

It's Out of This World Spectacular
I Peter 3:22

This morning we come to a passage and topic that I have not preached on, except maybe in passing reference to what I was preaching at the time. But I have never preached an entire message or series on this topic. If I were a betting man chances are you have heard few messages dedicated to the subject as well. I'm not sure why, but it's not something you hear a lot of messages about. It's even something we don't sing about much either.

I went to the Christian Book Distributors website to see how many books they have on the subject. There are a few authors past and present who have written about it. Perhaps the mystery that surrounds it is the reason little has been written or preached about it.

You may remember this opening monologue from a well-known TV program:

"Space, the final frontier. These are the voyages of the starship Enterprise. Its 5-year mission: to explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before." That is how Captain James T. Kirk began each episode of Star-Trek.

I would suggest to you today that there is another and more final frontier than space. Let's look at our passage in I Peter 3:22. Our topic is heaven and today we will just scratch the surface and in no way delve into the depths of heaven.

Consider with me two main points this morning.
Heaven is the home of Christ
Heaven is the hope of Christians

I. HEAVEN IS THE HOME OF CHRIST

Let me ask you a question. If I said I know of this really great place I want to take you but I'm not going to tell you where it is would you go with me?

If I threw in that it would cost you nothing would you consider it?

Chances are you would be very skeptical about taking such a trip even with someone like me. But maybe that would be reason enough not to go. Yet that is in essence what the Bible is asking us to do when it comes to heaven.

The Bible tells us that there is such a place and that it is a real place, not a figment of the imagination. The Bible tells us how to get there even though we don't know where "there" is.

The Bible even says that it doesn't cost us anything to get into heaven.

But science and reason would suggest that if you can't taste, touch, see, smell, or hear it, it doesn't exist. If you can't experience it in the here and now it can't be true.

For example, I have never been to the Grand Canyon, but Robyn tells me it's a real place because she has been there.

I have never been to the moon but I see it and believe those who have been there.

I have never been to Antigua but we know some missionaries who have.

Those who refute the notion of heaven's existence do so on the basis that they can't see it. Yet these are the same people who say that space is endless and there are billions of galaxies with trillions of stars even though they have never seen all of them.

According to sociologists who study such things, did you know that every known society has some belief in an afterlife, some notion of a place you go to after you die? Most believe that it is a literal place. Some believe that it is a state of mind you can achieve here on earth. Others like the Baha'i faith believe it is a spiritual condition that comes the closer you are to God. That world religions and cultures believe in such a place doesn't prove the existence of heaven but it does add credibility to the burden of proof that within a person is this idea of some place we go to after death. Heaven is real.

It is as real as Hartland, Michigan.
 It is as real as Hartford, Connecticut.
 It is as real as Houston, Texas.
 It is as real as Honolulu, Hawaii.

In the past several years some folks have written books about dying and going to heaven and then coming back. I can't refute their story, but it leaves me a bit skeptical. But there is one account I do trust that says heaven is a real place and because that source says it's real I believe it. You hold that source in your hand. It's the Bible, the Word of God. God's Word is not only true; it is truth. So if it says that heaven is real then I believe it. God said it, I believe it, and that settles it for me.

Paul writes in II Corinthians 12:2 about someone he knew, whom I believe to be Paul himself, who was taken up into the third heaven. In verse 4 he also refers to it as paradise. Being the astute people you are, if there is a third heaven then there must be a first and second heaven as well.

In the opening scene of Scripture in Genesis 1:1 we read that God created the "heavens and the earth." In verse 8 the KJV uses the term "heaven" while the NIV translates it "sky". The atmosphere which surrounds the earth is referred to as the heavens. Then in Genesis 7:11 it speaks of the "windows of heaven" being opened pouring forth the floods that covered the earth.

In his prayer of dedication for the Temple, Solomon refers to both the first and second heavens.
 I Kings 8:27

Isaiah reminds us in 55:9 about God that "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts."

The sky is the first heaven.
 The cosmos or universe would be the second heaven.

Psalm 19:1-2, 4b speaks of both when it says "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge... In the heavens He has pitched a tent for the sun."

David also declares the greatness of God and that everything in "heaven and earth" belong to Him. (I Chronicles 29:11)

But Peter isn't talking about the sky or the universe in our passage. He is referring to this third heaven, this place where God exists, this, as yet, unknown place.

Psalm 103:19 "The Lord has established His throne in heaven, and His kingdom rules over all."

Isaiah 57:15 refers to this place as the high and holy place where God dwells.

In Isaiah 63:15 the author invites God to look down from His lofty throne that is both glorious and holy. The Psalmist also speaks of God looking down from heaven to view the earth.

Revelation 3:12 tells us about the New Jerusalem that will come down out of heaven.

Matthew 5:16 encourages us to let our light shine before others to glorify God who is in heaven.

In Matthew 6:1 we are told that our Father in heaven will reward us.

We are also told in Matthew 7:21 that not everyone who claims to have done good deeds in the name of the Lord will enter heaven.

There are a lot of verses that support a real heaven and our passage tells us that heaven is where Christ went following His resurrection.

First, consider heaven as the abode of Christ.

A. The Abode Of Christ in Heaven

Next year I turn the big 6-0. I'm not yet sure how I feel about that. But I will say this, as that day gets closer, I realize that my days on this rock we call earth are coming to end. Already at 60 there are more aches and pains than I care to admit. So as my sojourn on this earth is drawing to a close, I am beginning to think a lot more about heaven, when I'll get there and what it's going to be like.

I am by nature a bit nervous about new things. I hope I don't mess up and embarrass myself. I was nervous the first time at age 13 getting behind the wheel of a car with Dad teaching me how to drive a stick shift. I was nervous the first time I lined up for a cross country race and when our mile relay team went to state. I was nervous the first time I came here to preach 12 years ago. What if I goof up or lose my place or trip going up the steps. But in the years since then I have learned you're not scary people at all. I really like you. But I still get nervous every Sunday.

I think I can even say I'm a bit nervous about going to heaven. I'm not sure why. Maybe it's because I don't know what to expect. I don't know what it will be like. Maybe in my humanness I wonder if I'll be welcomed even though I've got this promise in the Bible. I guess in that sense I'm a lot like John Newton who said that when he got to heaven he would be surprised at those he thought would be there who aren't and those who are there who he thought wouldn't be, but most of all he would be surprised that he is there.

I think about how many times I've royally messed up and yet God loves me, forgives me and has a place reserved for me.

But one thing I do know about heaven, it's the home of Christ. It is His abode.

I love John 14 for the simplicity and directness of its message. Speaking of heaven as His home, here's what Jesus said.

John 14:1-4

There isn't anything to be anxious about when going to heaven. It's His home and He wants us to be there with Him. I find that incredibly comforting. The litmus test for entrance into heaven is and only will be faith in Christ.

A woman died and was in line waiting to get into heaven through the pearly gates. As she got closer Peter was at the gate giving a spelling test to each person before allowing them in. One person had to spell horse. Another person had to spell bunny. Another person had to spell tree. When it was her turn she was asked to spell book. Before she entered Peter asked if she would mind taking over so he could run an errand. As she stood there administering the test she noticed in line an old boss who had given her nothing but grief during her time on earth. When it was his turn she said that entrance required spelling a word correctly. He was given the word Czechoslovakia.

On a night long ago Jesus told Nicodemus that whoever believed in Him would not perish but have everlasting life. Entrance to heaven doesn't require spelling tests or good deeds, or popularity or large donations, just faith in Christ. And He will be there. Scripture tells us that He is there right now.

Acts 1:9-11

Hebrews 1:3, 8

Hebrews 12:2

These verses tell us that Christ went into heaven, but how do we know He is actually there?

Acts 7:55 – the testimony of Stephen

Acts 9:1-6 – the testimony of Paul

Heaven is where Jesus lives. It's His abode. It also reveals His authenticity.

B. The Authenticity Of Christ In Heaven

That Christ is in heaven authenticates His deity, that He is who He claimed to be – the Son of God and God Himself.

John 1:1, 14, 18

On one occasion talking with the disciples Phillip asked Jesus to show them the Father (John 14:8). Jesus said if you have seen Him, you have seen the Father.

Hebrews 1:3 says the same thing when it declares “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being.”

If you have ever posted pictures on Facebook, you are given the opportunity to identify the faces in the picture. If you take enough pictures of the same people it will automatically identify them for you. Robyn thinks David looks like me, but when she posts a picture of David on Facebook, it does a facial profile and wants to put her name to his picture. According to Facebook David is an exact representation of Robyn.

Jesus is the perfect representation of the Father, authenticated by the fact that after His resurrection, He ascended into heaven. It was His home before He came to earth, and it was still His home after His work on earth was completed. By Christ going to heaven God in essence authenticated and accepted His Son’s atoning work on the cross. That He was seated meant His work was finished. In the Old Testament the priest was always standing meaning they still had work to do. As our High Priest, when Christ sacrificed Himself and was raised from the dead, His work was finished so He could sit down.

The authenticity of Jesus as the Son of God gives Him the privilege, the right to claim heaven as His home.

We see heaven as His home and the authenticity of His claim to be God’s Son, confirmed by the several occasions in which the Father remarked that Jesus was His beloved Son in whom He was well pleased.

From our verse we also see His authority.

C. The Authority Of Christ In Heaven

Notice our passage again.

“Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s Right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him.”

In ancient culture when an individual sat at the right hand of a ruler, it meant that person also had authority.

That’s what James and John wanted from Jesus when they asked if they could sit on the right and left hand of Jesus in His kingdom. They wanted to be given authority. Jesus responded that it was God’s authority alone to give and in our passage we see that it was given to Christ.

Again, in Hebrews 1:8 we read that this will be an eternal authority and His authority will be established in righteousness.

That authority brings with it the right to judge the world as we see in Revelation 5 where God holds a sealed scroll that contains the judgements that are to be poured out on mankind during the time of tribulation on the earth. An angel standing nearby asks if there is anyone worthy to take the scroll and break its seals. At first no one came forward but then the Lamb of God, the Lion of Judah stepped forward to take the scroll.

His authority not only gives Him the right to judge but also to be worshipped. Revelation 5 continues by noting that when He took the scroll even before He broke its seals, those around the throne fell to

the ground in worship proclaiming Him worthy to be revered and adored and worshipped.

In fact we are told in Philippians 2 that God had exalted Him to the highest place and given Him a name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee in heaven and earth will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, that God will be glorified.

Dictators throughout history have commanded and demanded their subjects bow before them. Protocol mandates that subjects bow before the king or queen. But there is no other name but the name of Jesus who commands such authority in heaven or earth. Every angel, every governmental authority, every power is ultimately in submission to Him. Ephesians 1:19-23

He has authority and the right to rule. Yet with all His commanding authority over forces seen and unseen, we also see in heaven His accessibility.

D. The Accessibility Of Christ In Heaven

Hebrews 4:14-16

The word “confidence” in the NIV can also be translated “boldly” as it is in the KJV. When coming to Christ we don’t have to be shy. Christ not only has the authority to judge He also has the compassion and empathy to understand our needs so that when we approach Him it is not out of fear but out of confidence that He will extend His grace in our time of need. In the context of this passage, the need spoken of here is our times of temptation.

In ancient times most rulers were not approachable by the average person. Even Queen Esther risked being put to death if her husband, the king, didn’t extend his scepter. But Jesus can be approached by His people boldly to receive His grace in time of need.

It is there that Christ intercedes for us according to Hebrews 7:25 “Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to intercede for them.”

Hebrews 9:24 “For Christ did not enter a manmade sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God’s presence.”

When was the last time you went boldly into His presence to receive His sustaining grace?
He is never too tired.
He is never too busy.
He is never unavailable.
He is always ready to intercede.
He is always accessible.

Heaven is the home of Christ.
Heaven is also the hope of Christians.

II. HEAVEN IS THE HOPE OF CHRISTIANS

How many of you remember this little chorus?
Heaven is a wonderful place
Filled with glory and grace
I’m gonna see my Savior’s face
Oh, heaven is a wonderful place.

Do you think much about heaven?

A. Heaven Is The Christian’s Gift

According to John 3:16 heaven is our gift for believing in Christ for salvation. There it’s referred to as eternal life.

Christmas is coming and with it comes gifts. I can’t wait to get mine. Am I as eager about the gift of heaven? If it’s a gift how many of us are longing, eagerly waiting for it? As a matter of fact Jesus told us that we should be laying up treasure in heaven not on earth. Where are you keeping your stuff?

Dr. Jeremiah provides a sobering illustration for us to ponder.

In 2016, Americans spent nearly \$33 billion on self-storage. In 2015, less than ten percent of U.S. households rented a self-storage unit. So far in 2017, construction on new self-storage units has topped \$240 million *per month*. Some of that storage is short-term, of course: people in transition, settling estates, storing business inventories, and so on. But the majority is in use for one reason: We have more stuff than we know what to do with.

There's nothing wrong with having possessions or storing them outside our homes for various reasons. But the booming personal self-storage industry stands in sharp contrast to the life Jesus encourages when He tells us to store our treasures in heaven.

Heaven is our gift, but many Christians aren't anxious to get there. They have things they feel they are tied to here, or want to accomplish now or not ready to give up. They aren't done with this world yet and perhaps forgetting or neglecting to think of all the splendor of heaven that awaits them.

Earlier this week I was responding to an email and paused for a minute to think about what to write next. Glancing out my office window an old song by Louis Armstrong came to mind to which I jotted down some new words.

I see leaves of green,
Yellow and red
I pause and consider the blood that was shed,
And I think to myself, what a wonderful God.

I see skies of blue,
And clouds just a few
But I wonder inside if today is my heavenly ride,
And I think to myself, what a wonderful God.

Yes, I think to myself, what a wonderful God.
Do you think about heaven as your gift? If you did
you would long for it more.

Then according to John 14:1-3 heaven is our guarantee.

B. Heaven Is The Christian's Guarantee

I find it incredibly comforting to know that Christ wants me – of all people – to be with Him in heaven. We're all messed up people, messed up by sin, but when we get to heaven that will all change. We'll be made fit for heaven and all the stuff we deal with here and now will be gone.

Christian artist Chris Tomlin wrote a song simply titled "Home".

This world is not what it was meant to be
All this pain, all this suffering
There's a better place waiting for me
In heaven

Every tear will be wiped away
Every sorrow and sin erased
We'll dance on seas of amazing grace
In heaven, in heaven
I'm going home
Where the streets are golden
Every chain is broken
Oh I wanna go
Oh I wanna go
Home where every fear is gone
I'm in Your open arms
Where I belong home

Lay down my burdens, I lay down my past
I run to Jesus, no turning back
Thank God Almighty, I'll be free at last
In heaven, in heaven
I'm going home

Blinded eyes will finally see
The dead will rise on the shores of eternity
The trump will sound the angels will sing
Hallelujah, Hallelujah
I am going home where the streets are golden
Every chain is broken, Oh I wanna go, Oh I wanna
go home where every fear is gone
I'm in Your open arms where I belong
Where I belong

I'm going home
 I'm going home
 I'm on my way home
 I'm going home

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If you had the choice would you go there today?
 Or are you holding on too tightly to stuff here?

Heaven is our guarantee because it is home for the Christian, the person who by faith has trusted in Christ. It's the gathering place where I'll see believing loved ones who have gone ahead of me.

C. Heaven Is The Christian's Gathering Place

I Thessalonians 4:17 says that we will be meeting Christ and those who have died who believed in Christ. We'll gather in the air and we will forever be with the Lord as we discovered from John 14 in that place He has prepared for us, that place called heaven.

Matthew 25:34 "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'"

Just think of all the people who will be gathered there.

Finally, heaven is the Christian's greatest joy.

D. Heaven Is The Christian's Greatest Joy

Revelation 21 and 22 tell us that heaven is a place of unparalleled beauty.

Revelation 22:3 says that heaven is a place of service.

Revelation 19:1-3 remind us that heaven is a place of worship.

Revelation 19:9 tells us that heaven is the place of a great feast.

II Corinthians 4:17 says that heaven is a place of glory.

Revelation 21:4 says that all the pain of this present world will be wiped away.

There will be no suffering.

There will be no sin.

There will be no sorrow.

There will be no sickness.

We have a name for such a place as that – it's called heaven.

I see postings on Facebook all the time about this place being someone's favorite vacation spot or that place being someone's favorite restaurant. They're so excited that they can't wait to tell others about it. If heaven is the greatest place ever, we ought to be more excited to share it with others. Don't be afraid to share what for the Christian should be our greatest joy.

Heaven is a real place.

It is the home of Christ and the hope of Christians.

Heaven is a wonderful place

Filled with glory and grace

I'm gonna see my Savior's face

Oh, heaven is a wonderful place.