

## [IN GOD'S IMAGE 88 – BENEFITS OF HEAVEN

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***We have finally reached that point in the narrative where God has achieved His goal of creating “man in His image” and as a consequence, God and man can dwell face to face in the New Jerusalem.***

- ◆ God through His work has created for Himself a holy people within whom he can come and dwell (Revelation 21:3).

***We have been looking at what insights we can discern from scripture on what life will be like in heaven.***

- ◆ **We saw that the new heavens and the new earth will replace the old heaven and earth of decaying time.**
- ◆ As the purpose of the decaying four-dimensional world of time and space is now redundant, it is no longer necessary for a humanity that has passed from mortality to immortality.
- ◆ God has provided His saints with a glorious spiritual body especially designed to inhabit the eternal dimension of heaven.
- ◆ So God puts the sad decaying period of rebellion to the torch and replaces it with the new heavens and the new earth.
- ◆ **We then asked the question, “What kind of body will this new heavenly creature have?”**
- ◆ We saw there is a time coming when we will have the same type of glorious immortal body as the risen Christ.
- ◆ Incredibly, humans will be infused with the very spiritual life of the Godhead so we can share in their existence as their children.
- ◆ Although it will not be a flesh and blood body, the spiritual body we will have still retains an important connection to our discarded physical bodies.
- ◆ When Jesus appeared out of nowhere to His disciples in the upper room after His resurrection with His new spiritual body, He was still recognisable as Jesus (John 20:19-20).
- ◆ **We also saw there is an important reason why we need “bodies” and it goes back to God’s purpose for us – to be created in the image of God.**
- ◆ In other words, to be a true human in God’s image is to have the same nature and character of the Trinity.
- ◆ The Father, Son and Holy Spirit share a deep, intimate personal relationship based on a shared mutual love between them.
- ◆ This is ultimately what love is, and why God describes Himself as love (1 John 4:8).
- ◆ But love is a medium or expression that necessitates separate entities or persons without which it cannot exist.
- ◆ God too, is a trinity of three persons for this very reason, to be able to express love to one another.
- ◆ So if we are to love, praise, serve and live with God, we will need a body to express these characteristics in the spiritual dimension of heaven.
- ◆ It is with these new spiritual bodies in relationship that we will reflect and participate with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the inner life of the triune God, or to put it another way, we will enjoy Holy Communion with one another.
- ◆ **Another benefit of this remarkable spiritual body is it will be incapable of sin.**
- ◆ Right now as we sit here we have leaders of governments around the world plotting the demise of other nations they regard as enemies.
- ◆ There are spy agencies committed to undermining their opponents through subversive activities.
- ◆ We have opposing political parties openly fabricating the truth in order to discredit their opponents to score a few political points.
- ◆ Business leaders sit around boardrooms calculating how they can achieve a few more extra dollars in profit from unwitting customers.
- ◆ We have drug lords, criminal masterminds, petty thieves, plotting all sorts of devious, illicit activities undermining our society.
- ◆ There is a darkness that exists in the fallen human soul that at times is terrifyingly evil.
- ◆ As the prophet Jeremiah, wrote, ***“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).***
- ◆ God is committed to not allowing this tragic spectacle of human nature that has existed since the beginning of human creation to continue to be repeated over and over again with even more disastrous consequences.
- ◆ History will not always be a story of human rebellion against God.
- ◆ And one of the glories of heaven is we will have a new nature that flows from God Himself.

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- ◆ One of my favourite qualities of God's nature is mentioned in 1 John 1:5.
- ◆ **1 John 1:5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.**
- ◆ Imagine what it would be like to have no evil or dark thoughts, ever! Yet, this is God's existence, and it will be our existence in heaven.
- ◆ The inability to sin will be one of the major benefits of our glorified spiritual bodies.
- ◆ God through His grace has already delivered us from the consequences of our sin and death, but now His grace goes further by delivering us from sin itself.
- ◆ **Romans 6:17-18 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. <sup>18</sup> You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.**
- ◆ In the past we made choices according to our old fallen nature whose natural inclination was in slavery to sin.
- ◆ But now we are part of the new creation with a glorified spiritual body. That new nature freely chooses righteousness and holiness.
- ◆ We will still have the ability to choose, but our choices will be in accordance with our new holy nature and the spiritual environment.
- ◆ God's goal in forgiveness is not just to forgive us and leave us with our old sinful nature, but also to grant us a new life that is no longer under the control or domination of sin.
- ◆ **2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.**
- ◆ Can you imagine the different outcomes we will experience as a result of this dramatic change in human nature?
- ◆ Instead of creative minds mentioned earlier being used for devious intentions, these creative minds now governed by the new divine nature will be used for constructive purposes and who knows where this will lead.
- ◆ **This leads us to the next benefit of life in heaven. Just as God has gifted each individual in this age with special talents and abilities, so it will be in heaven.**
- ◆ We look around us even in this fallen world and marvel at man's creative ability.
- ◆ These gifts and abilities come from the God who calls Himself "Creator" who distributes His creative gifts through the Spirit.
- ◆ **1 Corinthians 12:4-6 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. <sup>5</sup> There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. <sup>6</sup> There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.**
- ◆ And as Paul goes on to say, no one is left out, no one is gift-less.
- ◆ **V.7 Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.**
- ◆ And contrary to how these talents and abilities can be misused in today's world, they will be put to constructive use "**for the common good**" of the heavenly community (Ephesians 4:11-12).
- ◆ This too is where the saints from the first resurrection who have been prepared for this time and are equipped with teaching ability will work with the billions of new saints from the second resurrection (Revelation 20:4,6).
- ◆ And just as He has shared His creative talents with humanity in today's world, so it will be in heaven.
- ◆ **1 Corinthians 2:9 However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived"— the things God has prepared for those who love him—...**
- ◆ Heaven will be an enriching environment where we will continue to grow in spiritual maturity by learning godly wisdom and knowledge, through the development of our heavenly gifts and abilities, and through the deep personal relationship we will develop with the Trinity and the billions of other saints.
- ◆ So contrary to the cartoon depictions of saints floating around on clouds playing harps for eternity, heaven will be a highly creative and productive place.
- ◆ **One of the areas where this creativity will manifest itself in a unique way is in our worship of the Father.**
- ◆ Worship is going to play a central role in the life of heaven (Revelation 4:8-11; Revelation 19:1-10).
- ◆ We learned in an earlier session that worship for Christians is our response to the grace God has shown us.
- ◆ Grace in some ways is very much like the act of breathing.

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- ◆ We inhale the generous grace God has showered on us and in response we exhale and give back to the grace-giver our generous worship and adoration.
- ◆ We also learned our worship of God needs to go deeper than just being thankful for what God has done for us.
- ◆ Our relationship with God may begin with gratitude and thanksgiving, remembering all that God has done for us.
- ◆ But while gratitude is a fine quality, as our relationship with God grows deeper, we need to move past thanking God for all He has done for us to thanking Him for who He is.
- ◆ It is at this point that our focus shifts from thanksgiving for what God has done for us to true adoration where the focus is rightly on the makeup and character of the One who has provided these blessings.
- ◆ Now that we dwell face to face with our God and get to know Him in a more intimate way as the loving and graceful God that He truly is, worship will come as natural as breathing.
- ◆ And if you think present worship music like the Hallelujah Chorus makes our spirits soar, it will be nothing compared to the spine-tingling Spirit-inspired music of heaven as we join with the heavenly hosts in singing praises to our God.
- ◆ **Another benefit of heaven will be the joyful reunions that will take place.**
- ◆ Precious loved ones who were lost through death, husbands reunited with their wives, parents with their children, it will be a delightful time of reunion when the lost time of separation will be redeemed.
- ◆ The apostle Paul reassured the Thessalonian church that were concerned about the fate of their loved ones that they would see them again.
- ◆ ***1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.***
- ◆ I'm sure there will be a lot of tears of joy shed at this time.
- ◆ But it will also be a time when we will be introduced to those ancestral relatives who belong to our family tree.
- ◆ No doubt we will discover we have some interesting characters in our family line that have preceded us.
- ◆ And of course we will meet some of the great men and women of faith, Abraham, David, Mary and other famous persons of history.
- ◆ But what about those awkward moments when we run into someone who we may not have expected to see in heaven?
- ◆ What if we suddenly bump into Judas Iscariot or Hitler, or it could be your murderer, an abusive parent, or divorced mate?
- ◆ How does one handle that awkward situation?
- ◆ It has been said the way we most imitate God is when we forgive someone, and not just anyone, but even our enemies.
- ◆ ***Matthew 5:43-45 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'<sup>44</sup> But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, <sup>45</sup> that you may be children of your Father in heaven.***
- ◆ No one will be in heaven that has not first of all accepted the saving grace of Jesus Christ.
- ◆ And Jesus goes on to tell us, no one will be in heaven that is not willing to forgive, as it is part of God's nature to be graceful and forgiving.
- ◆ ***Matthew 6:14-15 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. <sup>15</sup> But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.***
- ◆ Forgiveness is the great leveller. When we forgive we renounce our moral superiority over another.
- ◆ The same culture of grace, which leads to adoration, also creates an environment where we live and breathe forgiveness.
- ◆ We inhale God's forgiveness and exhale forgiveness to others.
- ◆ Just as God has unconditionally accepted us despite what we have done, we have to unconditionally accept others despite what they have done.
- ◆ ***Ephesians 4:32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.***
- ◆ When we come to the table of Holy Communion, we are reminded of this fact.

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- ◆ We come together as forgiven sinners among other forgiven sinners to be reminded of the fact His grace has provided all of us with His forgiveness.
- ◆ We stand side by side with other sinners under God's grace that forgives us all.
- ◆ So back to our question about bumping into Judas Iscariot or Hitler in heaven?
- ◆ The Judas Iscariot who betrayed Jesus would not be in heaven anymore than Gary Regazzoli who also betrayed Jesus will not be in heaven.
- ◆ Instead, if Judas is there, it will be a "born again" Judas who through the power of the Spirit has repented of His sins, and accepted the grace made possible by the One he betrayed.
- ◆ No one who is still "dead in transgressions and sins" will inherit the kingdom of heaven (Ephesians 2:2).
- ◆ So no one needs to fear the final judgment if they are "in Christ Jesus."
- ◆ ***Romans 8:1 Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***
- ◆ So neither Judas Iscariot, nor Hitler, nor Gary Regazzoli need fear the judgment if they are in Christ Jesus.
- ◆ This will be the culture of the new heavens and the new earth.