

Heaven: Comfort for Troubling Times

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[0:00] These are troubling times. More and more we are painted as bigots and on par with racists and Nazis and Nazis.

! History is forgotten. Reality is twisted and righteousness is fallen in the streets.! And if that's how you feel, you're not alone. These are troubling times.

And so Jesus' words to his disciples should be all the more comforting to us. Would you turn there to John chapter 14? John chapter 14.

John chapter 14. And we are going to read just the first three verses. Do not let your hearts be troubled.

Trust in God. Trust also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

[1:04] 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. Well, in troubling times, Jesus comforts his disciples with heaven.

And he talks about a house. He talks about rooms and a place. And he talks about you with me. And that's heaven. It's home. It's home. The disciples were entering a troubling time. And Jesus said, remember heaven.

And if we are in troubling times, we too would do well to remember heaven. It's good to think about heaven. And so we're going to begin a series on these Sunday afternoons together, these luncheons, on heaven.

And nothing could be more practical for living right now than the thought of heaven. Only people who have no spiritual sense, only people who have not really thought about heaven, would ever say that someone could be so heavenly minded they are no earthly good.

[2:17] That's a saying, and it's completely wrong. It's not how it works. It's always been the most heavenly minded people that stood against Hitler.

That stood against slavery and racism. It was the most heavenly minded people that opened orphanages and fought for freedom and fought for prosperity. It was the most heavenly minded people who stayed the course in troubling times.

And so we need to think more about heaven. And we need to do more than think. We need to feel the breezes of heaven. And see and feel the sunshine.

And catch glimpses of that shore. And so we need to pierce the fog and see however dimly that we do, mourning.

Mourning in heaven. With Jesus. With the ones that we love. Now, we have three simple points this afternoon. And the first is that heaven is meant to comfort us.

[3:24] And every word there is important. Heaven is, present tense, meant to comfort us. It's really meant to comfort us. And that's taken straight from our passage.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. So Jesus is saying, your hearts are going to have the tendency to start tossing and turning like the waves of the sea. The wind is going to be blowing.

And your hearts are going to be tempted to be troubled. And he says, do not let your hearts be troubled. Now, what is going to give us the ability to speak and calm the waves of our heart?

In troubling times. Well, he gives it to us. He comforts his disciples with heaven. Jesus thought heaven was the medicine they needed. Heaven is meant to comfort us.

It's not a retreat. It's not an ostrich sticking his head in the dirt because he's afraid or he doesn't like what he sees. It's legitimate. It's real comfort.

[4:22] It's not any more of a retreat than tomorrow morning or tomorrow afternoon at 3 or 4 when you have worked a long day and you're starting to look forward to go home.

That's legitimate. That's normal. That's normal. That's meant to comfort you. And heaven is meant to do the same thing. People don't say when you want to go home at 3 or 4 in the afternoon that you're sticking your head in the sand.

It's meant to comfort you. It's meant to comfort you. And heaven is meant to comfort us. Now, we weren't ever meant to go through troubling times without realizing that the Father has a house with many rooms prepared for us.

And that Jesus is preparing a place for us, a place where we belong, a place that we can call home, that we actually fit in, where we belong.

And that's meant to comfort us. That future reality is meant to come back into our present and really penetrate the clouds, penetrate our heart, soothe our fears, comfort our souls, still our troubled hearts.

[5 : 42] It's meant to excite our joy, to make us happy. It's meant to relieve our suffering. It's meant to shine a light on the dark path that we are on. It's actually supposed to do something.

Let me repeat that. Heaven is actually supposed to do something right now in your life. So is heaven doing anything in your life? Is heaven changing the way you live presently in any fashion? Not exterior, maybe not the day in and day out of the things that you do, but the way you do them. The things that you're after, is it changing your life? How much does heaven make a difference in your life?

Heaven comforted our ancient brothers and sisters. So they lived in the Roman Empire. And they were misrepresented.

And they were maligned. People call us racists and bigots and whatever else they want to call us. They said the early Christians were incestuous cannibals.

[6 : 54] You think it's bad for us? It was bad for them. But heaven comforted them. In the Roman catacombs under the city of Rome where the Christians buried the martyrs, there were inscriptions like these.

In Christ, Alexander is not dead, but he lives. Another says, One who lives with God.

Another says, He was taken up into his eternal home. And there are pictures on the walls of heaven. And it's not like our heaven.

It's beautiful landscapes. Children playing. People feasting at banquets. Heaven soothed their hearts in troubling times.

A Greek named Aristides wrote to a friend about Christianity in 125 AD. He's trying to explain why Christianity has been so successful.

[7 : 56] And he says, If any righteous man among the Christians passes from this world, they rejoice and offer thanks to God. And they escort his body with songs and thanksgiving as if he were setting out from one place to another nearby.

Why? The church father Cyprian wrote this, Anyone who has been in a foreign land longs to return to his own native land. We regard paradise as our native land.

Heaven comforted them. Heaven was meant to comfort Jesus' disciples. Heaven is meant to comfort us. So if you're looking around and you're seeing a lot to be worried about, you need to stop and you need to think about heaven.

It is not death to die, to leave this weary road, and join the saints who dwell on high, who found their home with God. It is not death to close the eyes, long dimmed by tears, and wake in joy before your throne, delivered from our fears.

It is not death to fling aside this earthly dust, and rise with strong and noble wing to live among the just. It is not death to hear the key unlock the door that sets us free from mortal years to praise you ever more.

[9 : 25] Heaven is meant to comfort us, to help us. But does it? Well, we have a hard time thinking about heaven, and we have a hard time remembering it, and we have a hard time looking forward to it, and living for it, because we have a hard time finding that comfort.

And a lot of times, it's not because God hasn't told us what it's going to be like. It's not because of that. It's because we have believed Satan's lies. Satan is a liar.

And when he speaks, he lies. When he lies, he speaks his native language. So kids, you don't have to think hard to even speak English.

You probably don't even realize you are speaking English. You speak this language. So naturally, Satan's like that. He has to work hard to tell the truth. Just like you have to work hard to speak

Spanish.

Satan is a liar, and one of the things he loves to lie about is heaven. In Revelation 13, you see a picture of this satanically inspired beast. And listen to what he says in Revelation 13, 6.

[10 : 38] He opened his mouth, this beast, this satanically inspired beast, he opened his mouth to blaspheme God and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.

Satan loves to lie about God, about what God's like, that's his name, and about the place where God lives, heaven. He likes to lie about the people that live in heaven.

And so what is heaven? If you listen to Satan, there, it's a pretty bland place. It's not much to look forward to. It's only slightly better than this.

And it might be absolutely worse than this. And Huckleberry Finn, the Christian, there's a Christian old lady named Miss Watson, and she's a spinster, and she's not married for a good reason.

And she doesn't like Huck Finn having a good time. She doesn't like Huck Finn, and so she's always trying to curb Huck Finn's boyish behavior.

[11 : 45] She went and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was go around all day long with a harp and sing forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it.

I asked her if she reckoned if Tom Sawyer would go there. And she said not by a considerable sight. And I was glad about that because I wanted him and me to be together.

That's heaven according to Satan. Sitting there on clouds, plucking harps, ever singing, nothing else to do. It doesn't appeal to Huck Finn, and if we're honest, it doesn't appeal to us.

But that's Satan's lie. He slanders heaven. So if God is no fun, if God is bad and mean, then surely the place that he creates is going to be the same way.

So he slanders heaven. He says Disney World is boring. He says the Grand Canyon is dull. He says the ocean is small. He says mountains are nothing but bits of rock. Satan takes the best place and he makes it dull and boring, something to hardly look forward to, far away, and probably not real after all.

[12 : 57] Not real at all, really. In the Chronicles of Narnia, in the sixth book, The Silver Chair, it's one of my favorites, there are three heroes, Puddleglum, Eustace, and Jill, and they are captured by an evil queen in the sunless world underground.

She calls herself the queen of the underworld, and she says, all their memories of the overworld, of Narnia, of the sun, are just figments of their imagination.

And she laughs at them because she says, oh, you guys are just playing a game of pretend. You're just imagining things. It's not really real. And they tell her, well, there's a sun there.

And she asks, well, what's this sun like that you're talking about? And they have a hard time. How do you describe the sun? And they say, well, it's like a big lamp.

Oh, well, now you're talking about a lamp. We all know what a lamp is. And your sun is just a dream. And when they talk about Aslan, she says, oh, you're just pretending that there's this big cat.

[14 : 12] We've all seen little cats. There's no such thing as lions. And then she starts to hypnotize them. She says in there over and over again, there never was any world but mine.

Sounds like Satan. Never been any world but mine. There is no Narnia. There is no overworld. There is no sky.

There is no sun. No Aslan. Again and again, she says it. And pretty soon, they're mindlessly repeating it after her. That's Satan's lie.

If heaven is real, which it's probably not, then it's dull. It's boring. So there is no heaven. There is no God.

There is no world but mine. All the rest is just pretend. But here's the truth. Heaven is meant to comfort us.

[15 : 17] And that leads us to the third point. We need to clear the fog. We need to get a glimpse, to start to feel it.

We need to get our imagination in gear. God has given us imagination, something to imagine, something that we haven't seen. And we need to get that imagination and put it in looking forward.

Now, someone might say, maybe one of you says this, but doesn't it say, no eye has seen and no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

Doesn't it say that? We can't know. Not really. We don't know any idea what you're talking about. We can't look ahead. We can't know. All of it's out there. It's beyond our, any sort of knowledge.

We can't think about it now. Not really. Well, it does say that. It says that in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9. Would you turn there?

[16:21] 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9. 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9. Is that the end of 1 Corinthians?

What does it say next? 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9. 1 Corinthians 2, verse 9. But God has revealed it to us by his spirit. And then look down in verse 12.

We have not received the spirit of the world, but the spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. So how are we going to pierce the veil in some small way?

To some degree. How are we going to clear the fog and get a glimpse of heaven such that our faith can lay a hold of it, our heart can go out to it, we can rejoice in it, we can find comfort in it.

How are we going to feel heaven's breezes and heaven's sun? Well, we aren't left alone. God gives us his spirit to show us, to teach us, to help us.

[17:41] And so here is God's, the spirit-inspired book, and he reads it with us. He reads it with us to show us, to teach us, to bring heaven to our hearts, to take it off of the page.

And so that, if you will, the breezes of heaven, the sunshine of heaven will actually start to blow in our lives, to make it real to us. And so that we can say, oh, I can't wait to get there.

It gives us strength to keep running, to make us feel it, to see through Satan's lies, to feel comforted. The Holy Spirit is with us to clear the fog so that we can see the shore and keep swimming.

1952, Florence Chadwick walked into the ocean off of Catalina Island, and she is going to, she was going to swim 20 miles to California.

It was a, she'd already swam the, swam, swam the English Channel. And so this was going to be her next big thing. But it was really foggy that day.

[18:52] It was a foggy, chilly day. It was so foggy, she couldn't see the boats that were around her, that were going with her. She began to swim.

Swim. Swim. And 15 hours in, she begged. to be taken out. But her mom said, you're close, keep going.

Well, finally, she kept swimming, and then she, exhausted, gave up. She stopped swimming. They took her up into the boat. And when she got on the boat, she looked up, and the shore was a half a mile away.

She said, all I could see was the fog. If I could have seen the shore, I would have made it.

Believers, the shore is Jesus.

The shore is home. It's Jesus preparing a place for us. It's him waiting for us. To be with him where he is.

[20:06] The shore is the new heaven and the new earth, the home of the righteous. It's there. Now, the question is, is can you see it?

Do you want to see it better? Do you want to feel it in your soul so that it gives its soul strengthening power so that you keep swimming? Yes, it is foggy, but none of us are home yet, and we need to clear the fog, glimpse through the fog, to be able to see the shore, and hopefully this series will help.

That's what we want to do. Clear the fog, let us see heaven together, but until next month, would you go to the end of Revelation, not right now, but go to the end of Revelation 21 and 22 and read it and read it and reread it and imagine it and pray over it and ask the Holy Spirit, show me my home. Would you do that? Would you read those two chapters until the fog breaks? And would you pray that little prayer, Holy Spirit, show me my home.

Can we do that together? Let's pray. Oh God, the things that you have planned for us are really beyond our imagination, and yet you have given us the Holy Spirit that we might begin to see and taste of the powers of the age to come.

[21:42] Holy Spirit, you are the one who created at the beginning, and you have begun the new creation in our hearts, and we long to be home. We long to belong to be in the creation that we fit into.

And we can say, this world is not our home. We are just passing through, and yet it takes forever. Would you please give us patience? Will you give us faith to keep going?

Pray that you would help us to encourage one another. And Holy Spirit, come and read with us as we read Revelation 21 and 22, and we see the new heavens and the new earth.

Make those things real to us. Pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.