

Heavenly Creatures

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Today's Heaven

John Lennon's infamous song, "Imagine" begins with the words,

*"Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today..."*

Today these words ring true, in some form or another, for many people. Either heaven does not exist at all or, if it does, it is not something to hope for, being seen as irrelevant, boring, or incomprehensible.

As is apparent from the bible, however, heaven was intended for all in a relationship with Christ - a final chapter in God's overarching purpose to rescue, relate to, and restore His creation.

Nonetheless, even for many followers of Christ, heaven remains a vague, distant concept, couched in words such as "eternity," "immortality" and "resurrection", difficult to reconcile with everyday, practical life.

Take a few minutes to look at the passages on the right. What are some of the main ideas about heaven expressed? Use your bibles to check out the context if necessary

The bible itself (interestingly) contains sparse detail on heaven – why do you think this is so?

A discussion on the concept of heaven may, therefore, pose more questions than answers. Consequently, this study can only brush the surface, attempting an exploration of the few things we do know about heaven, and ultimately posing the question: "What difference should heaven make to our lives and to the lives of others?"

Heavenly creatures

In Genesis we see that God created the world, a world where God was not separated from people but instead related intimately to them – living amongst and communing with them until the Fall (e.g. Genesis 3:8-10).

It has been suggested that, as a result, within all of us today there is an "innate consciousness" of this intimate relationship and eternal existence, nostalgia for an unbroken relationship with our Creator and the untouched, luminescent, whole and paradisaic earth.

Moreover, arguably such longing points to the fact that there is something far more fulfilling than this earth awaiting us, a place where we shall at last be restored to our original existence. Such a place is heaven.

"The desire God has placed within us is wild in its longings to pursue the One who is unknown. Its capacity and drive is so powerful that it can only be captured momentarily... And when the moment has passed, we can only hold it as an ache, a haunting of quicksilver that flashes a remembrance of innocence known and lost..."

~ The Sacred Romance ~

It has also been suggested that while all of us experience such desires in our lives, we often mistakenly attach them to the wrong objects – a special relationship; a beautiful piece of music; a moving poem; a breath-taking sunset. In doing so, we believe our joy and meaning derives only from these earthly things, not seemingly realising that such experiences and emotions only point to our heavenly home and ultimately, God.

Genesis 14:19

"Creator of heaven and earth..."

Deuteronomy 26:15

"...from heaven, your holy dwelling place."

Matthew 6:9

"Our father in heaven..."

Acts 1:11

"The same Jesus, who had been taken from you into heaven..."

Ephesians 1:20

"...and seated him [Jesus] at his [God] right hand in the heavenly realms..."

Mark 13:32

"...not even the angels in heaven..."

Matthew 22:30

"At the resurrection...they [people] will be like the angels in heaven."

Philippians 3:20

"But our citizenship is in heaven"

1 Peter 2:11

"I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world..."

Luke 10:20

"...rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

2 Corinthians 5:2

"Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling."

1 Corinthians 2:9

"No eye has seen...no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."

Matthew 24:35

"Heaven and earth will pass away..."

2 Peter 3:13

"We are looking forward to a new heaven..."

Revelation 21:4

"...God is with men and he will live with them. They will be his People...He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Revelations 22:3-5

"No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads...and they will reign for ever and ever."

“The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; in was not in them, it only came through them, and what came through them was longing. These things – the beauty, the memory of our own past – are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard...”

~ CS Lewis – “The Weight of Glory”

- ⇒ What do you think of this idea?
- ⇒ What might be the consequences of living as if earthly pleasures are merely that – not a means to an end, but an end in themselves?
- ⇒ If the most joyous, wonderful things on earth reflect heaven, what might this mean for the suggestion that heaven is boring?
- ⇒ If, as for many people, this desire for God/heaven is not attached to such, what does this mean for sharing our relationship with Jesus with other people?

The future heaven

As can be seen in Revelation (see right), God will one day create a new heaven and a new earth. In these passages it is suggested that:

“He [God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain...”

- ⇒ What do you think this means for our present existence?
- ⇒ What does it mean for those who are currently mourning, crying or in pain? For those who have lost/losing loved ones?
- ⇒ What do you think of the excerpt below?

“If for all practical purposes we believe that this life is our best shot at happiness, if this is as good as it gets, we will live as desperate, demanding, and eventually despairing men and women. We will place on this world a burden it was never intended to bear...most of us live as though this life is our only hope.”

~ The Sacred Romance ~

If we believe in heaven, what difference should that make to our lives?

Some food for thought...

“That is what mortals misunderstand. They say of some temporal suffering, “No future bliss can make up for it,” not knowing that Heaven, once attained, will work backwards and turn even that agony into glory.”

~ CS Lewis – “The Great Divorce” ~

“Our ancestors were afraid of Hell; we are afraid of Heaven. We think it will be boring. But adoration cannot be boring, for one is gazing at the face of the beloved, and the face of the beloved is inexhaustible. We find it hard to imagine the kind of happiness that might flow from a condition of perfection. The very idea of perfection has become alien to us.”

~ Carol Zaleski ~

“The hope of life after death must be separated forever from the behaviour control mentality of reward and punishment. The Church must abandon, therefore, its reliance on guilt as a motivator of behaviour.”

~ Unknown ~

“[Without heaven/eternal life] religious humanists will embrace a narrative in which there is no divine purpose in the world or in nature. The only goals will be those created by individuals and institutions, with the private goal being self-creation and the social goal being reducing pain and cruelty. Success or failure will depend upon human intelligence and effort.”

~ Unknown ~

“The mind is its own place and in itself

Can make a heav'n of hell or a hell of heav'n.”

~ John Milton, “Paradise Lost” ~

“And yet all loneliness, angers, hatreds, envies and itchings that it [Hell] contains, if rolled into one single experience and put into the scale against the least moment of the joy that is felt in Heaven, would have no weight that could be registered at all.”

~ CS Lewis – “The Great Divorce”