

Christian Warfare

Inhabitants Of The Heavenly Places

Ephesians 6:10-12

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. 11 Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:10-12 (NKJV))

In our last message, we ventured a glimpse into the spiritual realm that God calls “the Heavenly Places”. And we asked the questions, “what are those Heavenly Places and where are they located”? Are the “Heavenly Places” mentioned here in verse 12 the same place as the “Heaven” that we have read and heard about all our lives, that place where God sits on His throne, with Jesus seated at His right hand, ruling the world? Or are the “Heavenly Places” a different place.

As we examined the many references in these scriptures that speak about “Heaven” and the “Heaven of Heavens” and then also these “Heavenly Places”, we were led to the answer that No, the “Heavenly Places” spoken about here are not the same place as the “Heaven” that we are accustomed to thinking about, that place where those of us who have received Christ as Savior and Lord will spend an endless eternity.

These “Heavenly Places” are a special realm within the “spirit world” that, for a lack of a better way of expressing it, is somewhere “in between” our natural world and the “Heaven of Heavens”.

Thankfully, God does not leave us to much speculation about the Heavenly Places. He has provided us with enough examples and explanations describing those special realms that we can know most of what we need to know about them, and also about the creatures and the people who live there, and about the many things they do.

One passage that is especially revealing to me is the account in Luke 16 of “Lazarus and the rich man”, this Lazarus not being the same Lazarus who was raised from the dead, but was a poor beggar. In this passage, we are given a brief glimpse into both “Paradise” and into “Torment”, both of which are located in those “spirit realms”. Turn with me to Luke 16, and beginning in verse 19 read along with me . . .

19 “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. 20 And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, 21 who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ 25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. 26 And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ 27 And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father’s house— 28 for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ 29 But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ (Luke 16:19-29 (ESV))

These words give us a vision of some of the people and some of the things that take place in those “spirit realms”. And here also, we are provided with answers to some of the most commonly asked questions about what takes place after we die.

We see from these words that both Paradise and Torment are there in those “spirit realms”. And the people who live in each place can look across a great fixed chasm and see and recognize each other.

Note here, in speaking of Paradise, that the people who are there were carried into Paradise by angels, those special “ministering spirits” sent to serve you and me. Listen to these words in Hebrews 1:14!

14 Are they (the angels) not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Hebrews 1:14 (ESV))

Folks, these are precious words of truth that should give you and me great confidence. These, and other scriptures like them, tell us that God has assigned special angels to minister directly to you and me all the days of our lives. And then at our death, they will carry us into Paradise. These angels are just one more of the blessed provisions that God has given to us to keep us safe and secure from harm, beginning with our first moment of salvation until the last moment of this life when our angel carries us away to be with Christ in Paradise.

And here also in the words in verse 24, we see a description of torment, words that should frighten anyone who reads them. The rich man is crying out for mercy! He is suffering in the heat of the flames, hoping to get just a drop of water to cool his parched tongue. But unfortunately for him, no mercy will be given. He was told here that because he chose the comforts and the provision of the world while he was alive, those would be his only rewards.

And we can see from the words of this conversation that even though the people who are in Paradise and those who are in Torment can see and know each other, they are not able to interact back and forth with each other, seen here because of the great fixed chasm separating Paradise from Torment.

And these words tell us that neither are they permitted to communicate or interact with people who are still alive in the flesh, seen here because of the rich man asking for Lazarus to go back and warn his brothers and the refusal to allow Lazarus to go back. And also, in noting that Lazarus was not permitted to help the rich man and also not allowed to warn the man's brothers, that speaks evidence that no "saint" in Paradise can intercede on behalf of anyone, whether it be someone who is still alive, or someone who is in torment, or someone who is in that place that our Catholic brethren call purgatory.

As for "Purgatory", I find no place in these scriptures that speak of or allow for such a place as "Purgatory". "Purgatory" is simply one of those "unfounded hopes" that the minds of men have contrived in a desperate attempt to provide one last possibility for the saving of their lost loved ones.

All such beliefs and practices as those of "praying to saints" are misguided and completely false teachings. Christ and Christ alone is the Mediator between God and man (1 Timothy 2:5). And He is the only one we should pray to for intercession. And some of these words of Luke 16 are confirmed by another passage, one in Hebrews 12. There we read about a "great cloud of witnesses" who are able to observe the things that we do. Listen!

1 Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (Hebrews 12:1 (NASB))

Note carefully from these words how very "close" this "great cloud of witnesses" is to us. They are said here to "surround" us, giving evidence that the Heavenly Places is all around us and "up close" to us here in our natural realm.

And the presence of this “great cloud of witnesses” seems from these words to be given for an encouragement to us here in our natural realm to keep our lives free from the sins that entangle us. Those words . . .

1 . . . since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (Hebrews 12:1 (NASB))

And then also, beginning in verse 18 of Hebrews chapter 12, we read other very cryptic words, these about a mystical city. Though it be invisible to our natural eyes, it is also very present all around us. These words begin by comparing Mount Sinai the meeting place where God spoke to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments, and Mount Zion, that special city, the Holy Jerusalem. Listen!

18 You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; 19 to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, 20 because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." 21 The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." 22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:18-24 (NIV))

Note these words carefully! This city, this Heavenly Jerusalem exists in that invisible realm of the Heavenly Places right at this moment and it is all around us. And these words of verse 22 speak of us coming to that Mountain now, indicating that it is something that we are to experience now, in our living years. The words, “you have come” speaks of how from the first moment of our salvation, something has already changed in our “citizenship”. We now are “citizens” of both realms, the “spirit realm” and our “natural realm”.

Folks, as mystical as all this may seem, it is still all very real and true. We in our natural state have, in reality, come face to face with this “spirit world”, a place where our loved ones, those described here as “righteous men made perfect” are right here, all around us.

And may I say that most Christians, even very mature ones, can't fathom or accept such thoughts as these. And because they cannot, they miss out on some very special truths of God.

I confess to you that I myself can't fathom these words, but I do believe by faith that they are true. And by faith I do really want to take that next step of faith that will allow me to know and appreciate and to experience these very special truths of God.

How will such a knowledge and experience manifest itself to our senses and to our "feelings" on our side of reality? I don't really know! I wish I did! But for some reason God has given us a brief glimpse into His ever-present, up-close presence, and the simple truth is, God does not ever waste the words of these scriptures. So, for that reason, I want to take the step of knowing as much as I can about the things these words are telling us about. Listen, to these words again, beginning in verse 22 . . .

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23 to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews 12:22-24 (NIV))

I confess to you that words like these keep me excited about who God is and what He is doing, both in the heavens and here on the earth. As I have said to us so many times, our God is not just "up there" somewhere in the heavens, out of sight and only accessible when we pray and plead with Him. Here is Christ Himself and a host of holy angels, here described as being "thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly. And they are up-close and immediate to all that is taking place with you and me in our daily lives.

And then, praise be to God, along with Christ and His host of angels are our loved ones who have gone on before us, here described as the "church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven". And then, praise be to God, as we ourselves die, we will be carried by our ministering angel to join with Christ and His angels and with our dear loved ones, and then we ourselves will become a part of that "great cloud of witnesses" in the "church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven". Hallelujah!

Listen folks! This is not just imagination! This is real, as real as real can be!

Now again, may I strongly reiterate, so that we are never confused! Just as there was a great "divide", a great fixed chasm between Paradise and Torment, so also is there a

divide between us and our loved ones who have gone on before us. And nowhere in these scriptures do we find where we are allowed to have any communication or interaction with them. Why am I saying this again? It is because it is such a popular belief in the secular and pagan world that we, through “mediums”, can communicate with those who are said to be on the “other side”. That is simply not true and moreover such activities and such communications are clearly from the demonic world, those principalities and powers and rulers of darkness and spiritual hosts of wickedness. So by all means, stay away from even watching such blasphemous things on television. That is not at all “Godly entertainment”.

So then, what are we to do with what we have learned from these scriptures today? It is to know that in this place called Heavenly Places Christ Himself lives and rules over all that takes place there. And with Him is His host of angels. Also there is the “church of the firstborn whose names are written in heaven”, that “great cloud of witnesses.

And there also are those special places called Paradise and Torment where both saints and sinners, each in their appointed places, are awaiting the final judgment when God will assign all created beings, men and women, both righteous and unrighteous, and angels, both the holy ones and the unholy ones, to their final appropriate consequence, some to “heaven”, that place of eternal rejoicing, and others to “hell”, that place of eternal suffering.

But until God calls everything to a close, the “Heavenly Places” will remain filled with constant goings-on, especially with the activity of angels and demons, the angels blessing and ministering to us here in this natural realm who have obtained eternal salvation, and also the demons who have but one goal and that is to tempt and corrupt both those who are lost and unsaved, and each of us who are fully saved. That is what demons do and they will always do it until God calls an end to it all.

Next week, it is my hope that God will give me words for you regarding those activities of the angels and the demons, those principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness, as we wrestle daily with them for the cause of righteousness.

I’ll close for now. But for this coming week, please do spend some time with the Lord and ponder with me about these special things that God is revealing to us in these passages. They are deep and they are difficult, but He is faithful to speak to us through His word if we are willing to listen.

12 For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12 (NKJV))