



**BETHEL AG CHURCH**  
INTERNATIONAL WORSHIP CENTRE

# ASSURANCE of **HEAVEN**

*"TRULY, I SAY TO YOU, TODAY YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE."*

*LUKE 23:43*

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## Second statement from the Cross - AN ASSURANCE OF HEAVEN!

*"And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43 - ESV).*

While on the Cross, the Lord spoke directly to one person first and in a personal way – the thief. This unnamed thief did not start his life in fear of God. In fact, his crimes led him to the Roman crucifixion. He even joined forces with the other thief to critique the Lord when they hung on the cross

**(Matthew 27:43)**. However suddenly, the thief was transformed and he began to have faith in Jesus **(Luke 23:39-43)**. He turned from a reviler to a defender, from a mocker into a man of faith and prayers. In an instant, God's grace broke through in the same time as he repented and feared God. He saw that Jesus was the King who ruled His kingdom from the Cross. The Lord did not disregard this penitent thief. The Lord in turn assured him firmly by saying: *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."* (KJV)

When Lord Jesus uttered those words of assurance to the thief, the Paradise was opened to all humanity since Adam's original sin. **(Revelation 3:7)**

### What is Paradise?

Paradise (Greek: *paradeisos*) is the word Jesus used on the cross to describe HEAVEN. Paradise literally means 'enclosure' or 'garden'. In Judaism, Paradise pointed towards the future - when the Messiah would restore all things to perfection as in the first Garden where Adam and Eve were placed.

*Lord Jesus used the same word when He promised in Revelation 2:7, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God." Paradise is sometimes called as Abraham's Bosom (Story of Rich man and Lazarus Luke 16:19-31)*

Paradise is a place where God's presence dwells with you, just like Lord Jesus promised the thief on the cross - "you will be **with Me** in paradise."

Paradise won't be a paradise (Heaven) if God's presence is not there!

### Is Heaven a literal physical place?

Heaven is an actual place, in an actual location, designed by God for all those who believe in Him. The writers of Scripture present Heaven in many ways as a garden, a city, and a kingdom. Because gardens, cities, and kingdoms are familiar to us, they afford us a bridge to understand the place called Heaven. Sometimes we tend to spiritualize or allegorize all the earthly descriptions of Heaven. We may even fail to take Scripture seriously when it tells us about Heaven as a familiar, physical, and tangible place.

**John 14:2, 3** *"In My Father's house are **many mansions**; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare **a place** for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."*

## Where do people go now when they die...

### ...Saved ones?

People who trust in Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour go immediately to Heaven to be in the presence of the Lord once they die. Though their bodies remain in the grave and decompose, their soul and spirit (the immaterial part and the real person) go immediately into the presence of the Saviour.

**Philippians 1:21-23** "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain...the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;"

**2 Corinthians 5:6-8, John 14:23, Acts 7:55-56**

### ... Unsaved ones?

People who had not or do not trust in Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour immediately go to hell, to a place of torment, once they die. The Bible says that God prepared hell for the devil and his demonic cohorts (**Matthew 25:41**) that He is "... not wishing for any [person] to perish but for all to come to repentance." (**II Peter 3:9**), and that He has done everything possible to save us from that terrible, place. Yet in the end God will not violate or overrule the deliberate choice of those who consciously and wilfully turn away from Him.

**Romans 1:20 - 21**

### ...For those who never heard about Jesus?

The Bible does not tell us specifically about what happens to those who never heard the Gospel or those who are perhaps mentally challenged to receive the Gospel. However, we have a God whose works are perfect and He will do what a rightful Judge would do. **Deuteronomy 32:4**, "He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he."

"Soon you will read in the newspaper that I am dead. Don't believe it for a moment. I will be more alive than ever before."  
- D.L Moody

### I've heard my Catholic friends talk about 'Purgatory'. Is Purgatory another term for Heaven?

There is a belief that a place after death called Purgatory exists, where some of the remaining sins of people are purged through suffering. After a period of time that corresponds to the suffering necessary for the sins committed, the person is set free from Purgatory to enter Heaven. This concept is unbiblical and weakens the finished work of Christ on the Cross for all our sins. Jesus bore all our sins (**1 Peter 2:24**). There are no sins left for Purgatory to cleanse because it was all done by Jesus on the Cross. This is why Jesus said, "It is finished!" (**John 19:30**)

## Is Heaven our default destination after we die?

What would keep us out of Heaven is universal: *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* (Romans 3:23). Sin separates us from our relationship with God (Isaiah 59:2). God is so holy and because we are sinners, we are not entitled to enter God's dwelling presence (i.e. Heaven) as we are. **So Heaven is not our default destination.** No one goes there automatically. Unless our sin problem is resolved, our default destination is ... Hell.

## Can we really know in advance where we're going to when we die?

The apostle John, the one who wrote about the new heavens and New Earth in the book of Revelation, said in one of his letters, *"I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life"* (1 John 5:13). For all those who continue to put their trust in Lord Jesus, we can know for sure that we have eternal life and we will go to Heaven when we die

## What you need to know and do to prepare yourself for Heaven?

- To sin is to fall short of God's holy standards. All of us, like Adam and Eve, are sinners. You are a sinner. That's the first thing you need to know. Sin deceives us and makes us think that wrong is right and right is wrong (Proverbs 14:12).

- Sin has consequences, but God has provided a solution for our sin: *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23; John 3:16; Hebrews 2:17-18; Hebrews 4:15-16). *"Salvation is found in no one else [but Jesus], for there is no other name under Heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

- We must recognize and repent of our sins. Forgiveness is not automatic; forgiveness is only established by our confession. *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."* (1 John 1:9)

- Once forgiven, we cannot live our lives in isolation. We must become part of a spiritual family called the Church, where God's Word is believed and taught. (Word of caution from **Matthew 7:21-23**, *"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of Heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."* Do not merely assume that you are a Christian and are going to Heaven. Make a conscious decision to surrender control of your life to Him and follow Him)

- We are called to bear fruits (results / signs) of our born again experience known as the fruits of the Holy Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-24, John 15: 4, 5)

## Won't Heaven get boring? What will we do? Work, Rest, Play?

A quick answer to that question is our God is not boring, likewise Heaven cannot be boring.

King David wrote *"In Your Presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."* (Psalm 16:11). Our God is infinite in creativity, goodness, beauty, and power.

We will worship Him, serve Him, and work for Him in His Kingdom (Revelation 7:15; 22:3, Luke 19:11-27) There will be celebrations, feastings and great fun (Luke 22:29-30, Isaiah 25:6)

In Revelation and Paul's letters we are told that God's people will actually be running the new Heavens and New Earth on God's behalf. Heaven will be far more exciting than anything we will ever experience on this earth.

## **I've heard people say, "Heaven is in your mind... Heaven is here... Heaven is a state of being... Is that true?"**

In one sense, the concept of Salvation is not about a life after we die, but glimpses of Heaven here on earth through faith, hope, love, forgiveness, etc. in our day-to-day life events. Having said that, Heaven is not just a state of being because Lord Jesus Christ promised his disciples, *"I am going to prepare a place for you."* So as we strive to transform to be heavenly, Christ reigns in our lives to prepare for a real place called Heaven.

## **In Heaven, do we become angels?**

No, humans do not become angels after they die. Angels are Angels and humans are humans. Angels are a different order of creation from humans. The resurrected Jesus did not become someone else; He remained who He was before His resurrection: *"It is I myself!"* (Luke 24:39). People will not lose their personalities as they receive glorified bodies after they die. Jesus called people in Heaven by their distinct names like Lazarus, Abraham, Moses, Elijah etc.

## **What kind of bodies will we have in Heaven?**

Our resurrection bodies will be like Lord Jesus' body when He was resurrected and appeared to many.

It will be a body that is redeemed and restored to its original beauty and purpose that goes back to the Garden of Eden.

We will have bodies that are untouched by the Curse, or disease, or restrictions, but clothed in glorious splendour like our Lord Jesus

(Luke 9:29, Revelation 21:23) and like Moses and Elijah when they appeared on the Mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:31)

*I Corinthians 15:35, 42-44, "But someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have? It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. 43 Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. 44 They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.(Matthew 13:43; Daniel 12:3)*

**Christ reigns in our lives to prepare us for a real place called Heaven.**

## **What if Lord Jesus Christ returns before I die?**

1 Corinthians 15:51 - 52, *"Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."*

## **Do people in Heaven know what's presently happening on earth? Do they pray for those on earth?**

People who are already in Heaven definitely can understand the things that happen here on earth but they have no power to influence the things of the earth. Christ is the only One who intercedes on our behalf.

1 Timothy 2:5, *"For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."*

## **Once in heaven,**

### **Will we recognize our loved ones?**

Yes, we would recognize our loved ones in heaven. The disciples recognized the resurrected Lord. Thomas cries out as he identifies Jesus, *"My Lord and My God."* (John 20:28) The story of Lazarus and the rich man in Luke 16 suggest the same.

### **Will we grieve over loved ones who are not there?**

The thought of loved ones not being in Heaven could cause temporary sorrow, but our joy will be extravagant to the point that we will not experience sorrow or pain. All will be perfected and healed in Christ

Revelation 21:4, *"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."*

### **Will there be marriage, family, and friendship in heaven?**

When we receive a glorified body, it doesn't erase history on earth. Heaven won't be without families. On the contrary, it will be one big family where all family members are friends and all friends are family members. (Mark 10:29-30) Our relationships will be harmonious – what we've longed for.

One group of religious leaders, the Sadducees, tried to trick Jesus with a question about marriage in Heaven. (Refer Matthew 22:23-30)

Christ replied, *"At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven"* (Matthew 22:30)

There will be only one marriage in Heaven - a transcended marriage between Christ and His Bride – the Church. (Ephesians 5:31-32)

### **Will we be capable to sin in Heaven?**

Christ promises on the heaven, *"There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"* (Revelation 21:4). Since *"the wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23) the promise of no more death

is a promise of no more sin.

Scripture emphasizes that Christ died once to deal with sin and will never again need to die (**Hebrews 9:26-28; 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18**). We'll have the very righteousness of God (**2 Corinthians 5:21**). We won't sin in Heaven for the same reason God doesn't: He cannot sin. Our eternal inability to sin has been purchased by Christ's Blood

### **Some people believe that if we have free will in Heaven, we'll sin. Is it true?**

Free will in Heaven is not equal to us being free to sin, as were the first humans, because Adam and Eve's situation was different. They were innocent but had not been made righteous by Christ. (**Romans 5:19**)

The inability to sin doesn't inherently violate free will. Once we become what the sovereign God has made us to be in Christ and once we see Him as He is, then we'll see all things—including sin—for what they are. God won't need to restrain us from it. Sin will have absolutely no appeal. (**2 Peter 1:4**)

### **What did Lord Jesus say about Hell?**

In the Bible, Lord Jesus says more than anyone else about Hell (**Matthew 10:28; 13:40-42; Mark 9:43-44**). He refers to it as a literal place and describes it in graphic terms – that includes raging fires and the worm that doesn't die. Christ says the unsaved *"will be thrown outside into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (**Matthew 8:12**). In His story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus taught that in Hell, the wicked suffer terribly, are fully conscious, retain their desires and memories and reasoning, long for relief, cannot be comforted, cannot leave their torment, and are bereft of hope (**Luke 16:19-31**) Read also **Matthew 10:28, 2 Thessalonians 1:9**

### **How long will Hell last?**

Hell is eternal. Jesus said of the unrighteous in **Matthew 25:46**, *"they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."* Here in the same sentence, Christ uses the same word translated "eternal" (aionos) to describe the duration of both Heaven and Hell. Thus, if Heaven must be experienced forever, Hell will also be experienced forever.

### **Can a good God send good people to Hell?**

No one is saved by being a good person or by doing good works. Also, God never sent anyone to Hell just like He never forces anyone to Heaven. Everyone has a choice to make in this life. They can either choose eternal life or eternal punishment. The good news is that God desires that no one perish and suffer eternal torment (**2 Peter 3:9**) and He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (**Ezekiel 18:32**). People send their own selves to Hell when they choose not to believe in Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. (**Acts 4:12**)

**"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." - C.S. Lewis**

## **Must I share this news of Heaven and Hell to my friends?**

Yes, most definitely, in a loving way. The most basic truth is that there are only two possible destinations after death: Heaven and Hell. Each is as 'real' and 'eternal' as the other. Until we surrender our lives to Jesus Christ, we're headed for Hell. The most loving thing we can do for our friends and our family is to warn them about the road that leads to destruction and tell them about the road that leads to life. All roads do not lead to Heaven. Only one does i.e., Lord Jesus Christ. He said, *"No one comes to the Father except through me."* (John 14:6)

## **How can Heaven affect my life now, on earth?**

We must understand that our life here on earth is short.  
Not only is life short, death comes unexpectedly.  
We must prepare ourselves for Heaven to meet our Master.  
So setting our minds on Heaven is a discipline that we need to learn.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I remind myself daily that this world is not my home?
- Do I realize daily there are only two destinations – Heaven or Hell – and that I, and every person I know, will go to one or the other?
- Do I realize daily that God examines my life?
- Do I make my choices in the light of God's Word and His promises?  
(2 Peter 3:11-14)

*Colossians 3:1-2, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."*

**WE ARE ALL MADE FOR A PERSON AND A PLACE.  
LORD JESUS IS THE PERSON AND HEAVEN IS THE PLACE**

### **Book References**

Heaven, How I Got Here - By Colin S. Smith  
Heaven - By Randy Alcorn  
Cries from the Cross - By Erwin W Lutzer  
I'll Hold you in Heaven - By Jack Hayford  
Surprised by Hope - By N.T Wright

**If you have any further questions, please email us at [info@bethelag.in](mailto:info@bethelag.in) or walk into the church office for any counselling regarding this issue.**