

It Is Written

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HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST

By Terry Wane Benton

I pointed out that Christians are presently “in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3,7), and one preacher, in disbelief, asked, “What is it like in heaven?” He thought he had me stumped for claiming we are presently in “the heavenly places.” His question reveals a disturbing misunderstanding. It is disturbing because he leads other people into the ditch if he does not know that all Christians are in Christ, which is a heavenly place. If you are not in this heavenly place in Christ, you are not in Christ at all, and if you are not in Christ, you have no spiritual blessings such as redemption through His blood and forgiveness of sins. That is disturbing!

So, how can we be in “the heavenly places in Christ” without being in heaven itself, where Jesus is seated at the right hand of God? The expression “heavenly places” in Christ concerns a spiritual zone relating to being united with Christ. It is “heavenly” instead of “earthly” in origin. Since Jesus came to us from heaven, He is described as “the heavenly gift” (Hebrews 6:4). We have “tasted the heavenly gift.” That means Jesus is a gift that comes to us from heaven as God’s gift to us. If we can have the heavenly gift without being personally located in heaven itself, then there must be a way to enjoy heavenly things without first being in heaven itself.

In like manner, if we can wrestle against “the rulers of the darkness of this age...in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12) then this struggle does not have to be going on in heaven itself. Thus, “heavenly places” can be a zone where we are doing battle with evil forces. When Paul says, “heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3), he speaks of a spiritual zone of safety in Christ where our hearts or spirits may find refuge. So, we are all in “heavenly places” where we are battling with forces of evil, but we are not all “in the heavenly places in Christ.” “Heavenly” simply references the invisible spirit realm, and “heavenly places in Christ” references the spiritual safety zone where we have great spiritual blessings to aid us in the spiritual conflicts we face daily.

To believe that we are not in “heavenly places” is to believe that the rulers of the darkness are right there where Jesus is seated in heaven. That idea also implies that we are not really wrestling against the dark forces since we are not personally in heaven. That is not what the Spirit tells us in Ephesians 6:12. We are really and presently “wrestling against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” In that case, we certainly could not take up the armor of God and fight. We would have to wait till we get to heaven. So, it is beyond reasonable dispute that we are all in the heavenly places. And some of us have come into Christ and were baptized into Christ (Galatians 3:26-27), who is in this heavenly (spiritual) zone. Those who are presently in the heavenly places in Christ will one day get to go home to heaven, which is where Jesus and His throne are located. That place is heaven itself, while we await and do battle with forces of evil and darkness in “the heavenly places.” A place can be “heavenly” without being heaven itself. There is no darkness at all in the very presence of God in heaven, but there is darkness in “the heavenly places” because that is just a spiritual zone that is not fully visible and earthly. The heavenly places in Christ is a spiritual zone we enter now when we are baptized into union with Jesus (Romans 6:3-6; Galatians 3:26-27). In this region we are given great tools and resources for victory. In this region, we have “redemption through His blood, forgiveness of sins” (Ephesians 1:3,7) and many other riches that provide us with the means of victory.

Have you entered the heavenly places in Christ like the early disciples? If not, you remain under the power of the forces of darkness. Can we help you come into the heavenly places in Christ for safety?

Worship Weariness

By Dennis Abernathy

Malachi said Israel was weary, bored, and tired of worship. (Malachi 1: 13). It was too demanding and had become a grievous chore rather than an exalted privilege, a burden instead of a blessing.

Fast forward to today. Many want shorter sermons, with less Scripture and more wit, less identification and exposure of sin, and smooth speech with less doctrinal content. People don't want to be reminded of their sins. Calls for modesty, faithfulness, and godly living are held in disdain. Social drinking is justified, sexual immorality is becoming the norm, and gambling is becoming an epidemic. Entertainment has become our religion, and religion our entertainment! Many avoid Bible classes and worship services to do other things they desire. Instead of "seeking first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6: 33), such is way down the priority list.

The prophet Isaiah echoed the same theme in Isaiah 43. In Isaiah 43:22, God said: "But you have not called upon Me...and you have been weary of Me, O Israel." Sadly, many of God's people today have become weary of God's ways and of the exertion and effort necessary to serve Him. But, the sad thing about "worship weariness" is that it wearies God. In Isaiah 43:24, God said: "But you have burdened Me with your sins, you have wearied Me with your iniquities."

The Psalmist said: "I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord" (Psalms 122: 1). How much better off we would be today if our attitude toward worship and service to God was the attitude expressed in this psalm. Worship should not be a weariness or burden but a joy and an attitude of gladness for the opportunity to worship our God, the Creator of the world.

Josiah And The Book

By Zeke Flores

During Josiah's temple repairs, an astounding find was the impetus of a new force in a revival already underway. The Book of God's law had been found ... by a priest no less! But how long had the Book of the Law been lost? Since Josiah's great-grandfather Hezekiah led a similar revival, which was pleasing to God, plus having the guidance of the inspired prophet Isaiah, it seems the Book was used in Hezekiah's time. His wicked son Manasseh, who assumed the throne, probably simply ignored it, probably shelving it while he ravaged the nation with paganism and idolatry.

Hilkiah, the priest who finds the Book, and Shaphan, the scribe who read it before giving it to King Josiah, knew they had found something profoundly significant. Once Josiah heard what was in the Book, he knew he needed to heed its authority and bring the nation to obey it. He read it, obeyed it, shared it, and stood for it. All this for a Book while they already had the temple of God and all its furnishings in their midst. Josiah knew that without the Book, the temple and furnishings were incomplete.

Now, here's my point. There are many houses of worship across the land, indeed across the world, accompanied by accouterments intended to honor God. But where's the Book? Without the authority of the "Book of the Law," specifically the New Covenant, all the trappings of "worship" are vain, meaningless, and unacceptable.

We need to take the Book off the shelf, blow the dust off it, and make sure that we do everything written in it just as they're written. Or, like God's ancient disobedient people, we'll face His judgment.

"When the king heard the words of the law, he tore his clothes ... 'for great is the wrath of Yahweh which is poured out on us because our fathers have not observed the word of Yahweh, to do according to all that is written in this book.' Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant before Yahweh to walk after Yahweh, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant written in this book" (II Chronicles 34:19,31-32).