

**Rick Sparks, Heaven**  
**Reading: I Corinthians 15:35-58**

**December 20, 2015**

Thank you Bobby for reading that. It's good to be with you here today. I was asked by a couple of people to talk about heaven, and in particular to deal with a couple of specific questions with regard to heaven, and I asked if I could read a portion of an email I received if I didn't tell who wrote it, and she even said that I could say who wrote it. So thank you Gracie, I'm going to read a little bit of your email: "Heaven is something I struggle with. To narrow that topic down a bit, I think the thing I tend to fixate on is how we are not going to be married or given in marriage in heaven. I certainly can see how it would be a sticky situation if someone were married to more than one person in their lifetime. How could it be decided which person they would be married to in heaven. when they picked one, the other would be sad. So how would it be heaven to them? I understand that maybe marriage wouldn't be the best thing in heaven. I know that God knows best, but the not given in marriage concept makes me think that we won't know people the same way in heaven as we knew them here. It makes it sound like the people who were special to me here won't be any more special than anyone else to me in heaven. That makes me feel really sad and not just about my husband but also my family and friends. Are people fabricating the truth when they talk about, for example, a widowed husband dying and going to see and be reunited with his wife again in heaven --if they're not going to know their spouse as their spouse in heaven, how then, is that comforting? Why would God allow us to love someone so much and potentially have to suffer losing them only for it not to be reconciled in heaven. I don't think I know a whole lot about heaven, and I'm not sure we can know all that much. I know it will be better than what I can imagine. And I know it will certainly be better than the alternative eternity. I've heard it said that heaven will be full of work. Working doesn't sound like much fun to me. I've heard people say we will be singing all the time. Again doesn't sound like much fun to me. Maybe that makes me a bad person, but I'm just being honest." And Gracie I thank you very much for these questions, and I appreciate very much you sharing your real concerns with us.

First thing I need to say is I think you hit the nail on the head when you said we can't know very much about heaven while we're in this world. It is not because God doesn't want us to know, but it's because we're so restricted by our own limitations here at this time. We can only understand the unknown in the light of the known. And the light of the known in this case is so weak and so pitiable and so inhibited. There's no way by which we, in our present state, can begin to grasp the glorious expansiveness of infinity. We can only learn a new thing by connecting it to something we already know. So when we talk about the world beyond this one, we have a square peg, round hole type of problem. In the late 19th century there was a schoolteacher and mathematician by the name of Abbott who put out a little book called *Flatland*. *Flatland* is about living in a fictional two-dimensional world as if it were the surface of a sheet of paper. For example, you can go one way or you can go the other way horizontally, but there is no third way. There is no up or down in Flatland. There's no Z coordinate; there's just an X and Y. So it is just flat. Everybody there is flat and that's all they know is flatness. Spheres cannot exist in Flatland; they're unknown there. So if a sphere does touch

Flatland, it just appears as a dot at the point of contact. If a sphere were to move through Flatland, it just looks like a circle that gets bigger until it hits its equator and then gets smaller until it becomes a point again and disappears as it passes through Flatland because there's no third dimension there. I think that can be partly analogous to what we're facing here with a question like this. Heaven is a higher dimension of life than you and I are used to or than we have ever known, higher than the three dimensions we know here. Therefore, we are presently equipped to know very little about it and understand even less than we know about it. Much of the scriptural depiction of heaven is written in negative terms--no night there, no pain, no death, no tears. I do appreciate Nancy putting that Scripture from Revelation 21:4 on the front of the bulletin today as Art mentioned during his class because it's a negative type description in general because that's how you and I can connect with it to what extent we can connect with it. When you talk with a two-year-old child, your ability to communicate is limited by the abilities of the child and the child's capacities at that very early age. So, in his descriptions of heaven, God is communicating with us--very limited people. So yes, I do think that this is a big part of the issue as you yourself have said.

But now that we have acknowledged that we can't know very much about it, let's think about the things that we can and do know about it. We have two issues here--we'll not be married to each other in heaven. That's one issue, and a second issue is what shall we do in heaven. I need to say a few things about this first one. The Lord said "In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but they are as the angels of God in heaven." Matthew 22: 30. As a human being, you are a personality; that's what is the substantial you. You are a personality in bodily form, but your bodily form is not the same thing as your personality. You have hair and you have eyes, but listen to that verb-- you HAVE these things. You are a person, whether you're in your body or not. Paul made that clear in II Corinthians chapter 12 "I knew a man whether he was in the body or out of the body I do not know." But I can tell that he was still a man, still a human being just the same, whether in or out of the body. It is not as disembodied spirits that God promises us eternal life, but as personalities expressed in a new kind of body. Paul calls it a spiritual body in I Corinthians 15 which Bobby just read for us. We are the same people. Whatever the form in which our personalities are being expressed at any given time. A personality is a message. Our present bodies are one means of transmitting that message. When you have a new body in the next world, you're going to have a new and better transmitter, a new form that is suited to its new environment. Now Jesus is the first fruits of them that slept. That is said in the 20th verse of the chapter that Bobby read--I didn't have him read the whole chapter because it's long, but in that 20th verse "Now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept," meaning that he is the beginning and he is the prototype of a whole harvest of resurrections. His appearance was changed. The properties of his body were changed. He specifically denied that he was just a ghost or spirit without a body. He could be touched. He could eat. He had flesh and bones, and yet he could enter rooms through locked doors. He could appear in places miles apart without traveling by any recognized means, and he ascended into heaven. He had a real body that was not an earthbound body. There was a continuity of life between the body of the baby that Mary took and laid in the manger and it later grew up and walked this earth, a continuity

between that body and the body of the resurrected Jesus, but in the resurrection it had undergone a very fundamental change. It was like the previous body. It had some sort of developmental relationship to the previous body, but it was obviously not identical with the previous body. The factor that outweighs all the dissimilarities between the original body of Jesus on this earth, and his resurrection body is that Jesus before and after the resurrection was undeniably the same person. That's the key point. The people who knew him best knew it was the Lord. Mary at the tomb recognized his voice or recognized, possibly, a peculiar form of address, a familiar mode of address to her when just the way he said Mary, somehow she recognized him. The two on the road to Emmaus recognized his mannerisms, the way he broke bread. The disciples by the sea recognized his characteristic activities, the way he performed the miracle of the fish and his thoughtfulness in preparing breakfast. They knew that it was the Lord. They all recognized the person; they all recognized the personality of a man they had known very very well, and they were so sure of his identity that they were willing to even die for that belief, as many of them eventually did. They were sure that it was the Lord. What survived death was his personality. The message was the same, but the transmitter was new and it was better. He was less confined, less limited, it was immortal, it was perfectly designed to live on in a spiritual environment. It was no longer really at home in this world, and so this is the pattern for all resurrection, including ours. Just as radically as the Lord's body was changed, our bodies will be changed. We don't know very much about the nature of the resurrection body, but we do know that much. The second body develops out of the first somehow. It's a refinement of it, a further advanced stage of it. It is, as it were, a mutation of it. It is incomparably higher and more advanced than the earthly body. We will enter a new environment in a form perfectly suited to life there. Now that I Corinthians 15 repays close attention and study on this issue. We don't have time to look into this in any detail at all, but it paints a profound picture of development from a simpler to a more complex form of life. There's a difference Paul points out between the forms for the bodies of people, animals, birds and fish, but it is a difference within limits. There are many similarities between these bodies as well. They have life in common and much much more. They have senses in common, appetites in common, animation in common. There is a circle, in other words of comparability, yet they are distinctively different from one another, so also he implies is life after death from life before death. It is an advancement, life after death; it's a development from the first. There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon. Heavenly life is like earthly life, but it's more glorious than earthly life. There are not so many things that are different between them as there are things that are similar. Yes, there are different things, many different things, but there are many similar things. The one is the extension or the development of the other. It's a development upwards if we're talking about the resurrection of those who are going to heaven. It's a development upwards. Flesh and blood while we're here are good vehicles for transmitting your personality in space and time. While living in Flatland, flesh and blood work just fine for you, but they are inadequate for a dimension of life where space and time have become obsolete concepts, just as a caterpillar has to be changed into a butterfly in order to inherit the air, so we have to be changed in order to inherit heaven. The spiritual body and the spiritual life are better, they're more glorious and are more real than their physical predecessors. The Lord never spoke of heaven merely in

woodenly literal terms. Rather, he used symbolic language. We find this a great deal. Heaven is no more literally made of gold and precious stones than the promised land literally flowed with milk and honey, but the image being presented, in either case, is clear enough.

What about the question of duration or length of time or length of some other medium rather than time. I've heard people say all my life that they would rather be annihilated right at the point of death, than having to spend eternity playing harps. There is obviously something decidedly unattractive to people about the idea of anything going on and on and on forever. The idea is that you'd be bored stiff. The idea is that after a few thousand years you would have done everything there is to do but yet there'd still be endless eons of time rolling out ahead of you. That makes heaven sound like a wet weekend in Reykjavik. Like the comedian said-- I think every comedian at one time or other has used the joke--he'll mention some town --he'll say, I spent a month there one night, and the idea is that you wouldn't want to be there a little bit of time; it would seem like a lot longer than it actually was. But heaven is beyond all that; heaven is beyond space and time; heaven has no location in space, and it is outside of time. It's hard for us to think about being outside of time because we've always been bound by it as we're bound by it now. But God's above time; God existed before time existed; God will exist after time has ceased to exist, and you and I will exist after time has ceased to exist. We need to be able as much as possible to think in those kinds of terms even though we can't understand it. Trying to measure years in heaven is like trying to measure laughter with a yardstick; it just doesn't work. There's an incompatibility there that cannot be resolved. Man was and is and will be, but God just is. There's really ultimately no past or future tense with God. He is the eternal present tense. He is the great I AM. That was the meaning of that in Exodus and in the New Testament as well. He is the I AM doesn't even fit grammatically--"before Abraham was, I AM" doesn't work grammatically, but it works beautifully in communication to tell that he was God in the flesh, the ever present state of being. God was never younger than he is now and God never grows old. He just is. So this is the context of heaven and in heaven we will live more fully. We will live more satisfyingly than ever before. You can take that to the bank. If we can just get there! The heavenly life will involve all of the important elements of what we know as life. There will be relationships. There will be development. There will be knowledge, there will be communication as we express our personalities through the transformed glorified bodies that the Lord gives us for that environment. We will recognize our loved ones more by who they are than by what they look like, and we will know them with a depth, we will know them with an insight, we will know them with a love that's unimaginable on this earth. Life will be transformed in the presence of its creator and sustainer, and God is going to enjoy his relationship with us, and I believe he will enjoy the relationships between his children, just as we enjoy sometimes relationships between our children. If there is a heaven at all, then by definition, it must be beyond our comprehension while we're here. I'm glad you love your husband; that's at the root of this issue. I'm very glad that you love your husband. One of the things Paul told Titus was to teach the older women to teach the younger women to love their husbands and that is a lesson learned in this case obviously; that's excellent. I believe that when you and your husband go to heaven, you will know one another there, you

will remember how special you were to each other here, and you'll be special to each other there. I can't see it any other way. The rich man was told by Father Abraham, "Son, remember. . ." This is in the next world and the rich man wasn't even in heaven. He woke up in torment, but he still could remember. Remembrance indicates survival of the personality. He knew Lazarus and he remembered their interactions here on this earth. If we couldn't remember our life on earth, then neither heaven nor hell would have their intended significance to the people experiencing them. The relationships we have here do not cease to be relationships when we die and enter the next world. There's no reason to conclude that from anything that the Bible says. David said of his dead baby boy, "He can't return to me, but I can go to him." Let's assume David goes to him. Will they stop being father and son in the next world? and if so, what good did it do to go to him? We're going to sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at a great feast. The Lord promised this. Will they stop being grandfather, father and son in the next world? Will Abraham, Isaac and Jacob be together and yet not know each other? Will they not know what they were to each other? How can that possibly be? What good would it do for them to be together? What kind of a promise is it if when it's fulfilled we can't know that it's fulfilled? If we know Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and know that that promise is being fulfilled, then why wouldn't they know one another and how can they know one another without knowing what they were to one another while they were on this earth? The apostle Paul said on a couple of different occasions things like "what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing are not ye before our Lord Jesus at his coming?" That's I Thessalonians 2 :19. Again he said in II Corinthians 1:4 , speaking in writing to another congregation, "You are our rejoicing in the day of the Lord Jesus." In other words, Paul expected in the next world to know the people that he had converted and the people in the church that he had helped. When we all wind up in heaven together at the end, he expected to know those people, to recognize them, and to be able to relate to them and have joy in their presence in the next world.

Now marriage in this world has both a civil and a religious component, but marriage really is a contract in this world, between a man and woman. We will not have or need a contract there in the next world. But what difference does that really make in your relationship? The fact that we won't have or need a contract there doesn't seem like an impediment to me. Do you hangout with your spouse, mainly because you have a contract, or mainly because you love one another? You want to be together. The fact that you love one another was the reason for the contract in the first place. So the fact that the contract is gone doesn't really affect their relationship as I understand it. You will still be you and he will still be him. You won't be strangers. You will still love each other, and you'll still have the relationship with each other that you build here, and you'll both be a part of the great marriage of the bride to the Lamb of God. I promise it will be great, and I make that promise on the authority of the word of God. Our experience in heaven is linked with this life. It develops out of it. Human personality flowers there into its finest and its most wonderful form , and that finest most wonderful form is in fact the personality of Christ. It is the personality of Christ that we take on. How did the apostle John put it? "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be. But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is, and every man that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is

pure"-- even as Jesus the Lord is pure. That's our destiny in heaven. We shall be like him. To be like Christ, that's the goal of it all. Ephesians 1:10 talks about the great goal of God in bringing all things together, all things in heaven and earth together in one in Christ, not Christ limited as he was on the earth to the confines of time in the flesh, but Christ resurrected, Christ risen, the free and timeless Christ of the resurrection morning. That's what we'll be like. you have and a community of people who are like that is what heaven will be. Sin will be excluded from heaven, so that heaven may be heaven. God has a way of keeping heaven holy, and yet, admitting people like us into it. It's amazing that he can do this, but this is the mystery of the gospel. This is the redeeming of the blood of Jesus Christ--continual cleansing of sin by the blood of the lamb for those who are of the truth and remain of the truth and obey him in this life. He is the author of eternal salvation unto them. Those who are in Christ are already considered a colony of heaven right now. The church is supposed to be like a colony of heaven. Every congregation should be considered a colony of heaven. It ought to be like a little foretaste of heaven when we're with that congregation even though we're still on this earth. Paul's making exactly that point in Philippians 3 verses 20 and 21. Our citizenship is in heaven already; that's where our allegiance is already; we live with eternity in our hearts already. That's the best possible preparation for death so that death does not need to devastate us and our families as it does in so many cases of people in the world. We see and deny even the possibility of death throughout life. When it finally hits, it's like the whole world came apart. Well, any view of life that doesn't take death into account is not a very good view of life. Death is virtually certain unless the Lord comes first. The death rate is one per person; we're all terminal cases, best just to accept that reality, live with reality, and acknowledge that we need to look beyond this world and accept and embrace the revelation that God has given us about that, so that we can die in the Lord. To die in the Lord, we must get into the Lord and stay in the Lord. "You are all the sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Galatians 3:26 and 27. Accountable people do not accidentally wake up in heaven without preparing to go there. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people, and decisions determine destiny. We don't know all about what God has prepared for us, but we know we need to be prepared for it. Heaven will bring complete healing. Our resurrection bodies will be freed from disability, from infirmity, from disease. Our emotional scars will be removed and we'll be free from neuroses and complexes and symptoms of depression.

What will we do in heaven? The Bible describes our activities in heaven as being very similar to the way they're varied here on the earth. We will not all be doing just any one thing all the time in endless repetition when we're in heaven. It seems that there will be fulfilling work of service for the Lord, not oppressive work, but rewarding service to God. Just as when earth was still a paradise, there was still rewarding service to God. God placed man in the garden, Genesis 2:15, to dress and to keep it before sin ever entered the world. Heaven is a well balanced state of being, perfectly planned for us by he who knows us best and loves us most. The apostle Peter said, "this is all reserved in heaven for you," for you who are in Christ; it's reserved in heaven for you. We'll go home with the Lord to enjoy and to praise and to rest and to serve and to rejoice and to sing and to celebrate forever. And God is still taking reservations. God likes to party and he's got a

big party planned. The main thing is please don't miss it; nobody has to miss it. But most people will miss it. If we can help you secure your reservation today, we're going to sing an invitation song in just a matter of moments. And if you'll respond to that, if you want to make your reservation, the Lord will help you and we will help you. You're no greater sinner than the Lord is a savior. How paltry is your worst compared to God's forgiveness of it. Don't miss heaven! For those who love each other, have forgiven each other, all is unentangled and all is undismayed. The Lord is calling and pleading and waiting as we stand and sing number 336. Please, won't you come?