

Heaven

I think this is the right place and the right time to say the right words and that makes me think of Albert Schweitzer, the great doctor, missionary, musician, who built the hospital in the jungle of Africa. One time this great missionary, public speaker, adventurer, traveler was here in America touring around, speaking at different lecture halls across the country, and he told this story on himself.

A Joke!

One night he came home from his hospital very late. Much, much too late for a married man to be coming home. As he approached the house, he began to worry about what he was going to say to his wife, because he knew she would be up and waiting on him and there would be trouble. He thought maybe she might be asleep. As he approached the house he turned off the engine and silently let the automobile glide into the yard. He listened and there was not a sound except for a few monkeys that were awake and a few night birds that lived in the jungle. He thought, "Oh good! Maybe she is asleep." He got out of the car and tip-toed up to the porch and listened and he thought he could hear her snoring. So, he

removed his shoes and tip-toed up on the porch, silently opened the door, crept inside the house, listened again, and sure enough he could hear the sound of snoring. He thought, "Oh, everything is going to be okay! There won't be any trouble tonight!" He silently slipped into the bedroom, got on his pajamas, and just as he was ready to crawl into bed . . . it happened! She rolled over in her sleep and began to call the dog. Dr. Schweitzer said, "This is the right time and the right place to do the right thing. So, I got down on my hands and knees very quickly and licked her hand."

I've never been blessed with that ability to do the right thing at the right place at the right time. If that would've been me, I probably would've barked! Maybe worse than that, I might have even bit her hand. But, I'm convinced that it certainly is the right place and the right time to say the right word and I hope you will pray for me so that God will put the right words upon my lips.

Homecoming

What do you think of when you think of a homecoming? Most of us think of going home. We think about our father, our mother, our brothers, our sisters, our grandpa, our grandma, our aunts, uncles, and cousins. Some of those wonderful times we've had. Maybe Thanksgiving or Christmas or birthdays or other occasions that calls the family home. But, in relationship to the church, what do we think about? We think about our brothers and sisters in Christ, old friends. We think about the grand old hymns of the church that we love to sing and about one of those delicious church dinners. We all have fond memories that we think about as we think about homecomings that we have experienced at the church.

The Greater Homecoming

I want to speak to you this morning about the greater homecoming. The homecoming that many of our loved ones, our broth-

ers and sisters in Christ have already experienced. That greater homecoming that each one of us is looking forward to as a Christian. I am referring, of course, to that heavenly homecoming. The scripture is from Revelation 21. In addition to that scripture I want to use these words of Jesus found in John 14. "Let not your heart be troubled, you believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions, if it were not so I would've told you. I go to prepare a place for you and if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you unto Myself that where I am, you may be also."

Why I Believe in Heaven

If you were to ask me why I believe in Heaven, I would have at least five good reasons. First of all, I believe in Heaven because the human soul has always longed for just such a place. You can go as far back as history will take you and you will find that has always been true. I do not believe that God would permit such a universal longing in the hearts and souls of all mankind without making some provision for its realization.

Secondly, I believe in Heaven because the human soul has always felt that there was such a place. Whenever people get tired of their doubts, when they get tired of arguments that are presented by science and philosophy and psychology, one can go off and commune with nature and there comes that small, still voice from within which says, "It must be so. It just must be so." That is the universal instinct of Heaven that God has placed within everyone of us.

I believe in Heaven, thirdly, because the human soul needs such a place. The best developments of this life are only fragmentary. The soul needs a place where it can go on to the perfection that God intended for it.

I believe in Heaven, fourthly, because justice demands there be a Heaven. Things are not right here on this earth. God made

them right in the beginning, but then man, like the fool he's always been, committed sin and ruined everything. So, from the beginning things have not been right. Is it right that the Apostle Paul should receive stripes beyond measure and be shipwrecked and suffer all that he suffered for the sake of the Gospel and then someday not be rewarded for his efforts for Jesus Christ? Is it right that Nero and Diocletian should wade in the blood of innocent Christians and then one day not be punished for their crimes? Just as justice demands a Hell, even so, justice demands a Heaven. Shall the Son of God be crucified and then one day not be glorified?

My fifth reason for believing in Heaven, and the best reason of all, is simply because God tells us there is a Heaven right here in His own Holy Word. If there were no other reason for believing in it that would be reason enough for me.

What Will Heaven Be Like?

What is Heaven going to be like? If we are going to spend all of eternity there I think that it's only natural that we would be interested in understanding what this grand and glorious homecoming is really going to be like.

I. First of all, we learn that Heaven is going to be a place. A real place. That is important to me. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you." The reason that is important is because some people claim that Heaven is only a hope in the back of your mind, just an ideal, just a figment of the imagination. But on the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm so glad to say to you that is not true. Jesus did not say, "I'm going to prepare a hope for you or a figment of the imagination for you." Jesus said, "I'm going to prepare a place for you." Jesus did go somewhere, someplace. He couldn't have gone nowhere, because where is nowhere? Wherever He went and wherever that place is, there He is preparing a place for you and for me.

Mansions

He says, "In My Father's house are many mansions." Every one of us have seen beautiful mansions in this world. I remember one time on one of my trips I had a little extra time, so I took a boat tour out of Miami, Florida down south along the coastline. I saw the Smith Brothers cough drop home, Elizabeth Taylor's winter home, and a few little mansions like that. But, the one that really blew my mind was the Deering Estate. When the boat came to this mansion it stopped and the guide began to describe this mansion. First he pointed out all the luxurious gardens surrounding that estate. He described the different exotic plants that were grown there. He told us how many full time gardeners it took to manage all those flowers and shrubs and hedges and plants and all that they had there. Then he began to describe the mansion itself. He told us how many rooms were in that mansion. He told what was in each room. He told all about the Persian rugs on the floors, the works of art hanging on the walls, the tapestries, and what they cost. He just went on and on until it defied description.

When he finished and the motor on the boat started up we began to slowly drift out into the ocean to continue our journey, I suppose everyone on that boat had the same feeling that I did. "Wouldn't it be nice to live in a place like that!" Just then, the guide astonished every one of us saying, "You can have this mansion free if you want it." I know my mouth fell open as did everyone else's. Almost at once everyone was saying, "How? How could we have this free?" The guide said, "Yes, it is a fact. The owners are offering to give it away free of charge, because they cannot pay the taxes. The State of Florida has refused it as a free gift because they would rather have the taxes. The United States Government has refused it as a little White House in Florida because they would rather have the taxes." Then the guide told us what the taxes were on that piece of property. It was in excess of \$1,000,000 a year. It must be nice to live in a place like that. But, did you ever stop to think that when we get to Heaven, even the Deering Estate will be

like a shack in comparison to what God has prepared for us up above. For He is the divine architect and builder of all the ages. Heaven is going to be a place. A real place of many mansions.

II. Secondly, I want to point out that Heaven is going to be a prepared place. Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you." In the preparation of Heaven, He is making it very commodious. God has plenty of room. I have often heard of people speaking of Heaven critically. "Oh, I don't know if I want to go to Heaven or not. There might be a housing shortage. We might be all cramped like a bunch of sardines." I hate to hear someone talk like that. I think it is sacrilegious and secondly, they are showing their ignorance of the Word of God and of the power of God.

Our World is Small!

Talk about size, space, and distance, did you ever stop to realize that this little earth that we live upon is actually so small that if reduced to a liquid you could pour 1,200,000 earths of this size into the sun and still have room for 4,900,000 moons to lay around the inside edge. Talk about space, how far away is the sun that warms the earth? Well, it is so far that if you chartered the Chattanooga Choo-Choo and took off at 60 miles per hour and traveled day and night, it would take 177 years to ever reach the sun, because it is 93,000,000 miles from the surface of the earth. Thinking of time and distance and space and travel, how many of us stop to realize that the entire solar system, sun, moon, stars, planets, and all the rest, is sailing ahead through space right now at a speed 400 times faster than a bullet. Where are we headed? The astronomers say we are headed straight for the constellation of Lyra. Every second that the clock ticks off, we are ten miles closer to it. That means that we have all traveled 150 miles since I just mentioned that 15 seconds ago. When are we going to get there? Nobody seems to know. The scientists do not seem to know. The astronomers don't know.

Because we have been traveling that way ever since the world was created. Who conceived this magnificent universe? Who brought it into being? Who sustains it? You know as well as I that the answer is God. That is why it makes me warm under the collar every time I hear one of these pitiful, puny, infidels disputing about God, finding fault with God, criticizing the Word of God, even having the audacity to say, "There might be a housing shortage in Heaven."

The Size of Heaven?

Did you ever stop to figure out exactly how large Heaven is? In Revelation it says that an angel took the measurements and found that it was twelve thousand furlongs. As we measure that is eight million feet, but then Revelation says cubed, that is eight million feet cubed. That is 512 quintillion cubic feet of space. Can you even imagine it? We have come to talk in terms of thousands, we can imagine that. We can even imagine millions, because we have been faced with a federal deficit for many years now in terms of trillions. Several years ago the Senate was engaged in a debate over one trillion dollars debt. Everyone says that is just beyond the imagination. Beyond trillion comes quadrillion and then beyond quadrillion comes quintillion, so it is beyond anything we can imagine, the room that there is in Heaven. Heaven is 512 quintillion cubic feet of space.

To try to help us realize how much room there really is in Heaven, let us suppose the world would stand for 100,000 years. Already the earth has been 6,000 years according to many Bible scholars. Let's suppose that the world goes on for another 94,000 more years before the end, and let's further assume the death rate continues as it is right now with approximately one billion people dying off each 100 years. That means that at the end of 100,000 years three hundred trillion people would have lived and died on this old earth. Suppose they all went to Heaven, which is ridiculous because Jesus has already said, "Straight and narrow is the way

that leadeth to life eternal and few there be that find it. Broad is the way that leadeth to destruction and many there be that go in after." But, for the sake of the illustration let's suppose everyone went to Heaven. Divide three hundred trillion people into the 512 quintillion available feet of space and what do you get? You find that God would be giving each one of us 177,000 cubic feet of space to live in. Brothers and Sisters, if that is not enough room for you to move around in and feel comfortable then I believe that God has enough power to send down His heavenly surveyor and increase Heaven a few sextillion acres more for your personal comfort, because we know that Heaven is going to be a comfortable place!!

Beautiful!

Yes, it is going to be commodious and it is also going to be beautiful in Heaven. God loves beauty. This we know or He would not have given us the many beautiful things in this world. When we see the dogwoods in the springtime in the South, we know God loves beauty. When you see the azaleas, you know God loves beauty. When you see the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee in the fall with all their color that results because of 500 varieties of trees and plants in those mountains, you know that God loves beauty. But, there is just one thing wrong with the beauty in this world and that is the fact that sin has marred the perfect picture. But, in Heaven there will be no sin and therefore the beauty will be absolute perfection. The Bible tells us in Revelation that the walls will be made of jasper, the foundation will be garnished with precious stones, every gate of the city will be a pearl, and the city itself will be paved with pure gold. But, after all, those are finite words, employed in an effort to describe that which is infinite.

The Little Blind Girl

To try and describe the beauties of Heaven reminds me of the

story of the little girl that was blind since birth. She had never seen springtime or fall. She had never seen the ocean or people or automobiles or anything. The only thing she knew is what her mother told her. One day a noted surgeon came to town and operated on the eyes of this little girl. After the operation, the day came when he led her to the window of the hospital room and removed the bandages and she was able to see with her own eyes for the very first time. She gazed out the window at trees. She saw automobiles moving up and down the streets. She saw people walking, flowers, the clouds in the sky, the blue sky itself, the sun, and as she took in all of this, suddenly she burst out in tears and she ran sobbing to her mother and said, "Why didn't you tell me how pretty it was, Mommy? Why didn't you tell me?" The mother was upset and she said, "Child, I did tell you. I've been spending all my life telling you how pretty everything is." The little girl objected and she said, "No, Mommy, you never did tell me how beautiful it was." Then it dawned on the mother what was happening and she said, "My child, I guess that you have to see it with your own eyes in order to understand it." That is the way it is with Heaven. No doubt when we get there we may object to the Apostle John and say, "Why, when you were writing there in the Revelation, why didn't you go ahead and tell us how really beautiful that it was going to be? John will say, "I did. I used every word that could be found in written language to describe it, but the beauties of Heaven are infinite."

Comfortable

Yes, it is going to be beautiful, it is going to be commodious, and it is going to be comfortable. There will be no grinding toil up there. No blast furnaces to swelter over, no heavy burdens to break down tired shoulders. Rising up early in the morning, toiling all day long, coming home at night so tired that you cannot even go to sleep, these things are not going to take place in Heaven, because the very words toil, poverty, misery, hunger, anxiety, and sickness

will not be found in Heaven's vocabulary. There will be no trouble in Heaven. It's hard for us to imagine, isn't it? Because the very first thing we do in this life is to cry and the last thing that most people ever do is to groan. But there will be nothing like that in Heaven.

No Death!

There will be no death in Heaven. There will be no undertaker to call. There will be no broken hearts as the dirt is thrown over the casket, because there will not be any cemeteries up there. I Corinthians 2:9 says, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit." I am so glad that God has revealed to us just a little bit about Heaven.

Busy Place!

It's going to be a place, a real place, commodious, beautiful, comfortable, and then as we read a little bit further in the scriptures we understand Heaven is going to be a busy place. It's going to be busy with intellectual activity. Heaven will be a place of never-tiring thoughts. There will be no stagnation of learning up there. We will be able to learn as much in five minutes in Heaven as it took a whole lifetime to learn down here. In this world, some of us have been too poor to obtain a good education. Others, like myself, have been too stupid to learn all that we should have learned. But, in Heaven, God will touch our brain so that we can wrestle with the infinite mysteries of the universe. The Bible says that "we shall know even as we are now known" I Corinthians 13:12.

Heaven will also be busy with social activity. There will be a reception room. Not like the reception rooms that we have among earth's society. For here we have backbiters, gossipers, and trouble

makers. But no one like that will inhabit Heaven's society. Down here we have the gang that sells liquor and drugs and all the rest of it, but in Heaven not even the smell of alcohol or drugs will be available. As we step into Heaven's society room, Jesus Christ will be the first one to greet us.

What Will You Do First?

Someone has asked me, "What do you think you will do when you get to Heaven?" I said, "Well, when I get to Heaven I think I will first of all look at Jesus." I want to have a good long look, maybe about 500 years, just to admire Him and to thank Him for saving my soul. After I have had a good long look at Jesus then maybe there will be time to look around and see if there is anybody else I know. How do you feel about it? What do you think you will do when you first get to Heaven?

3 Surprises?

Somebody once said there will be three surprises when we get to Heaven. First of all, we are going to be surprised not to see a lot of people there that we thought would be there. Secondly, we are going to be surprised to see some folks there that we didn't think would be there. The greatest surprise of all will be to see that we made it ourselves! I don't know what you think about that, but I disagree. I think that we probably will be surprised to see some folks there that we didn't think would make it. I think we might be surprised not to see some folks there that we did think would make it, because we are not the judge. God is the judge.

But I truly do not expect to be surprised about myself. I'll tell you why. God has revealed in His Holy Word, the Bible, just exactly what we can expect. God has told us in His Word that if we put our faith in Him, according to Hebrews 11:6; if we repent of all of

our sins, according to Acts 13:3; if we publicly confess the name of Jesus Christ, according to Matthew 10:32; if we are baptized into Christ, according to Mark 16:16; and if we are faithful in living for Jesus, according to Revelation 2:10 that we will be in Heaven. No doubt about it. I know in my heart whether I have done what Jesus has asked me to do and whether I am continuing to do what Jesus asks me to do, therefore I do not expect to be surprised about where I spend eternity. You also know in your own heart whether you have obeyed the Gospel and whether you are continuing to live the Gospel faithfully. If you have obeyed and are being faithful then you are not going to be surprised to be in Heaven. If you are not obeying, you are not going to be surprised to be left out of Heaven.

Other Activities

There are going to be many other activities in Heaven besides the ones I have named thus far. For example, in Revelation 7:9-12 we get a good idea about how busy we are going to be in Heaven. "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothes in white robes, with palm branches in hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!' And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, 'Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.'" The point is that we are going to be so busy in Heaven serving our God, praising His Name continually. Yes, that will be our chief joy, to serve God in His temple.

III. Heaven is going to be a place, a real place, a prepared place, commodious, beautiful, comfortable, a busy place. And,

finally, we know that Heaven is going to be an eternal place. Paul says here, "We have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come." Nineveh, Babylon, Rome, Tyre, Sidon, all the great cities of the past have crumbled and passed away, but Heaven is a city whose builder and maker is God and the foundations will never crumble. We shall be there in that great and grand homecoming forever and forever and forever.

Prisoners in the Philippines

Many of you can remember the dark days of World War II and the Christian Church missionaries who were imprisoned by the Japanese in Manila, Ray Carlson and his wife Imogene, who are still on the battle line for God. Many years ago we had the privilege of being with Ray and Imogene Carlson on the island of Cebu in a thrilling evangelistic meeting. We had the additional thrill of hearing them tell this story first hand that I want to relate to you about our other missionaries, Brother and Sister Leslie Wolfe, and some others that were in the prison camp on the island of Luzon in the Philippines. They were held there for over three years. The Japanese had them on a starvation diet. They did not want them to live, they wanted them to die. They had a terrible, terrible time.

Toward the end, they were all so weak that it was even hard for them to walk. Brother Leslie Wolfe was down to less than 100 pounds. He was nothing but skin and bones. The others were not in much better shape than he. Then the Japanese decided on a most horrible plan. They decided that they were going to execute the prisoners. One of the Filipinos who worked there at the prison was able to read Japanese. When he was cleaning up the Commandant's office he noticed that order on the commandant's desk. So, he spread the word among the more than 2,000 American prisoners in the prison camp and the Filipinos that were also held there. Of course, the prisoners began to try to figure out a way that they could escape.

One of the Americans had managed to put together a home-made radio with different pieces and parts that had been smuggled into the prison camp. Over that homemade radio, he had been listening and he found out that General MacArthur had kept his promise and had returned to the Philippines and he was not really too far away from this prison camp. The prisoners held a meeting secretly at nighttime and asked for volunteers who would try to escape and get through to General MacArthur. There were four single men who volunteered. They slipped out at nighttime and somehow, miraculously, managed to slip through the Japanese lines and they got back to General MacArthur and told him of the horrible plans of the Japanese to execute the Americans and the other prisoners. General MacArthur sent the men back with this encouraging word, that he would come and rescue them before the date that the Japanese had set for the execution.

They managed to slip back into the camp and the word spread among all the prisoners. They were greatly encouraged. But as the time went on and that execution date drew near, suddenly the Japanese changed their minds and they decided to move the date up two days. All hope of rescue failed. But, very, very early one morning, just before daybreak, some of the prisoners heard the drone of airplane motors in the sky. For almost four years they had not heard the sound of an airplane motor. Some of them jumped up and ran out into the courtyard to look up and see what was happening. But others said, "Down! Down! You must get down!" They managed to keep all the prisoners laying flat on the ground or else inside their prison quarters.

Then all at once it happened. Filipino guerrillas had surrounded that prison camp during the darkness of the night and they arose instantly as one man and they stabbed all the Japanese guards and they dropped without a sound. At that same time those airplanes appeared overhead and opened their door and hundreds of paratroopers leaped out. Soon the sky was filled with the white, silken chutes as the soldiers floated down to the rescue. Just then, those who were there tell how poor, old, brother Leslie Wolfe, nothing

but skin and bones, tottered out there in the open, along with his wife, and when he looked up at the sky and saw the sky filled with those beautiful white parachutes, he began to cry for joy. He grabbed his wife and hugged her and he said, "Oh, Darling, just look up. Look up! isn't it beautiful! The angels are coming to take us back home!" *That's how much freedom and homecoming meant to those who had been in prison for such a long time!!*

My dear friends, I often think in my mind of how it's going to be one day when the trumpet sounds and we look and what will we see? We will see our Lord Jesus Christ coming to the rescue. Oh, how our hearts will shout for joy because that is the moment that we are living for . . . when our Jesus will descend with His holy angels to gather us up and take us home.

They tell of that city far up in the sky.

I want to go there, I do.

'Tis built in the land of the sweet by and by.

I want to go there, don't you?

There Jesus has gone to prepare us a home

I want to go there, I do.

Where sickness and sorrow and death hath no power.

I want to go there, don't you?

When Jesus is crowned King of all kings,

I want to be there, I do.

With shouting and singing 'til all Heaven shall ring.

I want to be there, don't you?

We'll shout hallelujah again and again.

I want to be there, I do.

And then we'll close with that chorus, "Amen and Amen."

I want to be there, I do.

I want to be there. I expect to be there, I do.

I want to be there. I want to be there.

I expect to be there, do you?

If you do, Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, the life. No man cometh on the Father except by Him. As we extend this invitation

MY FAVORITE MISSIONARY SERMONS

would you then make that all important decision? Would you step forth to give your life to Jesus, to accept Him as your Savior and Lord, to obey Him in Christian baptism, to unite with Him in His church? You are invited to do so.