

THE IMPOSSIBLE TASK

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If I asked you to picture yourself in heaven, what would you think of? Most of you (myself included) would probably first envision a land filled with clouds, reaching as far as the eye can see. If you are detail oriented, a few white-robed, winged angels playing harps and even a set of golden gates may have dotted the landscape. But any serious thinkers, Christians especially, soon reject this image. Instead, they picture...they picture ...what exactly do they picture? The Bible does give us some characteristics of heaven. It is a place of eternal light (Rev. 22:5) absent of sorrow, pain (Rev. 21:4) and hunger (Rev. 7:16). The streets and edifices are made of, or appear to be made of, precious metals and gems (Rev. 21:11, 18-19, 21). Sin is non-existent (Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 21:27, 22:15). And of course, all who inhabit heaven will fellowship forever in the presence of God (Rev. 7:15, 21:3). But what I'm really asking is what shall we be doing in heaven? What will our function, or purpose, be?

While they have never released a white paper on "What Life will be Like in Heaven" (nor do I expect they ever will), the pastors of a church I'd attended in the past gave the impression that heaven will be one great worship service. We will be in such awe of God's presence and holiness that the only proper response will be to worship him with song and dance. Furthermore, since glorified bodies will not tire, we can enjoy this fellowship eternally, without distraction. Randy Alcorn presents a picture of heavenly life where everyone will have status and responsibilities proportionate with the treasures they've stored up in heaven (i.e. through good works). (Alcorn 154-155) Wayne Grudem describes heaven as being transformed at the end of this age into a more holy, glorious place than it is now, and eternally joined with an equally

transformed New Earth. Life in this New Earth will continue much as it does now, in that we will continue to engage ourselves in artistic, technological and intellectual pursuits. The difference will be that we shall possess an infinitely greater knowledge of the universe (but never equaling God's) and all we do will be solely for the glory of God, without the slightest tint of sin. (Grudem 1160-1162)

While each of these speculations have merit, provide incentive for me to live a life glorifying to God, and increase my expectation of the life to come, none really answer the question at hand. What will a typical day be like in God's kingdom? I would be lying if I said I hadn't at least taken a stab at answering this question.

First of all, let me tackle my pastor's concept of eternal worship, similar to our Sunday service. While I do admit that this would be infinitely more desirable to the pitch black, pain-filled, God-absent alternative, Hell, it is not exactly my first choice of life eternal. I'm not saying I don't enjoy worship. Worship can be wonderful. At times when I have been really focused, I have been moved to dance or cry. The key, though, is that I was focused. It can be hard to get focused. Life is filled with distractions that can constantly interrupt your thoughts. Still, even if I could stay focused, how long would it be until I grew too tired to continue. Or I may desire some variety in my eternal life, something other than singing and dancing.

The problem with accepting this view of heaven is that I am trying to compare heavenly worship with the worship I experience in a fallen world, confined in a corruptible body. As mentioned before, heaven will be absent of distractions. Our glorified bodies will never grow weary. And the radiance of God will be the catalyst for spontaneous worship. Still, while on Earth, I cannot relate to this perfect existence, and therefore find it hard to picture myself fully satisfied in such an activity.

Next on the list is a heaven where my status and responsibilities will reflect how well I lived a life pleasing to God. The Bible does indeed speak of rewards in heaven (1 Cor. 3:8; Rev. 2:25-28). In fact, one song by the Christian artist Eli illustrates this concept by telling the tale of a man who, upon arriving in heaven, finds that his lackluster attempts at pleasing God only earned him a run down shack. Fine. So my heavenly mansion may not be as grand as some, but at least it should be bigger than others. Still, did you see the size of the pool that guy down the street had? He even had a jacuzzi. I wish I had a jacuzzi. Hold on. I've just become prideful and covetous, two sins which are supposed to be abolished in heaven. This can't be a true representation of heaven.

Forget about mansions, then. What about our responsibilities? Look at me. I get to shine the golden gates. They're the first things anyone sees when they enter New Jerusalem and I'm responsible for them. I sure must have done good work on Earth. But then there's Joe. He gets to oversee the workers in the palace. In fact, I don't think he even has to pick up a broom. Now that's a great job. I wish I had that job. Joe sure is lucky. And I sure am jealous. Not exactly a righteous attitude, is it? I've fallen into the same trap as before. I'm trying to image a pure, holy existence by comparing it to my current sinful existence. It just can't be done.

Let's move on to the idea that heaven is a paradise and all things will be pleasurable. Let's see. What do I get pleasure from now? For one, I like playing video games. I have had hours of fun sharpening my hand-eye coordination in an action game, or stretching my intelligence with a puzzle or adventure game. Maybe I can spend all my time playing video games. However, that time, while relaxing, isn't very productive. I believe God created us to be productive. Not to mention, many elements of video games would seem out of place in heaven (i.e. combat, death, fantasy realms). So video games are out. How about golf. I like golf, but we

all know how frustrating the game can be. And, unfortunately, a game of golf free from frustration probably isn't challenging enough to keep anyone's attention for long.

By now you may think you know the point of this essay. It is an impossible task for anyone to guess accurately what heaven will truly be like. Wrong! While this certainly is true, the point I wish to present is that even when we try to imagine the most holy place, we can't help but let sinful thoughts creep in. In fact, I believe the only thing more holy than heaven is God Himself. I would venture to guess that we would experience similar difficulty trying to accurately picture Him. If sin can permeate even these holy thoughts, how much more does it permeate our daily activities -- driving on a crowded street, working at our place of employment, raising our children, shopping? Can any man call himself completely righteous? If they do, they should examine their lives more closely. They may be surprised. God's word assures us that we all fall short of God's standard (Rom. 3:23).

In light of this, let's return to what we know about heaven. The Bible tells us that "no immoral, impure or greedy person..has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5 NIV). It continues to state that "Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful" (Rev. 21:27 NIV). Here lies our dilemma. I have just shown that all of our lives are filled with sin. We have also seen that sinners cannot enter the heavenly realm. Therefore, how can we hope to fellowship with God in eternal paradise. This is truly the Impossible Task.

Fortunately, God is able to make the impossible possible. Earlier I referenced Romans 3:23, which reads, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (NIV). But the verse doesn't stop there. It goes on to say in verse 24 that we "are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (NIV). Christ became our substitute. When we

acknowledge his sacrificial work on the cross, we allow Jesus to stand in our place before the judgment seat of God. God judges us based on the sinless life of His Son and we are permitted entry into the heavenly city. Imagine doing that for someone who has wronged you. As before, impossible.

So what's the next step for you? If you don't know Jesus as your personal savior, if all of this is unfamiliar to you, I suggest you read the tract "God's Simple Plan of Salvation"(found at www.godsimpleplan.org/tracts). If you have already made a home for Jesus in your life, then I suggest you take a few moments to thank him. Be grateful for what he has given you. What we deserve is an eternity absent from pleasure, comfort, light and God. What God gives us is a second chance to be transformed into the image of Christ. Praise Him, as share this message as I have shared it with you.

Works Cited

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