



Present Heaven

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Libin Abraham

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What's amazing is that every civilization, every century, every culture, every civilization, has believed in the afterlife that there was some life beyond this life on Earth. So for instance, archeologists have uncovered a 5000 year old boat that was buried in an Egyptian tomb because the Pharaoh believed that he was going to set sail to the next life. Native American warriors are buried with bows and arrows so they could hunt in the afterlife. Romans looked forward to what they called the Elysian Fields, where they would picnic in the afterlife. Even today, most Americans, over 70% believe that there is life after death somewhere, and 70% believe in a literal Heaven and a literal hell, like there is a real place called heaven and hell. I don't think it's coincidental that people from every civilization, every culture, have had a tilt towards eternity. I think it is what the wise King Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 311 when he said he meaning God has put eternity in our hearts. God has built into our hearts this propensity to long for to think about eternity, so that we will discover God, the only one who is the hope for all eternity. Today, there's this tension that many people live in, which is that though a lot of people believe in life after death, there is what people call a cut and paste theology about life after death, where people take what they like from this TV show, this conversation with a friend or Tiktok or social media influencer somewhere, and we kind of piece together what we would like to think about eternity. And I'll be the first to admit, yes, there is a lot of mystery about what eternity will be like. I don't know all the answers to what heaven will be like, and I'll be excited to figure it out when we get there. But there are some things that I believe we can know, some things that the scriptures at least point us in the direction of wrestling with and interpreting about what life after life here is like. So today, we're going to jump to what heaven now or present heaven is like what heaven now is like to do that we're going to be in Revelation chapter six. It's a passage that's not explicitly about heaven, but this is a passage where John records a conversation that happens in heaven. So it's not about heaven, but it's a conversation about people who are in heaven right now. So we get a little bit of a world view into what their existence in heaven is like and what heaven overall is like. We're going to read this passage in just a moment. But in this passage martyrs, or those who have died for their faith in Jesus, it is martyrs in heaven talking to God in heaven, and I believe that what's true about how they're like and what heaven is like for them is what is also true about any of your loved ones, believers in Jesus, who have died and gone to heaven, what it's true for them, what they're like and what heaven is like. So you got a lot of notes on your fill the blanks on the student notes, but I want to read this passage of Scripture to you, Revelation, chapter six, verse nine to 11. When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they had given, they cried out with a loud voice, Lord, the one who is holy and true, how long until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood? So they were each given a white robe, and they were told to rest a little while longer until the number will be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters who were going to be killed, just as they had been all right? So we're gonna jump into this text and look for clues, and we're gonna pair it with other passages of Scripture about heaven. And here's the first thing we wanna know about heaven. First thing that this passage reveals is that present heaven, heaven as it is right now, is temporary. Okay, heaven as it is right now, is temporary. We see that a little bit in this text, verse 11 of chapter six, they were told to rest a little while longer. They're asking God, when are you going to avenge this? And God says, Just hang in there, a little bit, meaning that the condition they were living in even the location where they were at was not their final destination. So this is what theologians call intermediate state, or present heaven. Heaven, as we know it right now, is actually temporary.

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It's intermediate. What do I mean by that? Well, because permanent heaven, heaven, then heaven, future is what

Revelation 21 talks about, which is not heaven up there in the sky somewhere, but heaven here on earth, on the new heavens and the new earth. It is what John sees as the New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, dressed as a bride for her husband. It is the new heavens coming down to here on Earth. That's the permanent phase of heaven, and until that moment when Heaven's not up there, but it's here. Those who have died in Christ are in this intermediate temporary heaven where they're waiting for the return of Jesus. They're waiting for their bodily resurrection from the dead and for the final judgment that ushers in heaven. Future. Heaven permanent. Next week, we're going to talk about heaven future. So come back next week. But there's an analogy that Randy Alcorn in his book on heaven, which is one of the most comprehensive books on heaven. If you want to jump deep into that, it's a great book. He describes his analogies that I think helps us understand temporary versus permanent heaven. So here's the analogy. Just imagine that you are living in a homeless shelter in Miami, and suddenly you get a phone call that, hey, you have just inherited a beautiful, furnished house along the hillside of Santa Barbara, California. How awesome would that be? Fully furnished. It's beautiful. And you get to live there. And here's the other thing, all of your family members who moved away from Miami, they're going to join you there. I know you're thinking, well, which of my family members are we talking about? The ones I like, but hey, they're going to join you there too. And so you hop on a plane and you're gonna go to Santa Barbara, but you have to have a layover in Dallas, I said, DFW, and you're gonna have to have a plane change, and all your friends and family that used to live in Miami, who are all over the place, they're gonna meet you at DFW in Dallas, and then from Dallas, you're gonna go to Santa Barbara. We're gonna live in this beautiful, furnished house. So when the ticket agent in Miami asks you, Hey, where's your destination? Where are you going? Would you say Dallas, or would you say Santa Barbara? What would you say, Santa Barbara? Because you're passing through Dallas, right? It's a temporary place until you get to permanent, your permanent destination, and so heaven now present. Heaven is a temporary dwelling place where those who have died from all over the world, all over the generations, they're there, but it's not their final destination, because Final Destination isn't up there. It is the new heavens and the new earth. So Randy in his book called heaven. He says it like this, God's children are destined for life as resurrected beings on a resurrected Earth. That's the final destination a resurrected being on a resurrected earth. Now. Heaven now is real. I'm going to say it's a real place, but it's temporary. Second of all, heaven now is a place. So it's not just an idea. It's not a myth. Heaven. Now, I believe, beyond the cosmic horizon that we cannot see, the light cannot reach, it is a real, tangible place. And we see a clue of this in Revelation 69 where John, as he's recording this vision, he says, I saw, I physically saw under an actual altar. When you look at all the images in Revelation that John sees as he gets a view into heaven and God's redemptive plan for present and future heaven, man, there are physical things that you can touch and see and feel. Now, we don't have to go to John to recognize this. You can actually hear this from Jesus in John 14, where Jesus to comfort his followers. He says in verse two, In my Father's house, are many rooms, if it were not so, I would have told you, but I have told you that I'm going to prepare a place for you. He goes on, if I go away and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to where I am, so that where I am not just that you'll be with me, but you will be with me where I am in a certain place, you will be with me there also. So Heaven is not an idea or a myth. It is, I believe, a physical place. Now here's why that matters,

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because when your loved one passes away, they're not just drifting in outer space somewhere. They didn't just get snuffed out. They didn't just disappear. They went from this place to another place. They went from this real Earth, touch and feel and see to a heavenly place. You can also touch, see and feel, which means death is not termination. For a Christian, death is relocation, not termination. It is relocation from this real place to another real place. It's a present heaven. Yes, it's temporary, but it is a real place. Now, third of all. All we maintain our identity in heaven, in heaven, present and in heaven, future, we maintain our identity. Notice how in Revelation 69 as we're told about these martyrs, their story is remembered, not forgotten, not as if their identity, what happened to them, is forgotten or dismissed? No, no. They are remembered for their story. So I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they had given. Here's what's happened to these people and what happened to their life is remembered, their suffering is known, not forgotten, not dismissed. And what is our identity? Identity is the memories we carry. And later on, we'll see that, as these individuals in heaven are asking God to avenge their blood, it means that they also remember what happened to them. They didn't forget how they died. They remembered so they remember the hard days of their life, their persecution, how they suffered. I think they also remember the good days of their life, the beautiful moments, the wonderful moments where they experience the grace and love and mighty power of God. I believe we remember now here's actually what's really cool. The other thing will actually be a comfort to you, especially if your memory seems to be fading, we will remember more in heaven than we do on earth. Amen. I mean, if it wasn't for these iPhones, I wouldn't really remember what my kids were like when they were a baby. But in Heaven, you will have perfect memory. Memory is going to

be required on rewards day when you give an account of how God gave you grace to live out your life on Earth and you remember the kindness of God and the goodness of God and how we stewarded this life on Earth, memory will be required, and in heaven, I believe we will fully remember, because your personality doesn't go away. It's a unique way in which you image God. Your identity remains with you. I would even say this, in many ways, we will be the same in heaven. It's just that we will be fully perfected. We'll have the same uniqueness and personalities, same facial features, perhaps just that we will be fully perfected. You maintain a lot of the same things, identity wise and memory wise, but sin will be no more. Everything broken will be made whole. Everything painful will be redeemed by Jesus. See, we believe that we as a human being, we are spirit, soul and body. And right now, if you're in Christ, your spirit is perfected because you have the Holy Spirit. You've been brought from death to life. You are righteous in Jesus, His righteousness, clothes you, covers you, your spirit is perfected. But then you have your soul, your mind, will and emotions, and in present heaven, your soul is perfected because sin is not there. Satan is not there. We don't have a flesh to battle with there. Your soul is perfected. But not only that, in future heaven, as we are raised from the dead and we get this glorified, immortal, incorruptible body, the Risen body, where calories do not count. Amen, not just are we perfected in our spirit now, not just are we perfected in our soul present heaven, but in our body and future heaven through the resurrection of the dead, every part of who you are is fully perfect in and through. And here's how John says it in first, John chapter three, dear friends, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet been revealed. We talk a lot about who we were before Christ and who we are in Christ, but there's also a who we will be in Christ when we see him. And John says that has not yet been revealed. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him as He is, fully pure, fully perfect, just as Jesus is. And everyone who has this hope, not fear, but this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.

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So John is saying, with that view of eternity, we are daily progressing now into what will be perfect, then we retain our identity, our memories. And I think we're gonna remember how we talked about heaven on this earth, how you sat in that seat in Carrollton, Texas, and you talked about heaven. And maybe you'd be like, Man, that guy was way off, or you're like, man, I was kind of right, but he tried, you know, I don't know. I think we'll remember, here's another thing about heaven. We will know each other in heaven, maybe some people you want to avoid, but I think we'll know each other. I hope you'll say hi to me. Notice in verse 10 of revelation six, the martyrs are asking how. Until you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood. So they don't just know their story. They know the story of the group. They're in our blood. There's this collective identity that is shared because they know each other. They are aware of one another. Our blood, the beauty, of Heaven is that there won't be isolation, it will be the fullness of relationships, the fullness of relationships, where you are known and you are fully known, where you know one another and you are fully known. Heaven is going to be fun for even the introverts, because you don't have the anxiety of, will I know them? Will they know me? What do I say to get the conversation going? No, no, you are going to be fully known, because even the next verse, as God responds to them, God says, Look, I know you are wanting for your fellow, brothers and servants. There's this familiar bond, but I know them. You know them. We know each other. Here's another clue that we know each other in heaven, there's this powerful, beautiful moment that happens in Matthew 17 on the Mount of Transfiguration. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus takes his inner circle, Peter, James and John, onto a mountaintop where he reveals his true identity. So they don't just see him in his human form. They see him to the best they can in his divine form. And on the mountaintop, Jesus brings two guests that Peter did not know of, that he didn't know there was a plus two situation, Jesus brings two people with him. So here's what happens in Matthew 17. He meaning Jesus was transfigured in front of them, and His face shone like the sun. His clothes became as wide as the light. Suddenly, notice who shows up, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with them. Then Peter, oh, you know, it's always got to be Peter's good idea. Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it's good for us to be here if you want, I will set up three shelters here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. Peter doesn't realize they just came from heaven that his shelter is probably not going to be as good as heaven. He's like, I'm going to set up my own shelter for you guys. Let me ask you a question. Peter recognizes who it is that it's Moses and Elijah. Had Peter ever met them before? No. Moses lived 1400 years before Peter. Elijah lived about 850 years before Peter. And it was just like a few years before the iPhone and where you could store pictures on the cloud and you can go look up people's social media profile and LinkedIn. So it wasn't like Peter's face identity. Who is this chatgpt? No, as soon as he had this heaven on earth experience, he immediately recognized who they were. That's Moses, that's Elijah. He recognizes them because we're fully known and we fully know. Another question, had Moses and Elijah met each other before? No, they lived hundreds of years apart on Earth, but they're not showing up on the Mount of Transfiguration. Be like, Who are you again? Why are you here? They were fully known to each other. Why? Because in heaven, they're coming from heaven. They were known to each other. They knew the story of one another's lives. So Peter recognizes Moses and Elijah know each other. And as they step onto the scene in

Matthew 17, they know exactly what is happening, and this is a beautiful comfort. No one arrives in heaven as a stranger. No one arrives in heaven as a stranger. You know each other fully. You know each other's stories. You can testify to the greatness of God in one another's life. Peter recognized them. They knew each other.

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Next point that's beautiful about heaven is that we are fully conscious in heaven. We're fully conscious in heaven. Some people say, okay, the moment we die, we fall into sleep. So sleep or we enter the state of unconsciousness, and we won't wake up until Jesus comes back and we have the bodily resurrection. But I think Paul would say, to be absent here, in that moment you're present with God, your soul, yes, your body returns to dust, but your soul goes to be with God. In fact, we see this in Revelation 6:10 with these martyrs who in heaven notice what they're doing. They cried out with a loud voice that doesn't sound like they're asleep. They know their story. They're looking on Earth, wondering, God, when are you going to judge those or bring justice to those who have killed us? What's going to happen to our fellow servants and brothers and sisters? And so they cried out with a loud voice, because their soul is in heaven. So they can feel, they can think, they can speak. They can even cry out with a voice, so they're not asleep. Their conscious is fully aware and awakened to the reality. So that leads me to think and believe that in heaven, people are connected to what's happening on Earth. People are connected to what's happening on Earth. Just every time I do a funeral, almost I get asked this question, Do people in heaven know what's happening on Earth? And it's not just a theoretical question, it's a personal one, because you wonder, do my loved ones, do my spouse, my kids, my parents, will they stay connected to my story on Earth. Will they know when I walk down the aisle? Will they see me graduating? Will they see me becoming parents myself? And for many people, one of the regrets they carry here is Man, I wish I came to Christ when my parents could still see it, or for some people whose kids have been praying for the salvation of their parents, I wish I came to Christ when my kids could still see it. And here, I don't know all the details of what is known between heaven and earth, but I believe people in heaven are connected to what's happening in our life. Why do I believe that? Well, the prayer of the martyrs in heaven is they cried out with a loud voice, verse 10, they cried out, how long will you judge those who live on the earth and avenge our blood? So they're seeing what's happening on Earth, and they're asking God, how much longer God? How much longer until you win the final battle, until you, like, finish all the unrighteousness and injustice on the earth. How much longer? Why? Because they're seeing what's happening on the earth, and notice God's response in verse 11, he said to them, rest a little while longer until the number will be completed of their fellow servants and their brothers and sisters who are going to be killed, just as they had been. So there's this familiar bond that these martyrs in heaven feel with their fellow servants, brothers and sisters. And God is saying, I'm going to care for them, I'm going to bring them home, and one day, when the full number has been reached, I will execute justice and righteousness on the earth. So they're seeing, they're connected to what's happening on Earth. This is fascinating and strange story in First Samuel 28 where Samuel the prophet, has gone to be with God, but Saul, the king is on earth, and he's trying to preserve a kingdom that God has taken away from him. So Samuel, also Saul. What does he do? He goes and finds a witch, the Witch of Endor, and he asks this witch to bring Samuel's soul back into his presence. It's like, straight, like Lord of the Rings kind of stuff. Okay, finds a witch. He wants to have a conversation with Samuel, though he's dead, and the witch has some capability to do that. So Samuel, like, comes out, and he begins to talk to Saul in some spirit form. But what's remarkable is Samuel actually begins the conversation. Saul doesn't have to fill Samuel in on what has happened since he died. Samuel begins to reveal the details of Saul's life since Samuel died, Samuel didn't have to get briefed on it. He knew the details of what happened in Saul's life. Why? Because I think he was connected to what was happening on Earth and specifically what was happening in Saul's life. Even though Samuel was in this intermediary state, he was aware Moses and Elijah, they didn't get a morning debrief of what was going to happen that day when they showed up, what? Where are we? What is going on? No, no. They immediately knew the redemptive story they were stepping into. They knew what moment of history they were coming into, because they had been seeing the story of God unfolding on the earth. Hebrews 12 talks about the heroes of our faith who have died and they've gone to be with Jesus. And here's what it says, Therefore verse one,

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since we are also surrounded So, since we also have such a large cloud of witnesses surrounding us, it's a picture of ancient games in Rome where there will be a fan base surrounding the athletes. These heroes of our faith are surrounding us, meaning they didn't just precede us. They are surrounding us, encouraging us to continue in our faith, encouraging us to lay aside every hindrance and the sin that so easily ensnares us, to run this race with endurance which lies before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus, saying you can do it. We're cheering you on. Run this race. It's worth it. Fix your eyes on Jesus. They're connected to what's happening in Luke 15. Jesus says that one sinner, when one sinner repents. And enters the kingdom of

God. All of heaven rejoices when one sinner says he accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior. There's a praise party in heaven, not just the angels, but the saints who were there. They rejoice when one sinner accepts Jesus, because they recognize heaven just got a little bit more full. So if you've come to faith in Christ after your loved one has passed away, I think in that moment you received Jesus, your loved one were saying, way to go, dad, way to go. Son, way to go. Daughter, I prayed for this moment. I've been watching your journey, and I'm celebrating with you in this great decision you've made to join the family of God all across revelation, as John depicts the story of God from beginning to end, when Jesus moves on the earth and he moves triumphantly, Revelation 18 and 19 talk about the scores of people in heaven, including prophets, apostles and saints, specifically, who rejoice when Jesus accomplishes victory on the earth. So I don't know if those in heaven see everything on earth, everything in our life, but all I know, I think, is that if they see what's happening in your story, and it gives joy to them, I think God lets them see it. I think if they see an answer to prayers that they've been praying, God is so kind to let them see and rejoice with him and along those who are rejoicing in salvation, in God's victory on the earth and in your life. Our loved ones, who are in Christ, they are connected. They see, they celebrate, and they rejoice in what's happening. Here's the seventh thing about heaven. We are embodied beings. In Heaven, we are embodied beings. Now this is probably what we have least clarity on, especially as it regards to present heaven. Now we know in future heaven, after our bodily resurrection, we have a resurrected, incorruptible, immortal body. We have bodies that are glorious. So that's in future permanent heaven. What's a little bit unclear is, what about now in present heaven? Do people who've died in Christ? Do they have shape, form? Do they have their risen body, because they haven't been resurrected yet? So are they disembodied spirits, kind of floating around? And we don't really have a clear answer on that, but we have a little bit of a clue from verse 11, because it says they were given a white robe to wear. Now, it doesn't mean that they have physical bodies, but I think to wear a robe you have to have some kind of form or shape. I don't know if a lot of disembodied spirits can put on a robe, maybe, but there was some shape that John sees that allowed them to wear garment. So a lot of lack of clarity around this, but here's what we do know about physical bodies who are in heaven. We know Jesus has a body in heaven. He is in His resurrected body that the disciples could touch and feel, see the scars, or see the wounds. Jesus didn't shed off his risen body. He took that body as he ascended into heaven. So he's got a physical body. We know about Enoch. Enoch in Genesis five, it says Enoch walked with God and he was just taken up. He didn't die. He didn't shed off his human body. He was walking with God and, boom, he was just taken up into heaven. So what kind of body does he have in heaven? I don't know. We'll get there, and we'll find out we know about Elijah, who also was taken up, didn't die, but he was caught up in a whirlwind, in a chariot of horses, taken directly to heaven again, didn't shed off his human body, and didn't find his corpse anywhere. So he's in some form, perhaps his body.

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And we know when Moses shows up, he is physically recognizable. It's not like he put on a suit and took it off when he left. He had some form, some shape, where Peter could say that's Moses. So I don't know what kind of bodies people in heaven have right now, but I think they are recognizable. There's some form, some embodiment in present heaven. Now here's what I want you to know. A lot of things we don't quite have complete clarity on, including that, but here's one thing we do know with absolute certainty and absolute clarity. The greatest wonder in heaven is God Himself, what we know to be sure without a shadow of a doubt. So heaven ultimately, is not about a place, though the place is great, it's not about the place, it's about the person. Him, the person of Jesus. What makes us look forward to heaven, ultimately, is not what is there. It's who is there, and the who is God, the Father, God the Son, God, the Spirit in their visible glory, that's who is there? Well we know all across revelation is that the throne of God is there. People experience the glory of God. They see Jesus who was slain like a lamb but risen like a lion. They see one who dwells in an approachable light, but he embraces you. He welcomes you. You feel the infinite glory, and you feel infinite love from Lord Jesus. That's why we look forward to heaven. And if you are looking forward to heaven for any other reason than seeing God Himself, you've missed it, because the glory of heaven, the attraction of heaven isn't the Streets of Heaven. It's not the scenery of heaven. It is the glory and the person of the Lord Jesus that we will stay fixated on for all eternity long. So notice in verse 10, all the things that are happening with the martyrs, all the questions, here's what anchors them. They cried out with a loud voice, Lord, the one who is holy and true. Lot of things they're still figuring out, but one thing they know is that they can direct their words to the Lord. They're not talking about the scenery of heaven. They're not talking about about God. No, no. They can run to Jesus and say, Jesus, Lord, You are the one that is holy. You are the one that is true. And so the reunion of Heaven is going to be amazing. When you see family and friends, yes, it's going to be beautiful. The relief from pain and struggle, it's going to be amazing. But the greatest reality of Heaven is being face to face with the one who gave his life for you, who died on a cross for you, who rose from the grave for you. That is what makes Heaven Heaven, and this is what Paul will say in Second Corinthians, chapter five. In fact, we are confident lot of things we may not know, lot of questions still lingering, but here's what we are confident

about, and that we would prefer to be away from the body, because that means the moment we are obeyed away from the body, we are at home with the Lord. That's what we can be confident about church. So Heaven is home because you are with the Lord. Heaven is home because you bask in the glory of God, visible, Lord of life, Lord of eternity. So would you stand with me today? Here's what I want you to know. We have a lot of longing for heaven, a place without pain and sickness and cancer and death and struggle and mental illness. Yes, we have a lot of longing for heaven. And some of you long for heaven because someone you deeply love is there and you feel a little untethered to Earth.

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So if you're longing for heaven, here's what I want you to know. If you're longing for heaven, look to Jesus. Look to Him. Fix your heart on him, fix your eyes on him, fix your gaze on him. Our longing for heaven leads us to the feet of Jesus. And for some of you, you haven't said yes to Jesus, so heaven will be not your home, but today the door of grace is open because Jesus is saying, Come to me. All of you who are heavy laden come to me if you feel like a failure, if you think you've been disqualified. Because I open the doors of heaven to anyone who will trust in me and what I've done so in our longing for heaven church, let's sing and let's look to Jesus, who is the author and finisher of our faith.