TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Don Taylor /Opening Prayer by: Bobby Rader

Morning Assembly Song Leader: Danny Balch

#611 Heavenly Sunlight
#549 There Is Sunshine in My Soul

Scripture Reading by: Parker Balch
#350 When My Love to Christ Grows Weak
#701 My Jesus I Love Thee
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#679 Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus
Sermon: "Phillip and the Eunuch "
Acts 8:26-40

#904 Have You Been to Jesus?
#851 I'll Fly Away

Closing Prayer by: Craig Girard

Tonight is our
2nd Sunday Evening
Service Project

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship, 5:00pm — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

May 8, 2022

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

Paradise of God: What the Bible Says About Heaven 2

This is the second in a series of articles recently published by Wes McAdams on his blog "Radically Christian." If you have not read the first one, check it out in last week's bulletin. BP

The Paradise of God and the Garden of Eden
The English word, "paradise" comes from the Greek, "paradeisos." Besides "paradise," another way to translate this word is, "garden." In the Greek version of Genesis, we read, *The Lord God planted a [paradeisos] in Eden* (**Gen 2:8**). The Garden of Eden, therefore, is the first "paradise" in the Bible.

With that in mind, it should not be surprising to hear Jesus say, in **Rev 2:7**, *To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God*. The tree of life signals that this is the same paradise /garden that was originally in Eden. It is the same paradise from which Adam and Eve were exiled (**Gen 3:23-24**).

The final chapter of Revelation does not use the word "paradise," but the tree of life is there (**Rev 22:1-3**). Which makes it clear that the same paradise is being described. In other words, the garden that was in Eden is now in the city that comes down from heaven.

Therefore, the biblical narrative begins with humanity's exile from paradise and ends with humanity's return to paradise. This narrative of exile and return is what the Bible is all about. It plays out multiple times with Israel. And Jesus returning all of God's redeemed people to the garden of Eden, the paradise of God, is the ultimate return from exile.

The Paradise of God is Currently in Heaven
The apostle Paul used the term "paradise" to describe a man who *was caught up into paradise* (**2 Cor 12:3**). But Paul also refers to this place as, *the third heaven* (**2 Cor 12:2**). This harmonizes well with Revelation's description that the paradise of God is in the heavenly city.

As we discussed in the first part of this study, the heavens encompass everything above the earth. The heavens are where God rules and reigns within his heavenly city. This city will one day descend to be received by God's people. And at the heart of this city is the garden paradise from which humanity was exiled.

Our thesis for this series is: Heaven holds all we hope to become and receive but is not our final destination. And "paradise" is one of the things we hope to receive that is currently held in heaven. When Jesus comes, and the vision of **Rev 21-22** is fulfilled, we will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God.

Jesus Promised the Paradise of God to the Criminal
The only other time paradise is specifically mentioned in the New Testament is in **Luke 23**. Jesus was crucified between two criminals. One of the criminals said, *Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom* (**v. 42**). And Jesus replied, *Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise* (**v. 43**).

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Joe Edd Stifflemire is taking chemo treatments.

Linda Frank will be having test run in the future.

Susan McCain is at home after being in the hospital last week.

Ken Coleman is at home after being in the hospital last week.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Harold & Geri Cryer, Steve Ward, Frank & Tina Garcia, Oscar Cantu, Caitlin Smith, Gary Nielsen, Virginia Cole, Ka'Leisha Jones

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, Myrtle Sheffield, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific

Upcoming Activities

Elders, Minister meeting Monday, May 9th at 5:30 p.m.

Primetimers will be going to Saltgrass Steak House on Tuesday, May 10th at 6:00 p.m. A sign up sheet is on the bulletin board. A driver is needed.

We will have a meal on Wednesday, May 18th at 5:30 p.m. in the family life center.

We will have a Houston Food Bank truck on Thursday, May 20th at 8:00 a.m.

The corrected directory has been placed on the bulletin board. Please double check it to make sure your information is correct.

Elders	Deacons	Minister
Ken Coleman	Daniel Balch	Bryant Perkins
Bobby Rader	Danny Balch	
Don Taylor		
Robert Ward		

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

is the weekly bulletin of the Liberty Church of Christ 3201 North Main, Liberty Texas 77575
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Luke 23:43 is a difficult passage. Every other passage about the paradise of God indicates it is currently in the heavens. But when a person dies, Scripture elsewhere teaches they go to "Hades" or "Sheol," the realm of the dead. In biblical cosmology, the heavens are above the earth and the realm of the dead is below the earth (**Gen 37:35; Is 38:18**). Even Jesus went down to Hades at his death (**Acts 2:24-28**), rather than up to the paradise of God in the heavenly Jerusalem. So, why would Jesus say, "Today you will be with me in paradise"?

Possible Understandings of Luke 23:43

Some have tried to solve the dilemma of **Luke 23:43** by suggesting that the realm of the dead (Hades) is divided into two parts: paradise and torment. The story of the rich man and Lazarus is used to support this idea (**Luke 16:22-23**). However, the Lazarus story does not mention paradise. Lazarus is said to go to *Abraham's bosom*. This is likely a reference to being *gathered to [his] fathers* (**Jdgs 2:10**) in the realm of the dead, rather than ascending to the heavenly paradise.

Another speculation is that through his death, resurrection, and ascension, Jesus rescued the spirits of God's people from Hades and delivered them to paradise. Some think this is why Paul can say about death, *My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better* (**Phil 1:23**). It is possible, therefore, that when Christians die, our disembodied spirits now go up to the paradise of God in the heavenly city, rather than down to the realm of the dead.

Finally, some argue that "today" refers to when Jesus made the statement, rather than when the promise would actually come to pass. It all depends, of course, on where we place the comma in **Luke 23:43**. As we have already discussed, Jesus did not ascend to paradise on the day he was crucified. He would not ascend to the heavenly city for several weeks. So, it might be possible to read the statement as, "I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise," rather than, "I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." That said, no reputable translation reflects this reading.

When Will We Go to the Paradise of God?

When I die, it is possible that I will be "gathered to my fathers" below, in the realm of the dead. It is also possible that my disembodied spirit will ascend to the paradise of God in the heavenly city, where Jesus reigns. I believe either of these ideas can be reconciled with Scripture. However, neither of these is my ultimate hope!

The Bible is vague on the question, "Where do we go when we die?" This ambiguity is due to the fact that Christian hope is not about where we go when we die. Jesus and the apostles were far more concerned about the resurrection of the dead than about the temporary resting place of disembodied spirits.

I am confident that wherever my disembodied spirit rests, my existence will be safely protected by the Lord. What I am far more focused on is the resurrection, transformation, and redemption of my mortal body when Jesus comes (**1 Cor 15:35-58**). On that day, we will *put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies* (**2 Cor 5:2-3, NLT).** We will only be disembodied spirits for a short time, between our death and the resurrection. But on the last day, we will be raised to live forever.

Only then, will the paradise city of God come and the Bible's grand narrative be complete. The meek will inherit the earth. The offspring of the second Adam will return to the paradise we lost. We will eat of the tree of life and dwell forever in the presence of God.