

John Gay June 1<sup>st</sup> 2025

Heavens Above!

‘Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven.’ (Luke 24:50-51)

Heaven, what is it like, and where is it? These are two questions that have exercised the minds of theologians down the centuries and has been the subject of much speculation. Frankly, speculation is as much as we are able to do on this subject. In this mortal life, we are trying to make sense of spiritual matters that for the moment are beyond our knowledge, or, if we are able to comment on them at all, are difficult to put into words.

What then can we say for certain? If we draw on God’s word, handed down to us in scripture, we can say that heaven is a place in the spiritual realms. The reason we can say this is that is that Luke records two accounts of Jesus’ ascension to such a place. He says in his gospel:

‘Then he led them out as far as Bethany, (therefore he took them to an earthly place) and lifting up his hands he blessed them. While he blessed them, he parted from them and was carried up into heaven’ (Luke 24:50-51).

Thus, he went to another, spiritual place because we can’t see him and we cannot take ourselves there as things stand. Now the fact that he left a physical place where he was seen, to go to a spiritual place where he could not be seen, does not negate his going from the one to the other. He went, but out of our sight. Similarly, in Acts, Luke records the same incident from a different point of view through angels:

‘And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”’ (Acts 1:10-11)

So the disciples were gathered in one place, on earth, looking toward another place, heaven. But there are other places in the Bible where we sense the physical and spiritual places of earth and heaven:

Genesis 1:1 – ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.’ That is two separate places.

2 Kings 2:11 – ‘And as they (that is Elisha and Elijah) still went on and talked, (so while very much ‘par terre’, on the earth) behold, chariots of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven (to a different place).’

Matthew 11:25 – ‘At that time Jesus declared, “I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.’ So the Father is Lord of both places.

Mark 13:31 – ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, (that is, the two places as we know them now, but which will be made new when Jesus returns) but my words will not pass away (so, the word will remain constant)’.

Luke 3:21-22 – ‘Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying (that is, they are doing this on the earth in Jesus’ company), the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”’  
This voice came from somewhere else.

John 14:2 gives us an even greater sense of heaven as a place:

'In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.'

There are other examples, in fact most of Revelation is concerned with it, but these suffice to indicate that, if we trust God's word, we should be thinking in terms of actual places here, and not places that are imaginary or not capable of being known. This is of great importance because while we can believe earth exists readily enough, a person may not always be so sure that heaven exists. In which case on what is built our hope? If heaven is an imaginary abstract, then to where did the risen Christ go?

How then can we be confident that there is a place for us in heaven in the great scheme of things once our life is ended here? Does eternal life consist of floating around in some kind of universe with no sense of place at all and a relationship with God built on haphazard, occasional meetings by chance, if at all? What we are told about heaven suggests that is not the case.

Daniel is given this vision in Daniel 7:9-10:

"As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him'.

Not much floating around going on there. The Apostle John remarks from his vision:

'At once I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne stood in heaven, with one seated on the throne. And he who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian, and round the throne was a rainbow that had the appearance of an emerald. Round the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads' (Revelation 4:2-4).

Once again there is nothing fairy-like going on here, this is something that has been established! So, Heaven, what is it like, and where is? We can draw two conclusions from our study. Firstly, heaven is an actual place as the earth is an actual place, but there is an important difference between the two. Earth is a place within limits and with its own physical limitations. We know where it is placed in the universe and we know its own physical bounds and properties. In theory it is possible for us to cover every part of it if we had enough years and enough stamina.

Heaven is the exact opposite, at least to us in the life that we lead now. Heaven is a spiritual place that has none of the physical limitations as we know them in its present form. Even if we could get there as we are, we would never live long enough to see but a fraction of it. So, earth is a place and heaven is a place and each has their own place in creation. The Lord Jesus descended from the one to the other and on his resurrection found his place again at the right hand of his Heavenly Father.

Jesus will not be the only one to find his way to heaven. Though faith in him, we too can enter its gates and if, when, we do get there, we will have an eternal lifetime to explore it.