

## Occupations of Heaven

For many people, sometimes even for Christians, heaven is not a wonderful and desirable place. It is merely the more desirable alternative to hell. Heaven is often conceived of as dull, boring inactivity, like an eternity of the most boring, uncomfortable church service ever attended.

The popular view of heaven usually includes lots of cloud, white clothes and fluttering wings. It's seen as a dream-world where nobody does anything. How inconsistent that is to our knowledge of the creative God who is preparing heaven as the eternal habitation of those whom he has redeemed!

Wilbur Smith, in his book *The Biblical Doctrine of Heaven*, writes, "The Scriptures do not give us much specific data regarding the actual occupations of the redeemed in heaven, so that what we do have, we must consider as particularly precious and important." And that's true. So let's take a look at seven activities or occupations of heaven, though this is only a partial list.

At the top of the list is the activity of worship. "Worship" is acknowledging the worth of something or someone. One key activity of heaven will be an open acknowledgement of God's worth. This is a good reason why unsaved people would be out of place in heaven. They have no conception of the tremendous worth of God. Also, this is a good yardstick of our readiness for heaven: do we now openly acknowledge God's great worth through our worship?

This will not be a dull or humiliating experience. Isn't it a privilege to tell a great singer, artist or friend how great they are? How much better to tell God how great he is! Worship is just that. It's praising God, acknowledging his cleverness, his wisdom, his ability. Examples of worship in

heaven are numerous. Perhaps one of the more famous is found in Revelation 19:1-6:

*After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting:*

*"Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."*

*And again they shouted:*

*"Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever."*

*The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried:*

*"Amen, Hallelujah!"*

*Then a voice came from the throne, saying"*

*"Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!"*

*Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:*

*"Hallelujah!*

*For our Lord God Almighty reigns."*

Those words are familiar to many because of the music of Handel and his *Messiah* and the *Hallelujah Chorus* that's part of this work. Music is an important expression of worship. The book of Revelation has more in it about heaven than any other book in the Bible, but it also has more songs than any other book of the Bible except the book of Psalms, the Old Testament hymnal of Israel. Fourteen songs are re-

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corded in Revelation as sung by heaven's inhabitants including angels, elders and the redeemed. For example, in Revelation 15:1-4 John writes:

*I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last because with them God's wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:*

*“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

Music is a very important part of heaven. But I'm one of those people who have great difficulty carrying a tune. Perhaps God will enable those of us who could never carry a tune on earth to join the choirs of heaven. But, preparation is important. So, let's sing praises to God here on earth in rehearsal for the choir anthems of heaven.

Another important activity of heaven is service, a key characteristic of heaven's inhabitants. We read in Revelation 22:3 that the *“throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him.”* The word “servant” is found frequently in the book of Revelation (1:1; 7:3; 10:7; 11:18; 15:3; 19:5; and 22:3 and 6). This is the same description given by the apostles in the other books of the New Testament. We who are servants of God here on earth will continue to be servants of God in heaven. I picture heaven as a busy place where we are constantly doing things for God and others. That service will be a joy and not a burden.

Some young children were taking a standardized test in school. The test showed two pictures: one with a man chopping wood and the other with a man sitting and reading a book. The question asked which man was working and which man was relaxing. One child indicated that the man

with the book was working and the man chopping wood was relaxing. The teacher marked the question “wrong”, failing to realize that the child's father was a college professor who worked with books and relaxed with an ax!

Work is more often defined by our attitude toward the activity than by our actions in the activity. Work in heaven will be service in the most enjoyable and pleasant sense of the word!

David Gregg, who wrote *The Heaven Life* in 1895, put it this way:

It is work as free from care and toil and fatigue as is the wing-stroke of the jubilant lark when it soars into the sunlight of a fresh, clear day and, spontaneously and for self-relief, pours out its thrilling carol. Work up there is a matter of self-relief, as well as a matter of obedience to the ruling will of God. It is work according to one's tastes and delight and ability. If tastes vary there, then occupations will also vary there.

Perhaps those who love to build will extend the gates of heaven; those who love to study will peruse the libraries of eternity; those who love to paint will decorate the galleries of the Eternal City. God will employ us in the labors that we love and that suit us best—labors that glorify God!

A third activity of heaven is authority. Authority comes from responsibility. In the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 Jesus told about the servants who proved their responsibility and were given authority as a result: “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things.”

When people are responsible with what is given to them then more responsibility is given to them. It's true in earthly relationships with employees and children. When someone responds well to a task then additional tasks are given with more responsibility. The boy who does well as a stock boy may become president of the company!

In Revelation 5:10 the saints are told that they *“will reign on the earth.”* God promises us authority in the rule of this earth and the universe.

Theologian Wilbur Smith wrote:

... we must acknowledge that we do not really know specifically how the servants of the Lord will exercise the authority here spoken of, but apparently it refers to activity here on earth during and after the millennium.

In Matthew 19:28 Jesus promises that they will “*sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*”

While we don’t know all the details of how we will exercise the authority God gives us, many will function in positions of administration and rule over God’s vast creation. Some who are servants on earth will be princes in heaven!

A fourth activity in heaven will be fellowship. Apparently this is an important aspect of heaven’s life. King David, upon the death of his infant son, looked forward to the day he would go to be with him. David would become acquainted with the son he never knew on earth.

Moses and Elijah left heaven to fellowship with Jesus and his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Hebrews 12:23 tells of “*the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.*” I believe we will fellowship as an assembly in heaven just as we fellowship here as the assembly of a local church.

Revelation 19:9 foretells the marriage supper of the Lamb. Here is another picture of fellowship—eating together, rejoicing together, a time of God’s people fellowshiping together.

Imagine the joys of heaven’s fellowship. We will be reunited with loved ones who have preceded us in death. We will have the opportunity to meet saints from previous generations and build new friendships. Think how many there will be! Choose from men and women like Ruth or Mary, Paul the Apostle, David, Esther or John. We may meet great saints like Luther, Calvin or Spurgeon. We will have the opportunity to fellowship with people from all over the world and hear what God has done in their life.

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What is also especially exciting about this fellowship is that there will be no good-byes. An especially difficult part of this life is the inevitable end of all good fellowship. We hate to say good-bye! Even in speech, we substituted phrases like, “See you later!” But the fellowship and friendships of heaven will not be threatened by farewells!

A fifth activity of heaven will be learning. We’ll learn from God’s perfect knowledge. I look forward to that. There are so many questions I can’t seem to find the answers to. I look forward to the day when I can ask God, when I can do research in heaven’s libraries, when I’ll be able to talk to others that know. 1 Corinthians 13:12 says, “*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.*” Our Instructor will be Jesus Christ himself. We will learn from him all that we must know about the Godhead and the right and true worship and love of God.

Professor O. M. Mitchell, the great astronomer, believed that in the future life he would go from world to world continuing his studies of the heavens. Questions that have plagued us as temporarily unanswerable may be researched and answered to our complete satisfaction.

Sir William Robertson Nicoll wrote, “We shall understand then, as we do not understand now, what is meant for God the Father to give ‘*His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*’” I don’t think we

can fully understand what that means, but some day we will learn the magnitude of the mercy of God to provide salvation through his Son.

A sixth and final item in this list of heaven’s occupations is rest. Heaven brings an end to the weariness of a sin-stained world. In Revelation 14:13 John writes:

*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”*

*“Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”*

In 1830, Richard Baxter wrote concerning heaven, “We shall rest from sin, but not from worship; from suffering and sorrow, but not from solace!” You see, heaven’s rest is more active than passive.

We may dream about a vacation to “get away from it all” and camp, fish, read and swim or do something else that is different from our daily routine. Heaven is a rest from the tensions, sorrows, decisions, doubts and heaviness that cause fatigue in this life. It is rest that comes from activities that refresh and renew. Richard Baxter said, “O blessed day, when I shall rest with God; when I shall rest in knowing, loving, rejoicing, and praising . . .” Heaven is neither a dull place nor an inactive place. Eternity will be filled with the most interesting, enjoyable and profitable of pursuits. There is always a promising future for the child of God.

As a pastor, I have known very old people who are looking forward to death with fond anticipation. Imagine being almost 100 years old and talking about future plans! I have talked to elderly people in the hospital and seen a thread of expectancy through their conversation as they talk about the future even when they knew that their future cannot be tied here to the earth. In fact, studies have been done that reveal the same type of thing. It is amazing but true that these same people often have plans that extend far beyond their normal life expectancy. I think that’s part of God’s preparation for the activities and the fulfillment of heaven. That is where plans that could never be realized here on earth can be realized, where projects that could not be finished

here can be finished. Heaven is never a place to be feared or dreaded. Heaven is a glorious extension of the very best gifts God has given us here on earth.

Some years ago a terrible storm raged on the Great Lakes. A tugboat was towing a heavy barge. It wasn’t far from shore but it was far enough that shore couldn’t be reached because of the fierce breakers. The men on the tug were tossed about. The tug began to take on water and for hours it seemed there was little hope for its crew.

All through the night they were beaten by fierce waves and their lives were in constant danger. But they managed to keep afloat and in the morning the captain and his crew were rescued by a passing ship.

Afterward, as the captain told about that long night, he said one thing gave them strength to carry on and kept hope alive in their hearts. Shining through the gloom they could at times see the lights of home. That was the encouragement that sustained them to keep on and not give up throughout the terrible storm. Otherwise, they would have been lost.

Are you frustrated by the demands and aggravations of this life? Are you weary from work that never seems to be done? Are you tossed about in the waves of this world? Look to the lights of heaven. Jesus Christ is there and has prepared a place for you to call “home!”

If you don’t have the assurance and the prospect of heaven, you can have it! That’s what salvation in Jesus Christ is all about. It’s not just for heaven and eternity; it’s for here and now. If you don’t know Jesus Christ as your Savior, accept him right now so that you, too, can catch those glimpses of the home God is preparing for you.

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