

Chapter 11

Is Heaven Our Eternal Home?

In light of the previous chapters, we can begin to see that God's plans for man are earth-centric. God's original plan for man included being fruitful, filling the earth, and subduing it. The entrance of sin into the human race threw a wrench in the works, but the redemption from sin that Jesus accomplished on the cross, the coming redemption of our bodies and the prospect of God's government being established on earth at His return, should make our mission begin to come back into focus. When this begins to happen, a Kingdom paradigm is being established.

Too Heavenly Minded?

A few years ago on a hot July day, my family and I were driving home after having visited family in another state. We were listening to a Christian radio station when we heard something that illustrates this concept of being too heavenly minded. Below is the transcript of what we heard.

Tired of the heat, the bad news? Longing for a little freedom? If you're looking for that ultimate vacation destination, we've got just the right place. You'll be able to get away from all the hassles of life and relax in a place that's an absolute paradise! Time is limited. So reserve your flight now for heaven the ultimate destination for those who want to leave the cares of this world behind. Hey, why go to those other vacation spots where you can only get a tan? In heaven, you'll get a whole new body! Enjoy a tropical paradise beyond your wildest dreams. You'll love the delicious cuisine, wonderful fruit from the tree of life, and living water from the fountain of God. All in your very own mansion! You'll like it so much you'll never want to leave, and you won't have to! Escape the traffic, the job, not to mention the judgment of God, by reserving your place in heaven! So make your travel plans before it's too late. Heaven, the ultimate vacation destination. A heavenly reminder from (name of radio station).¹

Putting a message in such a format is intended to be a catchy and a somewhat humorous way of sharing the gospel, and in this case, a way of communicating the ultimate result of being a Christian. The content of the message is intended to be serious, however, the radio message transcribed above serves to illustrate how many of today's Christians view the gospel. To them, the gospel is all about escaping the difficulties and responsibilities of this world to go on an eternal vacation. It isn't difficult to see how a heavenly minded view such as the one portrayed above could facilitate a Christian culture that does not take responsibility in civil government and pursues pleasure more than working for the kingdom of God. [1] The truth is, God's plan for our lives involves a little more than an eternal vacation in heaven. He has plans for earth and we are part of those plans.

So, what does the Bible actually say about where we will spend eternity? When asked, most Christians immediately agree that their eternal destination is heaven. A random survey of people in our community showed that over 98% of people believe God wants people to go to heaven and live there forever. [2] But is this true or false? Well, Did you know that the Bible

never teaches that we are to live in heaven eternally? It may surprise you to know that of the approximately 250 times the word heaven is used in the New Testament, not once is the context describing a place we are “going to.”

Of course, the spirits of those Christians who die prior to Christ's return certainly go to heaven, at least temporarily. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8). But have you noticed that the Bible starts with man on earth and ends with man on earth? Nowhere do we find that heaven is our eternal home. To some, this may seem like a trivial issue, but in the context of changing the underlying concepts that make up our paradigm, this becomes quite important, giving focus and direction to our strategic function. [3] We should be focused not on getting to heaven, but on getting the Kingdom of heaven here.

Rewards: In Heaven or on Earth?

The Bible teaches that we have certain things in heaven, including treasures, rewards, our citizenship, etc. But do we assume that we must go to heaven to enjoy these things or do we expect these things to be brought to earth? It is more accurate to expect the latter. Jesus indicated that He would bring these things with Him when returns to earth.

Revelation 22:12 (KJV)

12 And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

The scriptures below indicate that Paul expected Jesus to return to earth in power to subject all things to Himself (establish His Kingdom), validate our Kingdom citizenship, and clothe us with immortality. Notice in the two passages below that he expected these things to come “from heaven.”

2 Corinthians 5:2 (KJV- emphasis added)

2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:

Philippians 3:20-21 (NASB-emphasis added)

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.

Strangers and Aliens on Earth?

Some may ask, “But, aren’t we strangers and aliens on earth?” Yes, the Bible does refer to us as strangers (aliens) and pilgrims on earth. However, being an alien or a pilgrim does not imply that we don't belong here permanently. For example, many people come to America as aliens, seeking citizenship, property, permanent residence, etc. This is exactly how the Bible described Abraham and Jacob, living in the land of Canaan:

Hebrews 11:9-10 (KJV)

9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:

10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Genesis 28:3-4 (KJV)

3 And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people;

4 And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham. —

These verses show that being an alien or stranger on earth does not mean that we are here temporarily. Like God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, we should expect to multiply and inherit the land where we are strangers and pilgrims, not abandon it. After all, Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt 5:5). [4]

Yes, we are strangers and aliens on earth; pilgrims seeking a home to call our own. It is as if we are living in temporary housing, waiting until our permanent housing is completed. As it says in Hebrews 11:10, the builder of our house is God, and in Psalms 127: "Unless the LORD builds the house, they labor in vain who build it..." But He certainly has co-laborers, like Paul who said:

1 Corinthians 3:9-10 (NKJV)

9 For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.

10 According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it.

God may have plans for us in eternity that involve locations other than earth, but if He does, the Bible does not speak of it. The Bible starts with man on earth and ends with man on earth. The concluding point of this chapter is simply this: we should be focused on preparing the way for God's Kingdom to appear on earth, not on getting to heaven. [5]

Paradigm Builder

The Bible does not teach that we will spend eternity in heaven. It begins with man on earth and ends with man on earth. If God has plans for us in eternity that involve other places besides earth, the Bible does not speak of it.

Before reading this chapter, how would you describe your position regarding this concept?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree

How would you describe your position regarding this concept after reading this chapter?

1 Strongly Disagree - 2 Disagree - 3 Neutral/Unsure - 4 Agree - 5 Strongly Agree

¹ Broadcast on WGCA 88.5 FM, Quincy, IL, July 19, 1999.

The Kingdom Paradigm, Common Sense Theology for Politically Minded Christians
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