

Oregon City United Methodist Church
18955 S. South End Road
Oregon City, OR 97045

Rev. Michael Benischek
503-522-9807
February 7, 2016

Series: Sermons from the Gallery

Sermon: What does Heaven Really Look Like? Can I do Anything I Want?

Matthew 18:10

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.

Revelation 21:4

‘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.’”

2 Corinthians 5:8

We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Philippians 3:20-21

But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

John 14:2

My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?

Sermon:

In the summer of 1986, I turned 13. And instead of playing baseball that year, or swimming in the creek, riding my bike around town, I went to Grandma and Grandpa’s house. Grandma lived 500 miles away. From June till August, I was in the Ozark mountains helping out at their small 10 room motel across from a State Park and gigantic lake. It was a tourist area. They had a swimming pool. They had Grandma’s home cookin. I was 13, and discovering these people called “girls”, that I really hadn’t noticed before. And there were these “girls” that would come to the motel, and go to the pool. And if you’re there all summer, you get a new batch every week. And there was fishing. And boating. And extremely loose and dangerous firework laws - you can still get a stick of dynamite there, and they call it a firework - sold year round. There was a theme park, and caves to explore, and forests to wander. To a kid like me, it was a little piece of heaven on earth.

Maybe you have a place like that. Maybe you’re living in it right now. Maybe you have a time and place where everything seemed right with the world, and if you close your eyes, you can transport yourself back there and be happy in your mind’s eye.

A Sunday School teacher was teaching his class about heaven. He asked the children, “If I sold my house and my car, had a huge yard sale, and gave all the money to the church, would that get me into heaven?” All the children answered, “NO!” “If everyday I vacuumed the church carpets, cleaned the washrooms, and mowed the grass, would that get me into heaven?” -Again, all the children answered, “NO!” “If I was kind to the poor, gave candy to children, and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?” Once more, the children answered, “NO!” “Then how can I get into heaven?” the teacher asked. A five-year-old boy shouted out, “YOU GOTTA BE DEAD!” A crash course on heaven is first of all, to go there, you got to die. I think most of us would like to skip that whole process, but the chances of us avoiding that are very slim. So I think a big question a lot of us

have is “What’s heaven going to be like?”

I know as a kid I thought heaven was going to be a place where I wore a white robe and sort of floated along in the clouds. Others of us think of heaven as sitting on a cloud and playing a harp. Generally, our thoughts of heaven are that it’s going to be a rather boring place; a place where it’s going to be hard to have a lot of fun. Or maybe it’s a place of too much fun, like our skit emphasized. But instead of going with what we’ve heard about heaven, I think it’ll be a good idea for us to take a look at what the Bible says about heaven.

Our scriptures today are little snippets of what heaven looks like. Notice that it’s very vague. Sure, we might hear other passages that talk about streets of gold, pearly gates - but we really don’t know. And Scripture just gives us a feeling of what it will be like someday.

Here are a few things that I do know:

First, heaven is a place where God dwells. What are the 3 most important words in real estate? Location, location, location. The house can look great, it can have top of the line appliances, but if it’s in a bad location it’s not going to matter! You want your home to be in a nice, safe area. You want your home to be in an area where you’ll have good neighbors. Well, heaven is in a great location! The location’s so good that we’re told God dwells there! Can you imagine that? One of your new neighbors is going to be God! And God’s presence affects everything! How many rooms? Many rooms! My joke is that I’m glad there’s many rooms, there’s some people I don’t want to room with. The Bible says, that “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light.” This place will last forever. The earth will soon dissolve like snow, all things will someday cease, but not heaven. God’s there. You’re in the right place. Therefore our dwelling in heaven is PERMANENT! What’s heaven going to be like? It will be a place where God dwells. Something else I know: It will be a place of relief and rest. A lot of people see life as being a hassle; as being tough and difficult. For some people life doesn’t bring a lot of hope because of all the turmoil you face. We experience broken hearts. We experience betrayal. We experience sickness and disease. We experience death and grief. Now I’ll be honest with you. I enjoy life. I’m amazed at how blessed I’ve been in my life. I’ve done things and been places where I step back and think, “How in the world did I ever get to be so lucky?” So I don’t want you to think I’ve got a death wish or something. I’m not one of those people who says, “I wish I could just die and go to heaven right now.” I’m not that spiritually mature yet. And I can imagine that most of us aren’t looking to get on that bus just yet. But let me tell you something. Heaven is going to be a place of relief. Pay attention to what v. 4 says. John tells us heaven will be a place where there is no more death, mourning, crying or pain. I can’t even fathom that! Can you imagine what it would be like to live life without the fear of dying; without wondering if your kids are safe or not; without ever experiencing hurt or pain again? How would that make a difference in your life? I think most of us would have a great sense of relief. It’d be like a major league burden being lifted off of our shoulders.

I like how Ecclesiastes puts it in chapter 3: “He has also set eternity in the hearts of men.” This world has some beautiful things within it; some things which I love and enjoy. But this place can never fully satisfy me. Why? Because this place is only temporary in nature. When you’re having a great time you’re always longing for more. And it’s disappointing when it comes to an end. This happens to a lot of us on vacation. We get away and go to the beach. We relax and have a great time. But by Wednesday or Thursday we start getting anxious. Why? Because we know it’s almost over. Heaven’s going to be a great relief to us b/c it’s not ever going to end. I picture it being like the best vacation you’ve ever been on, except it just keeps on going! When we’ve been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days, to sing God’s grace, then when we’ve first begun. What’s heaven going to be like? It’s a place where God dwells. It’s also a place of relief. What else is heaven going to be like?

Something else I get from the Bible about heaven: It will be a place of restoration. I like the word Salvation here. Salvation. To save. To restore. The way it should be. So when you enter into heaven, you’re not going

to enter into heaven w/your worn out and beaten down body. You're going to get a heavenly make over! My dad will have his legs back. My grandfather will lose his dementia. You're going to receive a new body! Stronger, better, Paul says, "(He) will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body." Before you start thinking about it I want to say I have NO IDEA what our bodies are going to look like and at what age they're going to be. Great questions to which I have no answer. But I do know our bodies are going to be powerful and strong. 1 Cor. 15: 43 speaks of the body like this: "it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power." Death for the Christian is a gate that must be passed thru in order to enter into the presence of God and to experience His restoration. It's thru death that we will be made into something far greater than we are now. What's heaven going to be like? It will be a place where God dwells. It will be a place of relief. And it will be a place of restoration. It's my desire to see more and more of us make reservations for heaven b/c it will make heaven a much sweeter place.

One last things about heaven. It's all based on relationships. If you were to ask me, Pastor Mike, what does heaven look like, the only thing I truly know is that it is total relationship. Being at one with the Universe, whatever you want to call it. Being with friends and loved ones for eternity. The Bible gives metaphors such as Heaven is like a banquet. A party. A celebration. Togetherness. It also gives metaphors of the other place, the place you don't want to go, as a place outside the celebration, outside the gate, no relationships, just isolation where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Think about it like this: When have you been the most happy? It probably had to do with relationships. When have you been the most saddened or depressed? Probably when your relationships were faltering, severed, or non-existent.

A few years back, I took my own kids to that old motel where I spent that amazing summer. Grandpa's gone, and grandma moved back to Nebraska and is now in a retirement facility. The place looked different. It felt different. It's like going back to an old home that you once lived in, but it's not the same. There's no connection. There's no relationship. It was my heaven on earth, but now it's changed, because my family's not there anymore.

To me, that's what heaven is. Total relationship. God's there. Family's there. A place of rest, relief and restoration. And a party, a celebration. And you're invited. But take your time, when you're done down here - no rush. And even though you've got all the time in the world, you'd better make your reservations now. Put Christ in your heart, trust in him, and let the celebration begin.

Afterlife Skit

Scene 1

Man lying on ground, angel standing over him.

Man: “What happened.”

Angel: <Big bold dramatic> “Welcome to the Afterlife!”

Man: “Afterlife? You mean I’m dead?”

Angel: “Well, you were just robbing a donut shop on Law Enforcement Appreciation Day, what’d you expect?”

Man: “So I made it, huh? Didn’t think that was possible, knowing me. Hey, can I see my mom, my dad?”

Angel: “Sorry, they didn’t make it this far. Just you.”

Man: “Well, that’s surprising. So what can I do here? Just float around, play a harp?”

Angel: “Anything you want. This is the Afterlife, after all. Your great reward.”

Man: “Anything?”

Angel: “Trust me. Anything.”

Man: “Well how bout I just go fishing for a while. That sounds nice, just me and the great outdoors. It’s time I relaxed for a while. You got fishing up here?”

Angel: “Of course, here’s a pole. Try that pond right over there.” Angel points off into distance.

Man: “Thanks! I can get used to this afterlife thing!”

Man walks towards where Angel was pointing.

Scene 2

Man comes back in with a pole and mess of fish.

Man: “Hey, angel! Hey!”

Angel: “How was the fishing?”

Man: “Great! Better than great. Best fishing I ever had. My bait no sooner hit the water and a big ol’ fish hit the line. Every time.”

Angel: “Sounds wonderful!”

Man: “Yeah, you’d think that. But after a while, it kinda gets boring, you know. Sometimes half the fun of fishing is not catching any fish. This was great, but I gotta try something else. <Pause and thinks> How ‘bout casinos? You got casinos up here?”

Angel: “Of course we’ve got casinos. We practically invented them!”

Man: “Great, get me to a casino!”

Angel: <Handing him some poker chips> “Take these, and just past the fishing pond you’ll see the casino. Can’t miss it. And guess what, Elvis is playing tonight.”

Man: “Hey, thanks! What if I need anymore chips?”

Angel: “Trust me, this is the afterlife. You’ll be just fine.”

Man: “Thanks Lady, you’re the best.”

Man walks towards the casino.

Scene Three.

Man comes back with a load of chips.

Man: "Hey angel! Hey!"

Angel: "How was the casino?"

Man: "Great, I mean, better than great! Every time I played a slot machine, it payed out. Everytime I bet on red, it came up red. Everytime I played blackjack, I got a 21. Too bad I didn't have this kind of luck when I was alive!"

Angel: "So what's the problem?"

Man: "It's no fun if you win everytime. I can't seem to lose. It sounds wonderful, but it gets boring after awhile. It's just not the same." <Ponders to think> "I know, maybe I need a little company! You got any ladies up here? Someone to go out with dancing, and dining, and who knows, a little kissy-kissy?"

Angel: "This is your reward, isn't it? Of course we have ladies up here for you. Just past the casino, you'll find our dating location, we call it, AngelsOnly.com."

Man: "Thanks, lady, you're really great, and understanding!"

Man goes off again.

Scene Four:

Man comes back dejected.

Man: “Hey angel! Hey!”

Angel: “So loverboy, how’d it go?”

Man: “Great, I mean, better than great! Every beautiful woman I asked out said yes. Every time I wanted to go dancing, they’d say Yes. Every time I wanted to go out to dinner, they’d say Yes. Everytime I’d say, ‘Let’s go back to my place’, they’d say yes. It was a dream come true! All I ever wanted!”

Angel: “So what’s the problem?”

Man: “Well, it’s no fun after a while. Half the fun is the chase, and if there’s no chase, if there’s no relationship, then something’s a little off. Having everything I ever wanted gets a little old after a while. Everything I do, I succeed. But yet I’m still miserable! What kind of heaven are you running up here anyway?”

Angel: <With a knowing grin> “Who ever said this was heaven?” <Man panics, angel laughs, lights fade out.>

Adapted from an Old Twilight Zone.