in how it turns out and no falling short of your expectations. So what kind of work will you do? Generally, it will entail helping God run the universe that He has restored in a way that constantly exalts Him. Specifically, it may well involve using and developing the unique gifts and abilities God has already given you, but in a sinless, perfect way. Are you musical or artistic? The best music and art may well be produced in future Heaven. Do you love technology or machinery? Why do we assume that machines or other examples of human ingenuity and creativity will somehow be absent in Heaven?

It’s important to remember that your reward for serving God now is working for Him even more in Heaven. Jesus told several parables that indicate that God rewards service or work for Him by granting even greater responsibility. By way of example, let’s read part of one story Jesus told. (Matthew 25:14-23) Isn’t there a principle there that transcends this life and this Earth? Those who are faithful in this life with a few things will be put in charge of many things in Heaven. The more faithful you are in this life, the more responsibility you will have in Heaven. Serving God in Heaven will not be a punishment but a reward. There’s no retirement in Heaven, because serving God will bring only great joy and immense satisfaction. Instead of an endless vacation or sitting around idle, God will offer you endless opportunities to be productive for Him. Third,

### **YOU WILL REIGN AND RULE.**

That sounds prideful and boastful until you realize that it’s God’s idea nor ours. In fact, reigning and ruling will mean restoring God’s original design. In describing future Heaven, the Bible says things like, “And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever.” (Rev 22:5 NLT) It also says, “If we endure hardship, we will reign with him...” (2 Tim 2:12 NLT) God is simply going to restore what humanity lost in the Garden of Eden. What did God say to Adam and Eve? “... ‘Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.’” (Gen 1:28

NLT) King David expressed this same truth in one of his psalms, “You gave them charge of everything you made, putting all things under their authority.” (Ps 8:6 NLT) Governing or ruling isn’t evil. God reigns and rules. God has created human beings with the capacity to rule, to rule well and to find pleasure in it.

Reigning and ruling in Heaven will mean claiming your eternal inheritance. The Bible says followers of Jesus are going to inherit things of value in Heaven. “And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God’s glory.... we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay.” (Rom 8:17, 1 Pt 1:4 NLT) While you aren’t told specifically what you’re going to inherit, the idea of inheritance itself points to the fact that part of what you will do in Heaven is to reign and rule. You will be a co-heir with Jesus Himself and help to rule the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Reigning and ruling will mean judging and managing future Heaven to some degree. The Bible says, “Don’t you realize that someday we believers will judge the world? And since you are going to judge the world, can’t you decide even these little things among yourselves? Don’t you realize that we will judge angels?...” (1 Cor 6:2-3 NLT) When you consider God’s original plan for humans in the Garden of Eden and when you consider Jesus’ parable about the talents that we read earlier, it becomes clear that God enjoys delegating His management responsibilities to human beings. He delights in entrusting the rule of Earth to us and the implication is that His plan will be fully restored and completely perfected in the New Heaven and the New Earth. Fourth,

## **YOU WILL LEARN AND GROW.**

I think it’s a mistake to believe that we will know everything there is to know in Heaven. The Bible does says, “Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.” (1 Cor 13:12 NIV) I believe the intent there, however, is to tell us that you’ll have knowledge in a fuller, more intensive way in Heaven rather than that you’ll know everything. After all, only God is – and will ever be – omniscient. Heaven is a place where you will never stop increasing your knowledge of God and all His creation. The Bible also says, “And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph 2:6-7 NIV) That word “show” means “reveal.” In other words, isn’t it more likely that in Heaven God will provide progressive, ongoing revelation about Himself and all that He has made? Isn’t it more likely that in Heaven, you will continually be learning new things about God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit? Long time radio commentator, Paul Harvey, is best known for his “rest of the story” spots. In a masterful way, he would share little know facts about a famous person or event until you got the rest of the story. That’s what Heaven will be

like. We'll have all eternity to hear the rest of the story about God and all He's done. Jonathan Edwards, the great theologian, said you will continually become happier in Heaven in "... a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God's glory with greater and greater joy in him."

By implication, it's reasonable to assume that in Heaven you will never stop developing the gifts and abilities God has given you. Whatever you're good at now and whatever you enjoy doing, you will have all eternity to develop more fully to God's praise and glory. Do you enjoy music, art, design? How about biology, astronomy, physics? Whenever you study what God has made, you study God. The possibilities are truly mind boggling. Again, I appreciate Jonathan Edward's insight – "... the number of ideas of the saints shall increase to eternity." Edward Donnelly offers this mind expanding comment on what you'll do in Heaven: "Throughout eternity we will live full, truly human lives, exploring and managing God's creation to his glory. Fascinating vistas will unfold before us as we learn to serve God in a renewed universe." Fifth and finally,

### **YOU WILL BE REWARDED AND REST.**

It's important to remember that Heaven itself is not a reward. It is always and forever a gift. But it's also just as true that in Heaven God is going to give you eternal rewards. Jesus said, "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven...." (Matt 5:11-12 NLT) He also said, "Don't hoard treasure down here where it gets eaten by moths and corroded by rust or—worse!—stolen by burglars. Stockpile treasure in heaven, where it's safe from moth and rust and burglars." (Matt 6:19-20 MSG) The Bible says, "For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body." (2 Cor 5:10 NLT) This future judgment is not going to determine whether you go to Heaven or Hell. This judgment will be about evaluating the quality of your service to God in this life. What did you do with the opportunities God gave you to serve Him? Did you serve God at all? How did you serve Him? Was your heart right? Was your motivation a good one? Who were you trying to lift up – God or yourself? That should give you and me pause every day of this earthly life. Jesus said, "Listen! I am coming soon! I will bring my reward with me, and I will repay each one of you for what you have done." (Rev 22:12 CEV)

The Bible refers to these heavenly rewards by using the intriguing word "crown." For example, when Paul wrote to his young friend, Timothy, he said, "And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return. And the prize is not just for me but for all who eagerly look forward to his appearing." (2 Tim 4:8 NLT) Several kinds of crowns are mentioned in the Bible. Surely, these crowns are symbolic because you can't put righteousness on your head, can you? Instead, they point

to something God will give to you or do for you. I believe those crowns in Heaven – those rewards - will be plentiful not scarce. Why? God is generous in His character and overabundant in His gifts. God is intent on recognizing, awarding and rewarding each of His children appropriately.

And, then, it is quite true that in Heaven God will provide you with rest, but it will be an active rest. The Bible does say, “And I heard a voice from heaven saying, ‘Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from their hard work; for their good deeds follow them!’” (Rev 14:14 NLT) Being inactive isn’t what the Bible means by rest. In Heaven you will rest from persecution, rest from suffering, rest from illness, rest from grief, rest from temptation, and - best of all - rest from sin and all of its effects on you and others. Everyone enjoys days off and vacations, but it’s a mistake to think of Heaven as an eternity with nothing to do. How boring! Instead, Heaven will offer times of joyful praise to God, meaningful and enjoyable work for God, relaxed fellowship and great celebration with Jesus and all of His followers. Feasting is mentioned many times, by the way. Why can’t it be literal food, drink and eating? Heaven will mean enjoying the incredible environment of the New Heaven and the New Earth that God has created around you. Why can’t it involve actual, physical travel around God’s universe observing all the incredible and beautiful things God has made? Or, how about enjoying music, drama, art, games and sporting events in Heaven? Why not?

Here’s a final thought about rest I couldn’t resist mentioning. Many followers of Jesus mistakenly think of the local church as a place of rest now. They get so worn out by life and its demands that they come to church and just want to be served. Served by Jesus. Served by the church’s staff. Served by the church’s leaders and volunteers. So they come, they sit in worship and they rest. That’s all they ever do: rest. The church is not a place of rest. It’s not a place for you to be inactive. You have eternity to rest and when your work for the Lord is done here, God will call you home and you will enjoy the active rest He has planned for you. If you’re going to share Jesus with a lost person, if you’re going to serve the needs of a poor person, if you’re going to show compassion to a hurting person, if you’re going to explain the Bible to an adult or a child, it must be done down here in this life on this Earth. None of that will be needed in Heaven. Are you busy for Jesus? Are you serving Him faithfully? What will you do in Heaven? It’s a great question that will get answered one day. But the far more pressing question is this one: what are you doing today for Jesus?

You've probably never heard of Wilbert Williams. He's not famous or rich. Still, Williams received an honor normally reserved for the connected, powerful, and wealthy. On December 2, 2004, the city of Chicago designated a street as Wilbert Williams Way. The honor was in celebration of his upcoming retirement. What did someone as unknown as Williams do to deserve such a tribute? For nearly 40 years, Wilbert Williams worked at the Woman's Athletic Club as a doorman. Normally, an honorary street sign goes to people who get the door held

open for them—not to the one holding the door. What set Williams apart? He carried out his duties in an exemplary fashion. Police Officer Paul O'Donnell said, "In all these years, I've never heard him speak a harsh word about anyone. He's a gentleman." Through his kindness and service to others, Williams made a powerful, memorable impact on those who he met at the corner of Michigan and Ontario. Having a street named after you is impressive. If the city of Chicago found a way to honor Wilbert Williams, do you think God will overlook rewarding you for even the smallest act of love done in His Name? Didn't Jesus say, "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, ... he will certainly not lose his reward." How much greater the honor God promises to give to those who serve him well: an eternal inheritance that will never spoil or fade away!