

Title: Thank God for Heaven
Date: 11/24/24
Subject: Thanking God for the promise of heaven
Scripture: John 14:1-4; Ephesians 1:9, 10; Romans 8:17, 22-25

Thankfulness series using requests from the prayer calendar is thanking God for heaven. With the Sunday School emphasis, we're getting a double dip this morning.

Have you ever gotten someplace and it wasn't what it was cracked up to be? It didn't live up to its expectations of what had been promised. Maybe it was an all you can eat buffet... and all you could eat was the few bites you managed to choke down. You didn't care to eat anymore. It should have been called an all you care to eat buffet...which wasn't much.

Or maybe you decided to live by the motto "Life is short. Eat dessert first" and you went for the creme brulee but it was neither creemey nor brulee-ey.

Or how about the vacation? The hotel/resort was billed as one of the area's finest. But it didn't look the way it did on the internet. The mountain view was shown as being spectacular, and it would have been, if the scenery hadn't been blocked by the recently constructed hotel.

I mentioned the hotel from our sabbatical where I killed several stink bugs. I told the clerk about it when we checked out. Her response was, "Sorry. We spray once a month." We were in the city of Berea. Maybe they should have been like the people of Berea in Paul's time who "examine the scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11) and checked the rooms more often.

Sometimes the experience - restaurant, vacation, resort, first date - is overshadowed and surpassed by the thrill, anticipation, expectations and excitement of the planning and prep. Feel like there was a bait and switch. There is an enticement and promise of something wonderful... but the actual was for something far less than satisfying.

My family likes to plan, as in do extensive prepping, for vacations- where you go, eat, what to see, laying out the route. We're not doomsday preppers. We're vacay preppers. Take months to do the preparations...and then the trip is over in a few days.

There's one experience where the anticipation, expectations, and excitement of planning and preparation won't overshadow the experience. That's the trip to heaven. There won't be a bait and switch where what was promised was way more than it could deliver. We have legitimate and wonderful reasons to be thankful to God for heaven. Let's begin with a familiar passage.

READ John 14:1-4.

The first reason to be thankful for heaven is that it is a dwelling place of God.

I. Heaven is the dwelling place of God

Jesus speaks in familiar familial terms. He tells us about “my Father's house.” He doesn't elaborate on things like the furnishings or decor. Those aren't the important matters. What is that it's his Father's house. It belongs to God the Father. It's his dwelling place (1 Kings 8:30). It's his home. Not a second home but his primary residence.

This is the message that God communicated to people: “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house you will build for me?” (Isaiah 66:1. Cf Matthew 5:34, 23:22; Acts 7:48, 49).

King Solomon realized that no building could confine God, not even the magnificent temple he would construct. The king said, “The temple I'm going to build will be great, because our God is greater than all other gods. But who is able to build a temple for him, since the heavens, even the highest heavens, cannot contain him? Who then am I to build a temple for him, except as a place to burn sacrifices before him?” (2 Chronicles 2:5, 6).

Earlier the Lord gave instructions to Moses and the Israelites to build a Tabernacle for him. It would be a dwelling place. Obviously, it did not contain the entirety of who God was. His presence was there but it really couldn't house him.

God's true and eternal dwelling place is in heaven.

We can let our sanctified imaginations run a little bit wild to envision what the house of the Almighty of the universe would be like. It has to be amazing. Stupendous out of this world.

Jesus said he was returning to his Father's house. He was going home. He frequently said that he had come from God and that he would be returning to God the Father (John 3:13; 6:38; 7:29; 8:42; 13:1, 3; 14:28; 17:3, 5, 11, 13).

That was good news for the Son of God, but what about those who are his followers. The first disciples wondered about themselves. Jesus knew what they were thinking and knew they were troubled. The disciples professed w a lack of understanding about what Jesus was talking about. He reassured them and all believers with the great news.

II. Heaven will be our dwelling place.

Jesus says he will come back to get those who belong to him and take them back to where he is, to his home in the Father's house, to his Father's home. Those who've placed their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior will finally and forever be at home. Jesus said he's preparing a place.

You may have seen commercials on TV for “a place for mom.” It's an organization that works with clients and a variety of senior living communities and home care providers to find living quarters, caring staff, and whatever's needed for mom or dad.

Jesus said he is working on a place for mom, dad, brother, sister, son, daughter, grandkids, grandparents, niece, nephew, friend, anybody in our relationship circle and those we don't know. We can put our name in the tag line: “a place for _____.” We look forward to “a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

What will that mean? What will that entail?

A. We'll experience the rule and reign of Christ.

Read Ephesians 1:9, 10

The center portion of these verses is descriptive of what God plans to do. We could remove them to more easily see God's intent. Take the beginning of v. 9 and fuse with the end of v. 10: And he made known to us the mystery of his will which is to bring all things in heaven and earth under one head even Christ. The son of God will assume his rightful place and reign over everything.

There'll no longer be separation between that which is God's space and the areas which temporarily are under the power of the devil who's known as the prince of the air. There'll be no powers or thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities that aren't subject to him. There'll be no holdouts. There'll be no enemy continuing to fight like isolated Japanese soldiers did in the Philippines for years after WWII ended. They refused to believe the war was over and fought on.

Everything will be brought under Christ. We'll enjoy heaven as heavenly citizens because that's the world to which we belong (Philippians 3:20).

B. We'll share in God's glory to claim our inheritance.

Read Romans 8:17

The reason we'll share in God's glory is we're God's children. "How great the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God" (1 John 3:1). He adopted us into his family with full rights and privileges of an adult child. We become joint heirs with Jesus Christ. Everything God gives to Jesus, his heir, he'll give to us. The "if" isn't a question about whether we share with Christ in his sufferings but is to be understood - if we do and it's true that we do share in his sufferings. We have a connection with him because the world treats Christ followers the way they treated Christ.

While Jesus told his followers to store up treasures in heaven (Matthew 6:20), the inheritance God will give us goes beyond them. Paul said he was pushing on toward the goal to win the prize for which God had called him heavenward in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:14). He wrote of "the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day - and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Timothy 4:8). Peter writes of "an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:4, 5).

Scripture tells us "When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

C. We'll experience the redemption of our bodies.

Read Romans 8:22 - 25.

The waiting for the adoption of sons refers to receiving the full benefits of the inheritance we have as children of God. We are children of God now but we haven't received all the perks and benefits yet. There is more to come. This will take place after the resurrection to heaven.

The redemption of our bodies means the entirety of our person will be there. We won't be bodyless souls, just some kind of floating spirits. We'll have physical bodies which will be resurrected. Soul and body will be brought together.

Our mortal bodies - these perishable, decaying, decrepit, inadequate, weak shells will be transformed into imperishable, whole, complete, immortal (1 Corinthians 15:53, 54).

Often people want to know what their body will look like in heaven. Will they look the same they do when we die? Will our bodies be from the prime of life? We'll save those questions for David in Sunday school.

When we get to heaven, we'll do what we were made to do. That part will take care of itself. We won't have to figure out what we're to do. There won't be any issues relating to what we're to do or how to do it cause it's going to be automatic.

Our concern is what about the here and now.

III. How to live in light of heaven

A. Rejoice. Romans 8:23, 24

Hope about what we'll believe we'll have based on what we presently have. We have the Holy Spirit who is the guarantee of what's to come, the pledge of a future inheritance. It's not like a child hoping to get an hippopotamus for Christmas. It's more like holding a set of keys for a brand new car...and hearing the revving of an engine around the corner of the building.

One day Jesus' disciples returned from an evangelistic tour. They were ecstatic that demons submitted to them in his name. Jesus said he saw what had happened. He witnessed Satan fall like lightning from heaven. He told them that he had given them incredible authority, and then said this: "However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20).

It's not about power. It's about position, as in position of having a guaranteed spot in heaven. Our names are on the reservation book. They're not going to be erased. Some maitre-d' or assistant manager isn't going to extend his hand asking us to palm him some money so we can get in.

The difficulty is that while we're living, we are on a wait list.

B. Waiting

The last word in v. 25 is "patiently." But there was another word that may have caught your attention. Groan. Creation is groaning because it wants to be liberated from the curse by which it is bound. It wants to be restored to God's plan for it.

Likewise, we groan because we're waiting. Like waiting in line to get into a concert. You want to get in and to get the best seat you can. You're antsy and fidgety. Make comments like: "Can't this line move any faster? Come on. Come on. Let's get this party started."

V. 23 says "We wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." This is the reason we were saved. We want it. We might be able to taste it. We can imagine it but it's not here yet.

Paul was a groaner. He included himself among those who are living on this side of heaven, as one who groans inwardly. He wrote elsewhere: “Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life” (2 Corinthians 5:2, 4). Then he said, “We are confident, I say, (sounds a little British to me) and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8).

It's in God's timing. Meanwhile, we patiently groan. Groan patiently.

c. Living

Earlier in the chapter we're told that we aren't to be controlled by the sinful nature so that we live according to sinful nature (vv. 9, 12). We have a different obligation. It's to live according to the Spirit, be controlled by him and put to death the misdeeds of the body (Vv. 9, 12, 13).

Another scripture speaks about the end times and the changes that will take place. There's the destruction of the present heavens and earth and then the creation of the new heavens and earth. There Peter records, “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed it's coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements that will melt in the heat. But in keeping with this promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him” (2 Peter 3:11-14).

He brings up our home again. This time it's called the home of righteousness. That means everything will be in a right relationship with God. There will be nothing impure, nothing sinful.

The challenge for us is to live in ways that please God. We're to make every effort to be what we ought to be - holy, godly, spotless, blameless and at peace with him. This doesn't mean we'll reach perfection. This doesn't mean we'll never fail. But the uptick of our lives is to be living lives that are obedient to God.

The beginning words Jesus told his disciples in John 14 were: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; Trust also in me” (John 14:1). We are to trust him about what he has for us in heaven.

Renee Wilson was shocked and overwhelmed by something her husband Lee of 50 years had done. No, he didn't finally offer to dry the dishes or put his dirty clothes in the laundry basket.

The guy had come up with a grand gesture to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. Lee remembered that Renee's favorite flower was sunflower. Don't jump ahead. He didn't give her a sunflower or a bouquet of sunflowers. He went way beyond that. He gave her 1.2 million golden sunflowers. He planted them on 80 acres without her knowing. He timed it so they'd be in full bloom for their anniversary, August 10 of last year. She was shocked and overwhelmed.

Two words that fit with how we'll respond when we get to heaven. Shocked and overwhelmed.