

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark, and I was one of the FLO coaches at our soccer camp; the other 51 weeks a year, I'm a pastor at North Shore Alliance Church. I love the game of soccer, and I love coaching students who have a passion for the game; it's been a real privilege to spend the week talking with students about soccer, about life, and about God.

As I teach this morning, I am going to launch our Summer Series entitled, "*You Asked For It*". A few months ago some of you submitted questions that you were interested in getting answers to, and each week we are going to address a question that people ask about life, faith, and God.

Each week one of our pastors will teach for 20 minutes followed by 10 minutes of interactive Q&A. Because of the unique format of today's service, we only have time for a 10-15 monologue, and so I'm going to kick off our Summer Series by attempting to answer a question that many people ask—*what is heaven like and how do we get there?*

Let me begin with the most basic part of the question: **what is heaven?** You are well aware, I'm sure, that there are a lot of different opinions about what happens the moment after we die. There are some who believe that this life is all there is—after we die, nothingness. Others believe that after death, they will come back again and again in a reincarnated cycle. Still others believe that after death their spirit becomes one with the Universe.

The Christian hope is very different. The Bible teaches that after death there is a life to come, a life with God, that lasts forever and is

beyond compare. This is what the Bible refers to as heaven. Let's turn to the next part of the question...

**What is heaven like?** This is more difficult to answer, not because the Bible is unclear, but because many of have been influenced by misconceptions and stereotypes. Let me name a few popular misconceptions about heaven.

- upon arrival, people who get to heaven become like angels, they're given a set of wings, they float about on white, fluffy, clouds, and they play harps.
- here's another one...heaven will be like one long worship service...our voices will never give out, our legs will never get tired, and we will stand and sing, forever, and ever, and ever.
- here's another common misconception—heaven is the place where you will have an eternity to focus on all the things you enjoyed most on earth. Are you a golfer? Great! You will love heaven! There is an endless supply of beautifully manicured golf courses, there's no need to book a tee time, and you will have the supernatural ability to hit every shot you couldn't while on earth. Are you a foodie? Great! You will love heaven! There is an endless supply of 7 star restaurants (it is heaven after all), the best chefs, no wait times, and to top it all off, there are no calories in heaven—you can eat as much as you like for the rest of eternity and never gain a pound.

If each of these are misconceptions, then what is heaven really like?

I'm going to briefly describe two images found in the Scriptures that, taken together, give us a picture of what heaven will be like; the first

image is taken from the beginning of the Bible, and the second is taken from the very end.

In Genesis 1, we are told that God created the world, and the crowning glory of creation took place when He made men and women in His own image. Humanity was made to enjoy God, one another, and the world; they were to care for and cultivate the earth on God's behalf.

Genesis 2 tells us that God had planted a garden—He called it Eden. In this garden, there were all kinds of trees growing out of the ground; trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. This garden was given to Adam and Eve as their first home; they were invited to work in the garden and care for it.

We notice immediately that the Garden was a practical place; there were trees that produced food that can be eaten. But more than simply being functional, we are told that the Garden was also beautiful, with trees that were pleasing to the eye. God is our Sustainer but He is also the Author of beauty. In many respects, this is what heaven will be like...God will sustain us, providing for all of our needs, and, everything that we see, hear, and feel will be beautiful.

Later in Genesis 2 the Bible describes the relationship between Adam and Eve. What we see is a man and a woman who made for one another—they lived in perfect harmony. They had nothing to hide, nothing to argue about, no cause to hurt or manipulate one another—they experienced authentic, trusting, peaceful, relationship. In many respects, this is what heaven will be like.

Genesis 3 describes God, calling out for Adam and Eve—He wanted to join them in a stroll through this Garden paradise. It's a picture of friendship and companionship; this is the relationship with God that He intended for us. In many respects, this is what heaven will be like.

But this isn't the world that we experience. When we watch the evening news we hear stories about broken bodies, broken relationships, and even broken countries—people and places are being ravaged by hatred, war, disease, famine, and economics. Our experience of pain, injustice, and death awakens us to a longing for wholeness; there is something deep within us that says, "*this isn't the way it's supposed to be!*" You're right of course...you and I were made for something more, something much better.

If Genesis 1-3 tells us about the ways things were when God first created, then Revelation 21 describes the way things will be when God comes to restore the world. Let me move on to our second image; listen to what the apostle John saw and wrote down,

*"2I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"*

One author writes, "Heaven and earth, it seems...[do not need] to be separated forever...they are different, radically different, but they are

made for each other in the same way...as male and female. And when they finally come together, that will be cause for rejoicing in the same way that a wedding is".<sup>1</sup> The Bible tells us that one day heaven and earth will be reunited—God and humanity will be reunited—the author of Revelation suggests that we're not going to heaven, heaven is coming here.<sup>2</sup>

One day death, mourning, crying, and pain will be gone forever; God will make everything new. This is what heaven will be like—this is the Christian hope—this is my hope. In the time remaining, let me address the final portion of our question:

### How does one get to heaven?

**illus:** Perhaps you've heard the story of the man who died and went to heaven. Of course, St. Peter was there to meet him at the pearly gates. And St. Peter said to the man, "*Here's how it works. You need 100 points to make it into heaven. You tell me all the good things you've done, and I'll give you a certain number of points for each item, depending on how good it was. When you reach 100 points, you get in.*"

"Okay," said the man, "*that sounds fair. For starters, I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated on her, not even in my heart.*"

"That's wonderful," St. Peter said, "*that's worth three points!*"

"*Only three points?*" the man thought, I expected a few more points for that one. He continued, "*Well, I also attended church all my life, I supported its activities with my time, my talents, and my money.*"

"*Way to go!*" St. Peter said, "*that's certainly worth a point.*"

"*Only one point?*" the man couldn't believe it; he was starting to get a little worried. He continued, "*How about this: I started a soup kitchen in my city and worked in a shelter that housed people who were caught in the poverty cycle.*"

"Fantastic," St. Peter said, "*that's good for two more points.*"

"*Only TWO POINTS!!*" the man cried, "*At this rate the only way I'll ever get into heaven is by the grace of God!*"

"*Now you've got it,*" St. Peter responded, "*Come on in!*"

Life as we know it is almost entirely based upon our performance. On the soccer pitch, in school, and in the business world—how you perform determines whether you succeed. One of the common misconceptions concerning heaven is that people get in based on how good they are. The question is, what is the standard goodness by which we will be judged? How do we know if we've been good enough? Jesus once said that there is only One who is Good—God Himself; He is holy, perfect, and pure. By comparison to His

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<sup>1</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Hope*, 104-105.

<sup>2</sup> Rikk E. Watts, *The New Exodus/New Creational Restoration of the Image of God*, 36.

## What is heaven and how can I get there?

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standard, we are like an oil-stained rag; there's no way any of us are getting in based on our own performance.

And this is why Jesus came. In John 14:6 Jesus said, *“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* We cannot work our way to God, and, so, Jesus made a way. Jesus once said, *“Blessed are those who know they are spiritually bankrupt—those who have given up trying to work their way to God—for they, and only they, will inherit the kingdom of heaven.”*

God in His mercy, has created a system in which we get what we haven't earned, where Jesus' performance is what matters. We are separated from God and unable to earn anything—it is by grace we are saved.

If it's by God's grace that we are saved, then faith is the means by which we receive this grace. By faith we put our trust in God mercy. We trust that God loves us, that He is for us, that His forgiveness is greater than all of our sin.

If you want heaven to be your final destination, then respond to God's offer of life. When Jesus died on the cross, He carried your pain, your disappointments, and your sin. He died and was raised to life so that you might be raised with Him. Will you turn to Him today?

**Pray**