

In Light of Eternity: Perspectives on Heaven by Randy Alcorn (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 1999) (59 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

Introduction – "WHEN I THINK ABOUT HEAVEN..."

1. Satan Lies about Heaven.

Because of pervasive distortions of what heaven is like, it's common for Christians not to look forward to heaven—or even to dread it. I think there's only one explanation for how these appalling viewpoints have griped so many of God's people: Satan. Demonic deception.

Jesus said of the devil, "When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Some of Satan's favorite lies are about heaven.

Revelation 13:6 tells us the satanic beast "opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven." Our enemy slanders three things: God's person, God's people, and God's place—heaven. [Page 2]

2. New Name and Place in Heaven

In Revelation 3:12, Jesus makes a great promise to those who obey him: "I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from m God; and I will also write on him my new name." Jesus says he will put on us the name of the person and the name of the place (heaven) for which we were made.

Jesus used the phrases "kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" interchangeably (Matthew 19:23-24). God's person and God's place are that closely connected (Luke 15:18). [Page 4]

3. Passion for God and heaven Inseparable

Like a bride's dream of sharing a home with her groom, our love for heaven should be overflowing and contagious, just as our love for God should be (Revelation 19:7). Our passion for God and our passion for heaven should be inseparable. The more I learn about God, the more excited I get about heaven. The more I learn about heaven, the more excited I get about God.

How it must wound the heart of our bridegroom to see us clinging to this roach-infested hovel called earth, dreading the thought of leaving it, when he has hand-built a magnificent estate for us, a place beautiful and wondrous beyond measure. [Page 5]

4. Not Serious That Heaven Is Our Home

To derail us, all Satan needs to do is minimize our passion for two things—the person of God and the place of God. A. W. Tozer said,

Let no one apologize for the powerful emphasis Christianity lays upon the doctrine of the world to come. Right there lies its immense superiority to everything else within

the whole sphere of human thought or experience.... We do well to think of the long tomorrow.

The greatest weakness of the western church today is arguable our failure to think of the long tomorrow—to take seriously the reality that heaven is our home. Out of this springs our love affair with this world and our failure to live now in light of eternity. [Page 6]

Chapter 1 - HOME

5. Christ Is Our Home

The Bible teaches that for Christians, our home is where Christ is, in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8). Our home is a place we've never been.

When we arrive there, heaven will immediately feel like home because we'll instinctively connect it to all we longed for and occasionally caught magical glimpses of while on earth. But in heaven we won't just look back; we'll look forward to and anticipate all that's ahead of us there. The longer we're in heaven, the more memories we'll make and the more our home will be...home. It won't lose its homeliness—it will always gain more. [Page 8]

6. Heaven Will Be Filled with Laughter

Eating, talking, and laughing together make a house a home. In heaven we'll have feasts together (Matthew 8:11). In fact, "the LORD almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples...the best of meats and the finest of wines" (Isaiah 25:6). Considering who'd doing the cooking, how good do you think that meal will be?

Jesus said we who weep now on earth will laugh in heaven (Luke 6:21). We'll be childlike there (Matthew 19:14). Who laughs more than children? When you think of heaven, think of delighted, infectious laughter with those you love. Get ready to hear the laughter of God, who made us in his image, with the capacity to laugh. [Page 10]

7. Heaven Is an Actual Place

The world has a saying—"You can never go home again." It means that while you were gone, home changed and so did you. In fact, your old house may have been destroyed or sold. It may be forever inaccessible to you.

In contrast, when this life is over, God's children will be able to come home...for the very first time. And because that home—unlike our houses on earth—will never burn or be flooded or blown away, we'll never have to wonder whether home will still be there when we return. Heaven will never disappear and never lose the magic of home.

For years I've had taped to my computer a prayer reminder for homeless children, sent to me by Action International, an outstanding missions organization. It cites Lamentations 2:11-19, crying out for the hungry children in the streets. There are more

than one hundred million street children in the world today, in desperate need of an earthly home, Christ, and the hope of a home in heaven. Who will appreciate heaven more than those who have been homeless on earth? [Page 11]

8. Heaven Is an Actual Place

Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2, KJV). He didn't say, "I go to an indescribable realm devoid of physical properties, where your disembodied spirit will float around, and which is nothing at all like what you've ever thought of as home."

If that were the case, he might just as well have said nothing. But he didn't say nothing—he said something. He told us of an actual place he was preparing. He also told us why—"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (John 14:2-3) [Page 12]

9. The Lord Will Delight in You

"The LORD will take delight in you.... As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you" (Isaiah 62:4-4)

Now think about that for a few million years! [Page 13]

Chapter 4 – JUST WISHFUL THINKING?

10. God Wants Us to Imagine Heaven

The information Scripture provides us about the world to come is substantial, with enough detail to help us envision it, but not so much to make us think we can fully comprehend it. I believe God expects us to recognize the limits and flaws of our imaginations, but to utilize them nonetheless (remembering always that though we're using our imaginations, heaven is more real than anything we've ever seen or touched). If God didn't want us to imagine what heaven will be like, he wouldn't have told us what he has. [Page 24]

11. Often Heaven Recounts Are False Doctrine

Bookstores are burgeoning with accounts of after-death experiences and interactions with angelic beings. Many of these are unbiblical and misleading, full of false doctrine. They imply that those who don't know Christ will be welcomed into heaven, contrary to John 14:6, Acts 4:12, and many other passages. Just because someone thinks he saw Jesus or an angel in a near-death experience doesn't mean it's true. Scripture warns us that "Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14). [Page 24]

12. Satan Tries to Hide the Truth of Heaven

It's difficult to desire something you can't imagine. That's exactly why Satan works so hard to eclipse the biblical teaching on heaven. He keeps us from desiring heaven by keeping us from imagining it—or prompting us to imagine it in all the wrong ways. [Page 26]

Chapter 5 – WILL YOU BE AMAZED?

13. Heaven Will be Diverse and United

Apparently it's within the vast and beautiful New Jerusalem we'll find the personal dwelling places Jesus has prepared for us (John 14:2; Luke 16:9; Revelation 21:2). Like the current earthly Jerusalem, the city will be a melting pot of ethnic diversity, with those of "every nation, tribe, people and language" (Revelation 7:9; see 5:9). But unlike today's Jerusalem, all these people will be united by their common worship of King Jesus. [Page 30]

14. Heaven's Geography Is Vast

The city's gates are said to be always open, and people will travel in and out, some bringing glorious items into the city (Revelation 21:24; 22:14). This outside travel suggests the city is not the whole of heaven, but merely its center. The gates that are opposite each other will be fifteen hundred miles apart, allowing access from every direction (Luke 13:29). Even the inside will be a huge area to investigate. The gates will lead out to an entire planet, the new earth, and a cosmos with vast realms to explore. [Pages 30-31]

15. Will Heaven Be Unlike Earth?

Many assume heaven will be unlike earth. But why do we think this? God designed earth for human beings. And nearly every description of heaven includes references to earthly things—eating, music, animals, water, trees, fruits, and a city with gates and streets. [Page 31]

16. The New Earth Will be Radically Transformed

The promise of new heavens and a new earth is introduced in Isaiah (65:17-19; 66:22). In the New Testament, John tells us more about it (Revelation 21), and Peter speaks of the earth being burned, followed by "a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:10-13). I understand this not as the absolute destruction of the planet, but the scorching of the surface and everything on it. It's as if an artist wiped paint away and started a new and better painting, but on the same canvas. As our resurrection bodies will be a superior recreation of our old ones, so the new earth will be the old earth liberated from sin and decay (Romans 8:19-22), radically and beautifully transformed. [Page 32]

Chapter 6 – HE KNOWS HOW TO BUILD

17. Christ Has Remodeled Heaven for Us

Our home is being built for us by the Carpenter from Nazareth. Building is his trade. A good carpenter envisions what he wants to build. He plans and designs. Then he does his work carefully and skillfully fashioning it to exact specifications. He takes pride in the work he's done and delights to show it to others. And when it's his own children or his bride he's made it for he takes special delight.

Jesus didn't say to his disciples, "I've already prepared a place for you in heaven," but, "I am going there to prepare a place for you." This means heaven has undergone some remodeling between the time he spoke and the time we join him there. [Page 36]

Chapter 7 – WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT ABOUT HEAVEN?

18. God Lives in Heaven

What's the most important fact about our future home? This is it: Heaven is the place God lives (Deuteronomy 26:15; Matthew 6:9). It's where he sits on the throne and dwells in all his holiness (Revelation 4:2-8; Isaiah 6). Heaven contains an actual sanctuary-God's dwelling place-which served as the pattern for the earthly tabernacle (Hebrews 8:5; 9:11,23-24).

In heaven there's a temple that contains the prototype ark of the covenant (Revelation 11:19, 15:5), another fact that violates the popular notion of a "spiritual" heaven with no physical form.

Heaven is where Christ came from (John 6:42), where he returned to (Acts 1:11), where he now is and from which he will return to earth (Acts 1:11; Revelation 19:11-16). [Page 39]

19. We Will See God's Face

The most amazing aspect of heaven is expressed in Revelation 22:4, which says of God's servants, "They will see his face."

There's no way to describe what a shocking statement this is to any Jew trained in the transcendence and unapproachability of God. The Creator said to Moses, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). The high priest could go into the Holy of Holies only once a year, and even then tradition says a rope was tied around his ankle in case God struck him down. (Who would dare go in to get him?)

The God who lives in unapproachable light became approachable in the person of Jesus (John 1:14). Though we will always be creature and he Creator, in heaven we will be able to live with him and actually "see his face." Incredible.

David anticipated seeing God's face in heaven (Psalm 17:15). His prayer was "that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD" (Psalm 7:4). We will experience the answer to David's prayer. God's house will be our home. [Pages 41-42]

20. We Are Pilgrims

The black slaves in early America had something we should learn from--a pilgrim mentality. With minimal possessions and power, they lived for another world, a better one. This central theme permeated their spirituals. They sang, "I am a poor way-farin' stranger, a-travelin' far away from home." "Soon I will be done with the troubles of the

world; I'm goin' home to live with God." "Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home."

The more possessions and power we have in this world, the more tempted we are to forget our true citizenship is in heaven. [Page 43]

21. This World Is Not Our Home

How are you doing as an ambassador for Christ? How are you doing representing your true country, heaven, as you live in this world that's not yours? Have you adopted values and customs of this culture that are contrary to those of the culture of heaven? Have you compromised your allegiance to your true country and your true King?

God describes his ambassadors this way:

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth.

People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13-16)

Are you ashamed to call God your God? Is God ashamed to be called your God? Are you thinking of the city God has prepared for you? Are you "longing for a better country"? Are you living now in light of all that country means.

Perhaps we should say aloud, over and over, the words of the black spirituals: "This world is not my home, this world is not my home, this world is not my home." [Page 44]

Chapter 8 – WHAT WILL WE BE LIKE IN HEAVEN?

22. We Will Eat in Heaven

Christ ate food in his resurrection body, and both he and we will eat and drink in heaven (Luke 14:15; 22:18). Most of us like to eat and drink. Every reference to sitting at a table and having a banquet in heaven should forever free us from the myth of floating around like ghosts (Isaiah 25:6).

Though we'll eat and drink, there will be no hunger or thirst in heaven (Revelation 7:16). Our heavenly bodies apparently won't need what is now essential--food, drink, oxygen, covering--but we'll be fully capable of enjoying these things. [Page 49]

Chapter 9 – EXPLOSION OF JOY

23. God Is Rich and Pleasure Giving

The idea is, "What will we do for entertainment if there's no sin?"

The fact that such notions would even occur to us demonstrates the extent to which we're blinded by the evil one. His most basic strategy, exactly the one he employed with Adam and Eve, is to make us think wrongly about God and believe sin will bring us fulfillment.

But sin is not what brings us fulfillment--it's what robs us of fulfillment. Sin isn't what makes life interesting; it's what makes life empty. This emptiness inevitably leads to boredom. When there's fulfillment, when there's beauty, when we see God as he truly is, boredom becomes an impossibility. In heaven we will be filled, as Psalm 16:11 describes, "with joy" and "with eternal pleasures." Why? Because God is infinitely rich and pleasure giving. [Page 55]

24. God's Joy Will Be Contagious

The joyful redeemed in heaven are described as "shining" and wearing "white robes," indicating their moral purity and righteousness (Daniel 12:3; Matthew 13:43; Revelation 3:4; 6:11). Far from being a deterrent to joy, purity is a source of it.

Our explosion of joy will coincide with the flowering of our righteousness. In that day, we will be amazed that people once imagined temptation and sin were the allies of excitement and fulfillment, when in fact they were their greatest enemies.

What does God say to his faithful servants when their work on earth is done? "Come and share your master's happiness." Matthew 25:23). The contagious joy of our Lord will permeate every square foot of heaven and every square inch of us. [Page 57]

Chapter 10 – REFRESHING REST, FASCINATING LABOR

25. We Will Have Friends in Heaven

After speaking of the shrewd servant's desire to use earthly resources so that "people will welcome me into their houses," Jesus told his followers to use "worldly wealth" (earthly resources) to 'gain friends' (by making a difference in their lives on earth). The reason? "So that when it is gone [when life on earth is over], you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9).

Our "friends" in heaven appear to be those whose lives we have touched on earth and who now have their own "eternal dwellings." Luke 16:9 seems to say these "eternal dwellings" of our friends are places where we stay and fellowship, perhaps as we move about the heavenly kingdom. [Page 59]

26. Start Celebrating Now

The world is always longing to celebrate, striving to celebrate—it just lacks the true reasons to celebrate. We have those reasons... the person and the place. So let's celebrate-let's get a head start on heaven! Don't wait until heaven to start rejoicing (Philippians 4:4) [Page 64]

27. We Will Have Eternal Rest

When at last we arrive in that special place and are with that special person, we'll rest from the labors we knew on earth (Revelation 14:13) [Page 64]

28. Work Will Be Refreshing

Our labor in heaven will be refreshing, productive, and unthwarted--like Adam and Eve's work in Eden before sin brought the curse on the ground (Genesis 3: 17-19) [Page 65]

29. We Will Serve Him

In heaven, we're told we'll serve God (Revelation 7:15). "His servants will serve him" (Revelation 22:3). This is definitive biblical proof we'll be active in heaven. Why? Because "serve" has a meaning--it means to work, to expend effort, to do something. Service involves responsibilities, duties, effort, planning, and creativity to do work well.

These verses should forever refute the poisonous propaganda of eternal passivity that Satan uses to diminish our thirst for heaven. [Page 65]

Chapter 12 – THE OPPOSITE OF BOREDOM

30. The Earth Is in Between

Earth leads directly into heaven, just as it leads directly into hell. Life here is a running start into one or the other. Heaven and hell are both retroactive to earth. The best of earth is a glimpse of heaven, the worst of earth a glimpse of hell. Earth is the in-between world touched both by heaven and hell, affording a choice between the two. [Page 74]

31. Christ Is There

The One who by his presence makes heaven heaven, will by his absence make hell hell. [Page 75]

32. Christ Talks a lot about Hell

We've bought into Satan's lie that it's unloving and uncivilized--even unChristlike--to talk about hell. But the truth is, our Lord Jesus said more about hell than anyone else (e.g. Matthew 10:28; 13:40-42; Mark 9:43). So, either Christ wasn't Christlike, or our perspective is wrong. [Page 75]

33. God's Greatness in Heaven

The sense of wonder we see among heaven's inhabitants in Revelation 4-5 suggests an ever-deepening appreciation of God's greatness. This isn't all there is to heaven, but if it was, it would be more than enough. [Page 77]

34. We Will Learn New Things

Will we learn in heaven? Yes! Ephesians 2:6-7 says, "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." The word "show" means to reveal, in a progressive ongoing way. When we die we'll know a lot more than we do now, but we won't know all we'll ever know. In heaven we'll learn new things about God, we'll go ever deeper in our understanding. Will we learn in heaven? Yes! Ephesians 2:6-7 says, "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." The word "show" means to reveal, in a progressive ongoing way. When we die we'll know a lot more than we do now, but we won't know all we'll ever know. In heaven we'll learn new things about God, we'll go ever deeper in our understanding.

God is infinite and inexhaustible (Isaiah 55:9). We'll never comprehend all there is to know about him. But we're told we should be always "growing in the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). Since we'll still be finite and he'll still be infinite, that will continue in heaven. [Page 78]

Chapter 13 – WILL WE REMEMBER OUR LIVES ON EARTH?

35. We Will Not Know Everything

One qualification is in order. I've heard people say, "We can't understand that now, but we'll understand in heaven, because then we'll know everything." In heaven, we'll see and know clearly (1 Corinthians 13:12), with far greater understanding than we have now. However, the notion that "we'll know everything in heaven" is certainly wrong. If we did know everything, we'd be God. He alone is infinite and all-knowing. We will always be finite, even after we become glorified in heaven. The angels in heaven don't know everything (Mark 13:32). Neither will we. [Page 85]

36. Righteous Deeds Will Follow Us to Heaven

We're told that after we die we'll give an account of our lives on earth, down to specific actions and words (2 Corinthians 5:10; Matthew 12:36). Obviously, we must remember the things we've done on earth—how else could we give an account of them? In fact, considering our improved minds and clear thinking, our memories of our earthly past should be more acute, not less. We won't remember less of earth, but more.

Our specific acts of faithfulness on earth will survive the fire of judgment and be brought into heaven with us (1 Corinthians 3:14). We're told that in heaven the

wedding dress worn by the bride of Christ "stands for the righteous acts of the saints" done on earth (Revelation 19:7-8). The very clothes we'll wear testify to what we did on earth. (Let's be sure we're fully clothed!) These righteous deeds done on earth are said to "follow" us to heaven (Revelation 14: 13). [Pages 85-86]

37. Martyrs Remember Suffering

The martyrs in heaven mentioned in Revelation 6:9-11 clearly remember what happened on earth, including the great suffering they underwent. With strong emotion they anticipate and look forward to God's coming judgment. [Page 87]

Chapter 15 – CAN THOSE IN HEAVEN SEE WHAT HAPPENS HERE?

38. We Will Be with Christ

Our happiness in heaven will not be based on our failure to know what's happening on earth. Rather, it will be based on our being with Christ and seeing with new eyes.

The joys of heaven are not rooted in ignorance. They're rooted in perspective. [Page 101]

Chapter 16 – A GREATER MIRACLE

39. Death—Our Last Enemy

The Bible calls death "the last enemy" (1 Corinthians 15:26). It's our ultimate problem. God sent his Son to defeat this enemy, to solve the problem. But we must accept his solution while we're still in this world. We must reach out our hand and take from him the ticket he offers us before we can get on the train-or before the train leaves without us. The absolute certainty of our death gives the gospel its urgency. [Page 103]

Chapter 17 – STONES FROM THE RIVERBEDS

40. Good Deeds Come with Us

The five-hundred-year-old play Everyman is a picture of all people. As Everyman faces Death he looks among his friends for a companion. Only one friend would accompany him to the other side. His name was "Good Deeds."

This picture is explicitly biblical. Of those who die in the Lord it's said, "their deeds will follow them" (Revelation 14:13). We can't take anything to heaven with us except the things we've done on earth for the good of others and the glory of our Lord.

In Revelation 19:7-8 we're told, "The wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)"

We might have expected the fine linen to stand for the righteousness of Christ or the faith of the saints. But we're told it stands instead for the righteous acts or works of the saints. [Page 111]

41. Good Works Are Essential

Scripture ties God's reward-giving to his very character: "God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them" (Hebrews 6:10).

Good works are essential to the Christian life (James 2:17-26; 3:13). Our faith is demonstrated by our actions; a life of service to God and others is the natural outflow of faith.

Christ will say to some believers, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21). Notice that he won't say "Well said" or "Well believed," but "Well done." [Page 112]

42. Believers Have a Judgment of Works

For unbelievers, this judgment of works comes at the Great White Throne judgment. Though believers will not be subject to that judgment, we will face a judgment of works at what is called the "judgment seat of Christ," where "each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Those words "whether good or bad" are perhaps the most disturbing ones for believers in the New Testament. I've found that any honest attempts to deal with this passage are met with tremendous resistance. Equally disturbing is Paul's statement to Christians in Colossians 3:25 that "anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism." [Page 114]

43. We Have Everything We Need

God has given us "everything we need" to live the godly life that results in eternal rewards (2 Peter 1:3).

That's why, when we really understand it, this subject should be encouraging to us. "It is my happiness," John Calvin wrote, "that I have served him who never fails to reward his servants to the full extent of his promise." [Page 115]

Chapter 18 – SALVATION, REWARD, AND FORGIVENESS

44. Rewards Withheld

It's critical to understand that the judgment of believers by Christ is a judgment of our works, not our sins. In 1 Corinthians 3:13-14, Paul says of each believer, "His work will be shown for what it is," and God's judgment fire "will test the quality of each man's work."

Our sins are totally forgiven when we come to Christ, and we stand justified in him. There's no condemnation for the Christian (Romans 8:1). Nevertheless, our laying up of precious stones on the foundation of Christ can apparently be replaced or prevented by sins we've committed as well as by righteous acts we've failed to do. Therefore a believer's sins contribute directly to his being able to "suffer loss" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Through this loss of reward the believer is considered to be receiving his "due" for his bad works (2 Corinthians 5:10). This is not a punishment for sins, but the withholding of rewards for works not done that should have been. [Page 116]

Chapter 19 – TREASURES AND CROWNS

45. God Is Watching and Keeping Track

How many times have we done small acts of kindness on earth without realizing the effects? How many times have we shared Christ with someone we thought didn't take it to heart, but years later they came to the Lord partly because of the seeds we planted? How many times have we spoken up for unborn children and seen no result, but without our knowledge someone chose not to have an abortion, and a life was saved? How many dishes have been washed and diapers changed and crying children sung to in the middle of the night, when we couldn't see the impact of the love we showed? How many times have we prayed and not seen an answer, when God was doing something great we won't ever know about until heaven?

God is watching. He's keeping track. In heaven he'll reward us for our acts of faithfulness to him, right down to every cup of cold water we've given to the needy in his name (Mark 9:41).

I've reminded myself of this when doing pro-life work, which often doesn't have obvious or immediate fruit. Those who spend their lives reaching out to Muslims and in other "low fruit" ministries should remember God says, "It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful," not successful (1 Corinthians 4:2, KJV). Of course, we want to be successful, but we can't control the results. Those we must leave to God, reminding ourselves that one day we'll learn of eternal results we never saw on earth. (Just as some of us may learn in heaven that our earthly ministries weren't as successful as everyone thought.) [Pages 122-123]

46. Rewards Will Vary

While heaven will be wonderful for all its inhabitants, Scripture makes it clear that not every believer's position and experience in heaven will be the same. Heaven's rewards—its possessions and positions—will vary from person to person.

Not all of us will hear the master say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23). Not all will have treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:19-21). Not all will have the same positions of authority in heaven (Luke 19:17-26). We'll have differing levels of reward (1 Corinthians 3:12-15). Scripture suggests some Christians will be ashamed at

Christ's coming (1 John 2:28). I don't think this shame will continue in heaven, but there's no indication that rewards lost due to disobedience on earth will ever be restored. [Page 123]

47. Characteristics of Rewards

No matter how we attempt to explain it, no matter how incompatible it seems with what we've heard, it's a fact of Scripture that there will be differing rewards and differing positions in heaven. This adds up to different experiences in heaven that are now being forged in the crucible of this life.

What will those rewards consist of? Crowns are a common symbol of rulership. Five crowns are specifically mentioned as heavenly rewards:

1. The Crown of Life—for faithfulness to Christ in persecution or martyrdom (James 1:12; Revelation 2:10).
2. The Incorruptible Crown—for determination, discipline, and victory in the Christian life (1 Corinthians 9:24-25).
3. The Crown of Glory—for faithfully representing Christ in a position of spiritual leadership (1 Peter 5:1-4).
4. The Crown of Righteousness—for purifying and readying ourselves to meet Christ at his return (2 Timothy 4:6-8).
5. The Crown of Rejoicing—for pouring ourselves into others in evangelism and discipleship (1 Thessalonians 2:19; Philippians 4:1). This crown may relate to Daniel 12:3, which says, "Those who lead many to righteousness" will shine "like the stars for ever and ever."

There may be innumerable crowns and types of crowns as well as many rewards unrelated to crowns. All are graciously given by the Lord Jesus and earned through the faithful efforts of the believer. They are lasting reminders of our work on earth and Christ's faithfulness in empowering us to do that work. [Pages 124-125]

Chapter 20 – GOD'S WAY OF REWARDING

48. God's Compensation Is Deferred

Two men owned farms side by side. One was a bitter atheist, the other a devout Christian. Constantly annoyed at the Christian for his trust in God, the atheist said to him one winter, "Let's plant our crops as usual this spring, each the same number of acres. You pray to your God and I'll curse him. Then come October, let's just see who has the bigger crop."

When October came, the atheist was delighted because his crop was larger. "See, you fool," he taunted. "What do you have to say for your God now?"

"My God," replied the other farmer, "doesn't settle all his accounts in October."

God's compensation for both believers and unbelievers is usually deferred. But a day is coming upon all men, when the announcement from heaven will ring out, "The time has come for judging and for rewarding" (Revelation 11:18). This will be the "appointed time" of judgment (1 Corinthians 4:5). "At the proper time," Paul says elsewhere, "we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." So he encourages us, "Let us not become weary in doing good" (Galatians 6:9). [Page 129]

49. Paul Ran with His Eye on the Prize

Paul ran his race with his eyes on heaven's prize (Philippians 3:13-14), which motivated him to run hard and long. He was unashamedly motivated by the prospect of eternal reward and acknowledged it freely and frequently (1 Corinthians 9:24-25; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 5:9-10; 2 Timothy 4:7-8). "Run in such a way as to get the prize," he said, and on the verge of death he spoke longingly of the crown the Judge would award him in heaven.

Paul encouraged this same motivation to good works for all believers. Slaves are told, "You will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward" (Colossians 3:22-25). The rich are warned not to put their hope in wealth, but "to be rich in good deeds." Why? So they can "lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age" (1 Timothy 6:17-19). [Page 133]

50. Today and That Day

Martin Luther said that on his calendar there were only two days: "today" and "that Day." May we invest all that we are and have today in light of that Day. [Page 135]

Chapter 21 – SECOND CHANCES?

51. Unprepared for Death Foolish

Since life's greatest certainty is death, it only makes sense to prepare for what lies beyond. Any life that leaves us unprepared for death is a foolish life. Matthew Henry said, "It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our last day." [Page 137]

Chapter 22 – WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE?

52. Prepare for the Next Life

Scripture makes clear that the one central business of this life is to prepare for the next.

Materialism would dupe us into believing this world is the ultimate world, the destination rather than the route to the Destination. From there it's a short step to racing off to earn, collect, accumulate, take, and consume as if that's all there is to life.

Then we wake up one day (if we ever wake up at all) to realize how terribly unhappy we are. Joyless, passionless, we become shriveled caricatures of what we could have been if only we'd lived in light of the person and place we were made for.

Life's great disillusionments come as we try to force our round made-for-eternity heart into the rectangular hole of this temporal earth. It just doesn't fit. We don't fit. No matter how far we stray from the narrow path of kingdom living, we remain children of eternity. Inside we are simply ill-suited for our present existence. [Page 142]

53. Do Things That Are Eternal

God is eternal. His Place is eternal. His Word is eternal. His people are eternal. Center your life around God, his place, his Word, his people, and those eternal souls who desperately long for his person and his place. Do this, and no matter what you do for a living, your days here will make a profound difference. An honest activity-whether building a shed, driving a bus, pruning trees, changing diapers, or caring for a patient-can be an investment in God's kingdom.

Your life on earth is a dot. From that dot extends a line that goes on for all eternity. Right now you're living in the dot. But what are you living for? Are you living for the dot or for the line? Are you living for earth or for heaven? Are you living for the short today or the long tomorrow? [Page 143]

Chapter 23 – CULTIVATING YOUR SENSE OF THE ETERNAL

54. Ceased to Think of the Other World, Ineffective

How many sermons about heaven or hell have you heard lately? How many books or articles have you read about it? How many discussions about them in the last few months?

In the absence of a strong theology of heaven and eternal rewards, the western church has been permeated by "prosperity theology" the gospel of health and wealth. We've been seduced to look only to short-term rewards of material gain, physical health and safety, and human approval.

What about you? Are you following the example of the saints by longing for heaven (Hebrews 11:13-16; 2 Corinthians 5:2)? Are you cultivating a passion for God's place?

Is heaven and all it represents a central object of your attention? Have you "set your heart on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God" (Colossians 3:1)? Is your heart's attention there, rather than on "earthly things" (verse 2)?

Perhaps you're afraid of becoming "so heavenly minded you're of no earthly good." There's another one of Satan's myths. On the contrary, most of us are so earthly-minded we are of no heavenly or earthly good. As C. S. Lewis said, "It is since

Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one." [Pages 144-145]

55. Leave This World Behind

Since Christ came to free us from bondage to the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15), and since death is the necessary doorway to take us to heaven, why is it that so many Christians today are so afraid to die?

The answer is simple--we've made this world our home. We've laid up our treasures on earth. Consequently, since every day brings us closer to our death, every day takes us further from our treasures. We end up backing into eternity, not wanting to let go of all those treasures we've accumulated. [Page 148]

Chapter 25 – STILL BEING WRITTEN

56. Use of Fortune to Reward Others

Alfred Nobel was a Swedish chemist who made his fortune inventing dynamite and other powerful explosives, which were bought by governments to produce weapons. When Nobel's brother died, one newspaper accidentally printed Alfred's obituary instead. When Alfred read it, he saw himself described as a man who became rich from enabling people to kill each other in unprecedented quantities. Shaken from this assessment of his life, Nobel resolved to use his fortune to reward accomplishments that benefited humanity. One of the many rewards he funded was the Nobel Peace Prize.

Nobel had a rare opportunity--to look at the assessment of his life at its end, but to still be alive and have opportunity to change that assessment. [Page 154]

Conclusion – SAFELY HOME

57. When We Die, We Relocate

Bertrand Russell has been called the greatest mind of the twentieth century. Anticipating his death he said, "There is darkness without, and when I die there will be darkness within. There is no splendor, no vastness anywhere; only triviality for a moment, and then nothing."

Whether or not he repented and turned to Christ before he died, Russell now knows how terribly wrong he was in thinking human beings exist only temporarily. Death is not a hole; it's a door. We don't end; we relocate. [Page 158]

58. Moving Day Is Coming

Through his death and resurrection the Carpenter flung open the door to heaven. If you're a Christian suffering with great pains and losses, take cheer (John 16:33). The new house is almost ready for you. Moving day is coming. The dark winter is about to be magically transformed into spring. Soon you will be home. [Page 163]

59. Offer a Person and a Place

In *Edge of Eternity* the King gives Nick the right perspective for life on earth: "Live each day as if it were your last day there. One of them will be."

The King then narrows the focus:

"You have your orders—I send you to battle. You are a soldier, and I would not promise a soldier ease. I promise you difficulty, but with it resources and purpose and joy.

"Go to where men die of thirst a stone's throw from pure water...go back as my water-bearer."

As long as we're still here in the parched wastelands of the present earth, God calls us to offer refreshment to a world full of people dying of thirst.

What should we offer them? Exactly what they thirst for--a person and a place.

Jesus is that person.

Heaven is that place.