

Heaven

I thought it would be a good idea to take some time to explore what the Bible has to say about Heaven. This is not an exhaustive discussion of the topic, so if that is what you are looking for then I would strongly recommend the book *Heaven* by Randy Alcorn. In that book Alcorn examines the subject with tremendous thoroughness and does a fantastic job of staying true to the Scriptures.

What I would like to do is go over a number of the highlights in order to give people a better idea of what Heaven is like. Along the way I hope to put to rest a number of common misconceptions. My plan is to approach the subject one passage at a time and explore what each one has to say.

The Criminal on the Cross

When Jesus was crucified He had a short conversation with someone else who was also being crucified – a conversation that tells us something interesting about Heaven. The passage can be found in Luke:

Luke 23:39: “And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us.

40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation?

41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds but this man hath done nothing amiss.

42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.

43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Did you catch the significance of what Jesus said in verse 43? He knew that all three of them were going to die that day, and they did. However, Jesus promised the repentant criminal that he would be in Paradise with Jesus *that day*. This tells us that when people die they don't just “sleep” until Judgment Day – they *immediately* go on to either Heaven or Hell. In the case of the criminal it was straight on to Heaven; in the case of the unnamed rich man (who we will discuss in the next section) it was on to a place of fire and torment.

Also notice that the man went straight to Heaven, *not* to Purgatory. The concept of Purgatory is highly unbiblical, for a great many reasons that I will not explore here. For the moment it is enough to point out that Jesus did not say “Today you will go to Purgatory and spend many long years there suffering for your sins, but if you hang on long enough you will eventually make it to Paradise.”

The Rich Man and Lazarus

In Luke 16 the Lord recounts the tale of the rich man and Lazarus. It is important to notice that this story is *not* given as a parable. Jesus does not start out by saying “The kingdom of Heaven is like...” The Lord simply says that there was once a rich man and a beggar and then explains what happened to them. The story is presented as history and should be treated as such.

Let's take a look at the passage and see what it has to tell us:

Luke 16:19: “There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

20 And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

22 And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;

23 And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.”

There are a couple things we can glean from this part of the parable. First, notice that both people went somewhere *as soon as they died*. Lazarus was carried to Abraham's bosom and the rich man found himself in Hell. Once again we see that the notion of “soul sleep” is not correct; upon death they were both judged and sent to either a place of rest or a place of torment.

It's also worth noticing that the beggar was *carried by angels*. I don't know if this happens every time a righteous person dies, but it did happen this time and it is worth mentioning. Finally, notice that the rich man immediately recognized Abraham, even though he never met him in life. It would seem that in the afterlife you know everyone and everyone knows you.

As you might imagine, the rich man was not happy. He was in a great deal of torment:

Luke 16:24: “And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”

The rich man clearly has a physical body of some sort because he can feel pain, has a tongue, and is thirsty. The flame is tormenting him and he wants something cool to ease his pain. This man is not suffering from mere “separation from God”. Instead he is desperately hot and thirsty and longs for something to ease his *physical* suffering. He is not a disembodied spirit but clearly has a body that is able to take nourishment. Abraham must have a body as well because the rich man begs Abraham to dip his finger in water. This implies that Abraham has fingers, which indicates that the body we will have between our death and our resurrection is quite similar to the one we have now.

Moreover, notice that the rich man *recognizes* both Abraham and Lazarus. Some people think that when you die you will no longer remember your life or recognize anyone that you used to know. The rich man, however, clearly recognized the beggar that used to lay at his gate. He remembered him and knew who he was. In fact, even Abraham was aware of their past history, which we see in the next verse:

Luke 16:25: “But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and

thou art tormented.”

Here Abraham makes another interesting point. Both Abraham and the rich man *remembers the rich man's life on Earth*. Some people believe that when you die you will no longer remember what you did on Earth, but this is clearly *not* the case. Abraham is reminding the rich man that when he was still alive he had a good life. The past has not disappeared.

What is especially interesting is that *Abraham* remembers the life of the rich man, even though the rich man had never met Abraham. This means either that Abraham watched the rich man while he was still alive, or that in the afterlife everyone knows the entire life history of everyone else.

The passage goes on:

Luke 16:26: “And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.”

This is another interesting point: there will be no mercy missions from Paradise to Hell. Those who are in one place cannot pass over to the other place. The righteous saints who are rejoicing in God's kingdom have no fear of ever finding themselves in Hell. There is no road that can take them there because an impassable gulf separates the two.

Since no one can go and help the rich man, he asks Abraham to send someone to warn his brothers:

Luke 16:27: “Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:
28 For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.”

This brings out another interesting point: the rich man was aware of what was going on back home! Jesus does not tell us how he knew, but the rich man clearly recognized that his brothers were still alive and were also in danger of Hell. At this point he realized that he made a terrible mistake and that it was too late for him to do anything, and he longed to rescue his brothers. One has to wonder: if people in Hell are aware of what is happening on Earth, then isn't it also possible that people in Heaven have that same awareness?

There are just three verses left:

Luke 16:29: “Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.
30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent.
31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

This is the end of the story. What I find especially interesting is that there really was One who rose from the dead and told people the truth about what was beyond death. That man was Jesus Christ – and people have not listened to Him either.

The Unrighteous Steward

This unusual story talks about a person who was falsely accused of being wasteful. The Lord uses this story to point out that the lost are sometimes wiser than the saved because the lost are smart enough to use their money to win friends, while the saved do not use their resources to build relationships that will last throughout eternity.

We can find this story in the book of Luke:

Luke 16:1: “And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods.

2 And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward.

3 Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? For my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed.

4 I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

5 So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, how much owest thou unto my lord?

6 And he said, A hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.

7 Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, A hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore.

8 And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

9 And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.”

In this story (which may also be a true historical account, because it does not begin with the phrase “The kingdom of Heaven is like...”) a servant is falsely accused of being wasteful. (I realize this is not apparent in English, but the word translated “accused” in verse 1 is actually a Greek word that implies that the accusation was false.) As a result of this false accusation the servant's master tells him that he is going to be fired. The steward realizes that this means he will have no way to support himself, and so he comes up with a brilliant idea: he goes around to each person that owes his master money and cancels a part of their debt. This has two benefits: first, it makes it easier for them to repay the debt and ensures that his master will at least get a partial payment, and second, it makes the debtors grateful and willing to help the steward in return.

The lesson that Christ draws from this is interesting. He says that His followers should use the world's resources to build relationships and help others so that when they die they will be received “into everlasting habitations”. In other words, after everyone dies and is in Heaven, those who were helped will *remember* the people who helped them and will open their homes to them. They will be grateful and will reward the giver. What was given will be repaid on a much grander scale.

In other words, people *will* have homes in Heaven, they will remember what happened during

their lives in this world, and the relationships that they had on Earth will continue in Heaven. Jesus wants us to take advantage of those facts and build relationships here so that we will be rewarded in Heaven. The people who you helped in this life will reward you in the next.

The Martyrs

In Revelation chapter 6 we are given a picture of a group of martyrs in Heaven. What is interesting about this picture is what the martyrs are doing. They offer us a valuable insight about what life is like in Heaven:

Revelation 6:9: “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, doest thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?

11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.”

This passage reveals something amazing about Heaven that is often overlooked or misunderstood. First of all, we've already established that when people die they immediately go to either Heaven or Hell. Because of this there's no reason to think that these martyrs are somehow figurative. These are real people who were executed for their faith in Jesus Christ, and they are now in Heaven crying out to God.

What many people miss is what the martyrs are doing. These individuals, who are in Heaven with the Lord, are crying out for *vengeance*. They are not happy, blissful souls. They remember their lives on Earth and know that they were unjustly murdered, and they are asking God to do something about it. They *still care* about what happened to them and they know that they have not been avenged. They have not simply “moved on” and “gotten over it”. This is more evidence that after people die they still know what is going on back on Earth – and those who were mistreated still long for justice *even after they are dead*.

The Lord's response is interesting: He gives them white robes and tells them that they need to wait a little longer. He doesn't refuse their request or rebuke them for it. In fact, He promises to grant it in a little while, after more people have been martyred. That is when He will pour out His wrath upon the Earth and judge the world for all its wickedness.

Time

Some people say that time does not pass in Heaven. However, Revelation says otherwise:

Revelation 8:1: “And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.”

Here we see that at one point there was silence in Heaven for thirty minutes. Thirty minutes is an interval of *time*. If there was no time in Heaven then there couldn't be any thirty-minute periods! In fact there wouldn't be any time periods at all, so if there are time periods in Heaven then there must be time. More than that, however, if *anything* is happening in Heaven then there must be time. Think about it: how can one thing happen and then something else happen next if there is no such thing as time? Time is the distance between events.

If you think about it, the idea of time not existing doesn't make any sense. Time simply means that one event happens after another event. If there was no such thing as time then nothing could *ever* happen!

So where does this idea come from? The phrase “time shall be no more” *is* found in one passage in the Bible. That passage is this one:

Revelation 10:5: “And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven,
6 And swore by him that liveth forever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer:
7 But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.”

This passage is *not* teaching that time itself will come to an end. As we've already discussed, that idea makes no sense, and it contradicts what was said just two chapters earlier. What this passage is saying is that one day an angel will say that “the mystery of God” would be finished. The phrase “there should be time no longer” means the same thing as “it's run out of time” or “there is no time left”. We say things like this all the time. All the angel is saying is that one day the mystery will finally be finished because the time in which it was being kept hidden will be over.

Animals

One very common question is whether or not animals go to Heaven when they die. As you probably know, the Bible does not directly answer this question. It is clear that God cares about animals; when He destroyed the Earth in the Flood He had Noah create a large ark so that the animal kingdom would be saved. Jesus told us that God knows every sparrow that falls, and in Job the Lord took great pride in telling Job about some of the animals He had created. They are definitely on His mind – but the Bible does not say what happens to them.

However, Ecclesiastes does say something interesting. In Chapter 3 Solomon says this:

Ecclesiastes 3:18: “I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.

19 For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so

that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity.

20 All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.

21 Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?"

Verse 21 is interesting. Notice how it appears to say that there is something that lives after the animal dies; both man and beast have a spirit that lives on after death. Now, the spirit of the animal does not appear to go to the same place as the spirit of the man, but something *does* happen to it. I realize this is not conclusive, but it is interesting.

Another point to consider is that God definitely has the power and the ability to bring animals to Heaven. Animals have never sinned so they would not be disqualified from being in the presence of God. At the very least there is no reason to believe that animals go to Hell, for Hell is reserved for sinners and animals cannot sin. Besides, if someone loved one of their animals and asked God to bring it back to life – well, would it really be outside of His character to grant their request?

The End of the Earth

When the Lord destroyed the planet in the great Flood back in Noah's day He promised mankind that He would never again destroy the entire planet with a Flood. However, He did *not* promise to never again destroy the Earth, and the day will come when the Earth will be destroyed. The Lord talks about this judgment in 2 Peter:

2 Peter 3:10: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,

12 Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

13 Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

In this passage we are told that one day the Lord is going to destroy the Earth and everything in it with fire. Everything that this planet contains will be destroyed: the elements themselves will melt and the very heavens will be on fire. All of the works that are in it – both great and small – will be destroyed. Nothing that we see today will survive. Those who trusted Christ will live forever and will never die, but all of their possessions in this world will be lost. Nothing on this planet will last forever.

That, however, will not be the end. After this happens the Lord has promised to create a new heaven and a new Earth. Of particular interest is the word that is translated "new". It does not mean new in the sense of a second one, but new in the sense of taking something and restoring it to its original condition – in other words, making something new again. The Lord is not done with this planet. He will destroy it with fire but then He will remake it to the way it once was, before sin entered in and before the great Curse wrought havoc. This new place will not be an evil world but a world of righteousness and peace. The old world – so filled with suffering and pain and death – will be gone

forever.

The Great White Throne Judgment

The Bible tells us that at the end of history (although in one sense history will have no end) there will be a great judgment where many will stand before the throne of God and be judged. This takes place after the Millennial Kingdom and is discussed in Revelation 20:

Revelation 20:11: “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.”

In this judgment all of the dead are brought before God. No one is excluded, no matter how they died or where they were. Hell itself is emptied of all the souls it contains. It is critical to understand that the people who will be judged here are *the dead*. The reason this matters is because this judgment takes place in the second half of Revelation 20. In the first half of this chapter the Lord returned to Earth, raised all of the *righteous* back to life, and together they lived and reign for a thousand years. This judgment takes place *after* that. This means that the only people who will still be dead at this time are all of the wicked who have lived throughout time, and all those who died during the millennial kingdom. The Church will not be included in this judgment because they were raised to life at the Rapture and therefore will not be among the dead. Likewise, the Old Testament believers and the Tribulation saints were raised to life at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom and therefore will not be among the dead either. It is very important to realize this; otherwise we will come away with a misunderstanding concerning who this judgment affects.

In this judgment all of “the dead” are judged. Those whose names are found in the Book of Life are spared and will go on into eternity, and those whose names are *not* found are cast into the Lake of Fire, where they will be tormented forever. Death and Hell are also cast into the Lake of Fire. This is important: after the final judgment Hell is emptied and the lost spend eternity in the *Lake of Fire*. Nobody will spend eternity in Hell because Hell is just a temporary holding place that will be emptied at this judgment.

The New Heaven and Earth

After the Earth is destroyed by fire and after Judgment Day, the Lord will create a new heaven and Earth. This is discussed in detail in the last few chapters of Revelation. I will only quote the first few verses here:

Revelation 21:1: “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

These verses say some very important things. First, as was stated earlier, the current heaven and Earth will not last forever. One day they will both be destroyed. However, after they are destroyed they will be made new again. That is what the word “new” means in verse 1. The Earth is going to be restored to way it was before sin and death and the Curse had their way with it, much like a wrecked car is brought back to its original beauty.

We have already seen that Hell is not the final resting place of the unrighteous dead. Those who did not place their faith and trust in Jesus are brought out of Hell on Judgment Day and cast into the Lake of Fire. Likewise, Heaven is not the final resting place of the righteous dead. 2 Peter 3:13 tells us that the saved are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth – and *that* is where the righteous will live forever with God.

Take another look at what these verses say. The great city the New Jerusalem will come out of Heaven and *down to Earth*. God then promises to dwell with men *on Earth* and be their God. He will banish forever all death, sorrow, crying, and pain. This place – this new Earth – is where God Himself will dwell. It will be His home and *our* home.

The rest of Revelation goes on to describe the fabulous city that is called the New Jerusalem. I will not go into all the details here; you can read them at your leisure.

The Final State

What will people be doing on this new Earth? Well, for one thing, as we've just mentioned, they will be living in a city (the New Jerusalem). We're familiar with cities and know that they are points of civilization, filled with all kinds of jobs and opportunities. It is exciting to speculate about what a race of perfect immortals might spend their time doing – especially with no sin, evil, or death to get in the way! There is nothing inherently evil with science, art, or sports, and there is no reason to believe that they won't be present. The key difference will be that *everything* will be God-centered, for we will finally be able to see things as they really are and will be able to serve God with all of our being.

Revelation chapter 22 does hint at what people will be doing through all of those ages:

Revelation 22:3: “And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him:

4 And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

5 And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign forever and ever.”

It is easy to miss but it's right there in verse 3 – “His servants shall serve Him”. Throughout all the ages of eternity His people will continue to serve Him with all of their God-given talents and abilities. Today we struggle to serve God through infirmaries and disease and sin and evil. One day we will serve God with perfect minds, perfect bodies, and in sinless perfection.

But that's not all! There is one other hint mentioned in verse 5 – we will reign *forever*. The Bible hints in a number of places that God has made us a race of kings and priests, and that throughout eternity we will reign with God. For example:

Revelation 1:5: “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,

6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”

This is found right at the beginning of Revelation. Here we are told that Jesus Christ has made us kings and priests. The job of kings is *to reign*, and this idea of reigning is repeated later on:

Revelation 5:9: “And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation;

10 And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.”

Once again we have the idea of reigning. It is clear that we will serve the Lord and one way we will do this is by reigning on the Earth. It's an exciting idea! But what will we be reigning over? The answer to this is hinted at in Isaiah:

Isaiah 9:6: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

Notice how verse 7 says that the Lord's government will continue to increase *forever*. This implies an eternal state of growth. And in what way will it grow? Is it possible that new beings will be added to the Kingdom? It doesn't say – but it *is* clear that stagnation is not in the picture. God is infinite

and will never run dry; the full extent of His creativity cannot even be imagined. We will never have to worry about getting bored. God's kingdom will continue to increase for all the ages of eternity, and the Lord has given us the unimaginable blessing of not only being there, but being there as a race of *kings*.

Treasures and Rewards

One final issue that must be raised before concluding a study on Heaven is the issue of rewards. This subject was brought up by Christ Himself in the Sermon on the Mount. The passage is found in Matthew chapter 5:

Matthew 5:19: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:
20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:
21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Here Jesus says something very interesting. Notice that He does not forbid the accumulation of wealth; in fact He commands it! However there is a twist: He wants us to lay up our treasures *in Heaven*. Jesus points out that if we amass fortunes on Earth we will lose them one way or another because this planet is full of corruption and thieves (not to mention the fact that one day this world will be destroyed). It's much wiser to lay up our wealth in Heaven because there it cannot be lost or stolen. Plus, if we lay up our treasures in Heaven we will have our heart there as well – and the Lord very much wants our heart to be centered on Heaven.

At the very least it's clear that it is possible to lay up treasures in Heaven. This means that there must be some way to take our resources and move them into a Heavenly account. Not only is it *possible* to do this, but Jesus *commands* us to do this!

We already discussed the idea of using earthly resources to accomplish something in Heaven when we touched on the parable of the unrighteous servant. There Jesus pointed out the wisdom of using money to help other people so that in Heaven they will invite us to their homes and reward us. But are there other ways to lay up rewards? I believe so. Matthew 10 says this:

Matthew 10:40: "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me.
41 He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.
42 And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Here Jesus talks about rewards for helping people who are in need. The idea of receiving a person is to take them for who they are – for example, to accept a prophet as a prophet instead of opposing him and trying to shoot him down. The actions that merit rewards do not have to be great; one example Christ gives is simply giving a child a drink of cold water. These are the kind of things that lay

up treasures in Heaven.

Some people object to the idea of treasures in Heaven and claim that everyone will have the same thing and that no one will be greater than anyone else. However, the Bible indicates otherwise. Take this passage as an example:

Matthew 19:27: “Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?

28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Here Peter told Christ that the disciples had sacrificed everything in order to follow Him, and he wanted to know what their reward would be. If there were no rewards this would have been a perfect time for Jesus to correct Peter (and Jesus certainly didn't hesitate to correct Peter on other occasions!), but that didn't happen. Instead of telling Peter that he was wrong to even think about rewards, Christ told him that they would receive something special: they would become kings, sit on 12 thrones, and judge the 12 tribes of Israel.

Now, notice that there are only 12 of these thrones and they were given to the disciples. This isn't something that is going to be given to everyone; you and I are not going to be sitting on any of those thrones. This obviously means that the idea that “everyone gets the same thing” is quite wrong, for the disciples are given an honor that no one else will have.

The apostle Paul reinforces this idea:

I Corinthians 3:11: “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

12 Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

14 If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

15 If any man's work shall be burned, he himself shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.”

Here Paul states that the works we do in our lives will be put to the test. If a man's work endures (in other words, if it was the right sort of work) then he will be rewarded. If it does *not* endure then he “shall suffer loss” and will *not* be rewarded. Verses 14 and 15 clearly indicate that it is possible for some people to be rewarded while others walk away empty-handed. This strongly argues against the idea that everyone will be given the same thing.

This means it's possible to enter Heaven and find rewards waiting, and it is also possible to enter Heaven and find that you wasted your life and accomplished nothing. Christ Himself warns of this possibility:

Luke 16:10: “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.

11 If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mannon, who will

commit to your trust the true riches?

12 And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"

Here Jesus clearly states that God is concerned about our faithfulness. God notices those who are faithful and those who are faithless. What is interesting is the conclusion – the passage implies that only those who are faithful in earthly things will be entrusted with “true riches”. *The Lord puts a difference between His faithful servants and His unfaithful servants.*

This warning is made even more graphic in Matthew 24:

Matthew 24:45: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?”

46 Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.

47 Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.

48 But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming;

49 And shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken;

50 The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of,

51 And shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

Here we see not just a faithless servant but an evil one. The Lord paints a picture of a master who comes home and catches his servants in action. The servant that is caught being faithful is given a tremendous reward of greater responsibilities, higher honor, and deeper service. At the same time, the servant that is caught being faithless is fired. He loses his position and is thrown out with the hypocrites. He does not find joy at his master's return; instead he finds sorrow.

It is tempting to think that the faithless servant in this passage symbolizes the lost, but Luke 19 makes it clear that that is not the case:

Luke 19:12: “He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

13 And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.

14 But his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us.

15 And it came to pass, that when he was returned, having received the kingdom, then he commanded these servants to be called unto him, to whom he had given the money, that he might know how much every man had gained by trading.

16 Then came the first, saying, Lord, thy pound hath gained ten pounds.

17 And he said unto him, Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou authority over ten cities.

18 And the second came, saying, Lord thy pound hath gained five pounds.

19 And he said likewise to him, Be thou also over five cities.

20 And another came, saying, Lord, behold, here is thy pound, which I have kept laid up in a napkin:

21 For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou laidst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow.
22 And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow:
23 Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?
24 And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds.
25 (And they say unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.)
26 For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him.
27 But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me."

Here we have a retelling of the same basic idea. Once again the faithful servants are rewarded with greater positions of authority; instead of managing a sum of money they are now responsible for managing entire cities. It's worth noticing that their reward is *completely* out of proportion with their service. A relatively small act of faithfulness was rewarded with a tremendous, breathtaking reward.

However, the faithless servant has his position of service taken away from him and given to someone else. He was condemned, fired from his job, and left with nothing. It should be stressed, however, that this person is *not* one of the lost. The lost are pictured in verse 27 where the master states that all those who refused to accept his lordship were to be punished by death. That gives us *three* categories: the faithful servants (who were rewarded), the unfaithful servants (who received no reward and who lost their position), and those who refused to be a servant at all (who were executed).

The Bible is very clear that the Lord puts a difference between the faithful and the faithless. He cares about what we do with our lives, and after our death He either rewards us or does not reward us. This is an *entirely different thing* from punishing sin. The Lord took upon Himself the punishment for all of our sin, and our sins have indeed been done away with. When we die and stand before God we will not be punished for them. However, based on the way we lived our lives we may or may not be rewarded. The Lord told us to lay up treasures in Heaven, and if we refuse to do that then we have only ourselves to blame.