

CHECK TIME

Talk

Golden Ticket to Heaven

[PPT]

- Tito and Amanda Watts were arrested over the weekend for selling “golden tickets to heaven”. The couple, who sold the tickets on the street for \$99 a ticket, told buyers the tickets were made from solid gold and each ticket reserved the buyer a spot in heaven — simply present the ticket at the pearly gates and you’re in.
- “People can sell tickets to heaven,” a Jacksonville police spokesman said. “But the Watts misrepresented their product. The tickets were just wood spray-painted gold with ‘Ticket To Heaven – Admit One’ written in marker. You can’t sell something as gold when it’s not. That’s where the Watts crossed the line into doing something illegal.”
- Tito Watts said in his police statement:
- *I don’t care what the police say. The tickets are solid gold. It was Jesus who give (sic) them to me behind the KFC and said to sell them so I could get me some money to go to outer space. I met an alien named Stevie who said if I got the cash together he’d take me and my wife on his flying saucer to his planet that’s made entirely of crack cocaine. You can smoke all the crack cocaine there you want... totally free. So, try to send an innocent man to jail and see what happens. You should arrest Jesus because he’s the one that gave me the golden tickets and said to sell them. I’m willing to wear a wire and set Jesus up...*
- Amanda Watts said in her police statement:
- *We just wanted to leave earth and go to space and smoke rock cocaine. I didn’t do nothing. Tito sold the golden tickets to heaven. I just watched.*
- Police said they confiscated over \$10,000 in cash, five crack pipes and a baby alligator.

Source: - <http://wcsx.com/2018/06/15/free-spot-heaven-ticket/> - June 15, 2018 – yet I found the same story quoted <http://stupid.com/arrested-selling-golden-tickets-heaven/> - Mar 31, 2015 at 8:03 pm

Prayer

Let’s pray.

Dear Lord and Father,

You dwell eternally, you love endlessly, you judge justly, you provide completely.

And you speak. Help us as we come to your word to look at your wonderful heaven and help us to grasp your truths.

In and through Jesus. AMEN.

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- We turn now from ‘Hell’ to the more popular ‘Heaven’.
- A few years ago on TV there seems to be a run of those talk- to-your-dead-loves-ones type of shows.
- I can only remember the name of one it was called *Crossing Over with Jonathon Edwards*. It got my attention because Jonathon Edwards is also the name of an enlightenment theologian from the 1700’s.
- This TV Show ‘Crossing Over’ was nothing of the kind.
- It boasted that Jonathon Edwards could tell you your future by speaking to your dead relatives who would in turn tell you what you needed to know.
- I always found that a bit amusing and sad – you know, if the relative was dead, then I sort of assumed that it had not worked out that well for them. So why ask their advice?! I mean if you want to find out about the living - why talk to the dead?!
- What it does tell us is that our world – even our secular world, quite likes the idea that there is something there after death.
- But there is a paradox in this – many people say they believe in heaven, but their interest is superficial. It has no practical impact on the way they live their lives, generally they ignore the future, and they live for the here and now.
- And even for Christians – we have a hope in heaven, but the idea is often just parked and little attention given to it.

Neglected?

So why is the doctrine of heaven neglected?

Five quick reasons.

To preoccupied with the present

- First – we are too preoccupied with the present. This does not need much explanation. The short-term easily overtakes the long term. The *now* gets the attention at the expense of the *then*.

To comfortable

- The second reason is related – it is that we are too comfortable
- We are rich – in fact we have never been richer, had more comforts, or been more materially supported at any time in history.
- We are generally happy, our concerns are there but compared to the concerns of even the generation before each of us - we should be ecstatic.

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- We are healthy, and at least in the first world, we have a health care system that means we live longer, and better, and when sick, we are cared for more painlessly than ever before.
- And we live in the era of instant *gratification* fuelled by the desire for instant *experiences*, made possible through instant *technologies* (that all seems to start to the letter 'I') and provide us with instant and constant *entertainment*.
- No wonder heaven is neglected – we think we are already there!

Inevitable

- Third – as a society we falsely assume that heaven, if that is the next stage of existence, is a *fait-a-comple*. That everyone goes there and that even if everyone else doesn't go there, I will.
- I see this at just about every non-believers funeral I go to.
- Here is what generally happens. It is sad especially for those who know the person best. But by the end of the service they are comforted because we have been told that the deceased person is a saint – in fact the eulogy was so amazing that it would be an honour for heaven to have the person there. You have to hope Jesus is not blinded by their brilliance when they walk through the pearly gates!
- We are told that the person 'always called a spade a spade' (for some reason that is important).
- That they were 'looking down from heaven'
- And that they always 'did it my way' – and sometimes they also have Frank Sinatra singing about it. Which I always find extra amusing because 'doing it their way' does not seem to have worked out that well!

- The point – for many, heaven is inevitable and of no concern because they assume they will be going there.

Unappealing

- The fourth reason heaven is neglected is that for some it just doesn't appeal.
- It is a boring place, located on a long white cloud, runs like an eternal church service, with angels playing harps for way too long. And I have to say, that if that is the picture – I am with them.
- That certainly doesn't appeal.

Too awesome

- And the last reason that we neglect heaven is this. For many it is a reality that is just too awesome for our limited minds to grasp.
- And you know – we know that is the case!

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- The Bible gives us every reason to expect a magnificent, transcendent, glorious heaven that is simply beyond our comprehension.

PAUSE

Okay – so what does the Bible say about heaven?

What does the Bible Say about Heaven?

1. For God’s Glory

- Heaven exists for God’s Glory.
- Go right to the first verse of the Bible – pretty sure in most versions of the Bible you will find that on page 1!

Genesis 1

- Genesis 1: Verse 1 – ‘In the beginning God created the *heavens* and the earth’.
- Have you ever asked yourself why he chose to do that?
- He didn’t need to – in the Godhead he was not even alone! Was he bored?
- What he did was create a place or places that could communicate himself
- God brought out of himself – a physical reality that might be experienced.
- Every land mass, every star, every mountain and every river, every reef and every tree, every animal and every bird – it all displayed his glory.
- But best of all he then created man and woman – in his own image to enjoy the glories of this wonderful place.

Heavens

- What do the ‘heavens’ here mean?
- There are three different yet still connected ideas which our Bible translates as ‘heavens’ and context helps us to determine which it is every time we come across the word.

1. atmosphere

- First there is the idea of *atmosphere*.
- Isaiah 55:10 talks of rain and snow coming down from ‘heaven’.
- Daniel 4:15 mentions dew from ‘heaven’ falling on the earth.
- Jeremiah 4:25 says that all the birds of the sky (‘heavens’) flew away.
- The idea of heaven here is clearly meaning the sky – the atmosphere.

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2. space

- The second idea is that of *space*.
- If you still have Genesis 1 open, look at verse 14 ‘God said let there be lights in the *expanse* of the sky’. This is much broader than just the ‘sky’ it obviously includes the stars and the planets and moons.

Point us to God

- Now those two really are not our primary concern – but before we jump straight past them it is worth noting that both (in some way) point us to the *glory* of the one who creates.
- Psalm 19:1 famously sings ‘*The heavens declare the glory of God the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*’

Our reality check

- Those ideas also help us in that they give us a reality check.
- When God determined and numbered the stars in the heavens and called each by name as he did in Psalm 147:4 and as he measures the waters in the palm of his hand and marks out the heavens with the spans of his hand as he did in Isaiah 40:12 - we should pause and think.
- On the way to Australia my parents took me on the QE II – at the time the largest ocean liner in the world. We sailed (if that is what big ships do!) up toward the North Pole.
- I remember one night my father getting me at mid night at taking me up onto the top deck – we were in the middle of the ocean – every direction I looked it was black sea – not a light on the horizon. And when you looked up – my goodness – I have never in my life seen so many stars shining so brightly.
- And you know that you are so very very small.
- But more important than that – is that you know that God is very very very big God.

PAUSE

3. ‘heaven’

- The third idea – is where our interest today really lies. Heaven itself.

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- 2 Chronicles 2:6 - calls it the 'highest heavens'
- Hebrews 9:24 - tells us that Christ entered 'heaven itself'.
- The apostle Paul talks of the 'third heaven' in 2 Corinthians 12:2 – perhaps he is thinking that the 'atmosphere' and 'space' are the first two heavens.

Where?

- Where is this place? Can we get an address? Up Mount Zion, over the clouds, take the right after the fourth planet and you should find it at the end of the solar system!
- Unfortunately, the Bible doesn't say.

The dwelling place of God

- What it does say is that heaven is the dwelling place of God.
- Isaiah 63:15 calls on God to look down from heaven, from his lofty throne.
- Psalm 23:6 calls us to dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
- In Matthew 6:9, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray by saying 'Our Father *in heaven*'
- Heaven is the dwelling place of God – wherever that might be.

Restricted to a place?

- King Solomon known for his wisdom (to a point) makes the observation (in 1 Kings 8:27) that a temple built with human hands could not contain God based on the fact that the earth itself, the heavens, even the highest heaven, could not contain God. How could God be restricted to a limited place on or near a planet as small as ours?

God's home

- So, perhaps a better way to think about heaven is as 'God's home'.
- I quite like visiting people's places – I always feel as if I know them better when I'm allowed to cross over the threshold of their front step.
- A person's home is often a statement of who the person really is.
- Maybe that is a helpful picture of heaven - to think of it as God's home.
- Not because we find out whether he stacks the dishwasher or not!
- But because it is where we see his holiness and justice most clearly revealed.
- Where we see the fullness of his being.
- Where we see his magnificence expressed.
- Where we see his splendour and beauty and glory perfectly understood.

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- Asaph in Psalm 73:24 calls on God to guide him and then take him *into his glory*

PAUSE

What does the Bible say about heaven? – it exists for God’s Glory.

2. When God’s Glory departed

- Now let’s go back to Genesis 1. If God has created *the heavens* and the earth to demonstrate his glory.
- And the clearest demonstration of that glory is in man and woman created in his image.
- Then what on earth was the man and woman doing listening to a snake?!
- When we read **Genesis 3** (which you did in your discussion groups) – it is pretty obvious that something has gone horribly wrong!
- The man and woman decide to ignore God and do other than what he asks – in doing that they *diminish his glory*. Tragedy.
- It makes sense that the man and woman are banished from the garden of all provision – they are sent out of what was effectively heaven.
- In just a few short chapters we see their sons squabble, then one murders the other (which took sibling rivalry to very unfortunate place!) and then a hop, skip and a jump away we find in **Genesis 6** that man’s wickedness had multiplied across the earth and that every inclination of the thoughts of man’s heart was evil all of the time – the earth was corrupt and full of violence. (*Gen 6:5,11*)
- This is our experience of the world.
- Creation is subject to frustration by its own choice and it is in bondage and it is decaying (Rom 8:20-21).
- For all have sinned and fall short of.... can you remember what comes next?
 - For all have sinned and fall short *of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)*
- This is our experience of the world – and Satan loves it!

3. God’s Glory restored

- So here is the thing. We have stuffed the earth – and we will continue to do that.
- But heaven is where God’s glory has been preserved and where it is protected.
- That is the reason why you and I can not just rock on up, knock on the door and invite ourselves in with meatloaf in hand!

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- As sinners, fallen, and evil to the core – we are banished from heaven in the same way that Adam and Eve were banished from the garden and a flaming sword put across the entrance.

4. Glory returns

- Now if heaven is where God's glory is preserved, then it is also *from* where God's glory returns.
- The whole story of the Bible is the story of *heaven returning*.
- It is the story of God's *glory* being restored in a richer, more wonderful way than what we could see even in the garden of Eden.

- Can I show how we have seen that glory return?
- It has happened in Christ and will continue until we see Christ again.

In Christ

- When God send his son Jesus – the *heavenly hosts* erupt – remember that from the Christmas story in **Luke 2:14**.
- When Jesus became flesh and made his dwelling among us – we saw the *glory of the one and only God (John 1:14)*
- As Jesus lives the perfect life – he points people to *the glory of God*.
- As Jesus approached the cross he summed up his life and his work by praying to God in John 17 '*Father, I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do*' (**John 17:4**)
- In his resurrection Jesus *returns to glory*, and promises believers that they too will receive and enter glory – as they sit with him in the heavenly realms (**Eph 2:6**).
- And then he calls all believers, while they wait for that day - to reflect the Lord's glory, being transformed in Christlikeness, with ever increasing glory, by the power of the Spirit. (**2 Cor 3:18**)

At the end of the age

- And friends, that day is coming.
- Revelation 21 shows us the day when Jesus returns – again from glory.
- We start with Eden – a garden which displays the glory of God, and we finish with a city where the glory of God is the only thing people will see.
- Look with me at Revelation 21 [*READ Rev 21:1-4 - emotively*]
- We start with Eden – a garden which displays the *glory of God*, and we finish with a city where the *glory of God* is the only thing people will see.
- And it is good.

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LONG PAUSE

How do we get to Heaven?

- Okay, we get heaven sounds like a glorious place.
- How do we get there?

1. It is Christ who brings us to heaven

- First, it is Christ who brings us to heaven.
- Utterly sinful man, cannot cross the divide to be with the thoroughly pure God.

- Turn with me to Exodus 33.
- Here Moses is talking with God about what it means to be in God's presence.
- Let's pick it up from verse 18 when Moses asks God to show him his glory. [READ Ex 33:18-23]

- If Moses could not stand in the brilliance of God, we cannot even put a pinky in heaven due to the perfection and glory of God.
- The glory of God is too powerful to be seen by anyone – ever since we were expelled from the garden.
- And so, we are totally dependent on Christ to bring us into God's glory.
- Now he does that in two particular ways:
 - by redeeming us
 - and by interceding for usLet me quickly look at each.

By redeeming us

- He redeems us, and he does that by suffering at the cross.
- 1 Peter 3:18 – *'For Christ suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.'*
- Christ, the one without sin - suffered in the place of those with sin – and in doing so he paid what he didn't owe, for those who could not pay.
- He redeemed us – such that we take the benefit of his righteousness.

- Let me try and illustrate that.
- Imagine you arrive at the pearly gates – they are shut and locked – you knock and present yourselves.
- And the agent for God says 'how is it that you deserve to be here'
- And your answer – I don't, but I have this invitation to redeem.

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- And you hand up the invitation – it is no golden ticket, in fact it is blood stained, and ripped, and crushed – as if the person who gave it to you had to go through a lot in order to give it to you.
- What does it say, the agent says: ‘it says: I have invited this person to join me in heaven – I vouch for them’
- And the agent for God says ‘and whom may I ask gave you this invitation?’
- And you say ‘It says right here – it is signed... Jesus Christ’

- At that point, what do you think the servant of the Lord is going to do?
 - Oh, I am sorry, that is not good enough.
 - Never.
 - The Lord of the house has invited you to go with him – and to ensure that happens he has agreed to vouch for you. He does that by dying on the cross for all that which otherwise would have made you too unworthy to enter the presence of God.

- You might be interested to know that nowhere in the New Testament are believers told they are going to ‘heaven’ – instead they are told, when they die, they will go to be ‘with Christ’.

By interceding for us now

- So, Jesus brings us to heaven by redeeming us, he also brings us to heaven *by interceding for us now*.
- Hebrews helps us understand what it means to have Jesus caring for us now – while we wait for heaven.
- Jesus is described as a great High Priest who has *gone through the heavens (Heb 4:14)*
- The role of the High Priest in the Old Testament was to be the representative and guide for the people of Israel. He was to ensure that the people were ready and able to come before God to make the offerings that atoned for their sin.

- Have a look with me at Hebrews 7. [WAIT]
- I’ll read from verse 23 [Read **Heb 7:23-27**]

- Here we have Jesus taking the place of the High Priest and interceding for his people as they come before God. We see his qualifications as one who is holy and blameless, pure, set apart and we see his offering his life.
- The result – he permanently lives interceding for us.

- Now think about what a great privilege it is to have Jesus guiding us to heaven.
- When we are strong – he strengthens us,
 - when we are weak he carries us,

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- when we are hopeless he encourages us,
 - when we are in danger he protects us,
 - when we are tempted he ensures we are not tempted beyond our limit.
 - He holds us. He guides us. He sets out the path to heaven.
- Have you ever seen a bunch of school kids on excursion? You see it all the time at the zoo!
 - It is like herding cats at points.
 - Little Jonny chases after the butterfly and runs straight toward traffic,
 - little Susie has a hissy fit and refuses to walk anywhere because little Amy has decided to hold Jemma’s hands instead of hers.
 - Little Josh has another one of those reflex spasms that causes him for no reason at all to punch William who falls over and takes little Stephen with him.
 - And this is all before they get through the turnstiles!
 - The teachers role is to somehow get a whole bunch of kids with different personalities, different agendas and different misbehaviours to move in the same direction – all the why keeping them safe from getting run over or eaten by a lion!
 - One of the ways Jesus helps us get to heaven is by interceding for us and guiding us – despite our different personalities, different agendas and different sins.

PAUSE

Being Heaven Sent!

- Okay, let’s finish these talks and consider what having a clearer grasp of Heaven might mean for how Christians should live.

1. Attractive Future

- First – it describes an attractive future
- Christians have an idea of what to expect and that helps us to live in hope.
- Last passage – **1 Thess 4:13-17**
- Paul writes to reassure those who have accepted that Jesus has died for them, and who wait for his return – Verse 13.
[READ 1 Thess 4:13-17]
- Christians do not need to be like the rest of the world – like people who have no hope.
- Those who die before Jesus returns – go with Jesus.
- Those who are still left when Jesus does return will see Jesus arrive coming from heaven, with a loud command – with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God – and the final resurrection will take place.
- And we will meet the Lord in the air

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- To be with him forever.
- Friends we have every reason to hope – so let's encourage one another by looking to Jesus and our heavenly home.

2. Reassured about death

- An Attractive Future.
- Second, be reassured about your death.
- If you have Christ as Lord – you do not need to fear.
- He is waiting
- He is coming
- You belong to him
- You are secure.
- Die well. It is only the next step to something wonderful.

3. Be Prepared

- An Attractive Future, Reassured about Death...
- And finally – Be prepared.
- Heaven calls us to prepare, to pack our bags, to be ready to board at any time.

- You don't need much luggage – although I am sure, like me you have a fair amount of baggage!!
- Let me help you pack...
- Take the stuff in your life that would be displeasing to God, the stuff that just doesn't suit heaven – and put it aside.
- Yes, there will be battles – you will win some and lose others. Do what you can under God to put sin aside.

- Next, grab the things that you know are holy and good and pleasing to God. That is good stuff – Pack those things:
- Here are some suggestions – Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and don't forget self-control.

- Okay, now pick up your bag and let's get on our way.

- As you set out – keep your eyes fixed on Jesus and you will find that when the time is right, he will lead you into heaven.
- As you walk make sure your life displays the glory of God and reflects your true home in Christ.

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- There should be a spring in your step. You can be very intentional – walk with purpose. Don't get distracted (there are lots of things that may interest you on the way).
- Keep this in mind – at every decision point, no matter how small or large ask yourself this question 'Will it help me to know, love, serve or obey Jesus better?'
 - Will it help me to know, love, serve or obey Jesus better?'
- If the answer is no – that means you are taking a wrong turn.
- If the answer is yes – that means you are on the right track. Keep going in that way.

PAUSE

- At 4am on Saturday 23rd July 1870 – Hudson Taylor stood at the bedside of Maria, his sick wife. Hudson Taylor was the founder of the great China inland mission.
 - Her temperature had risen again, dawn was coming and with the rising light Hudson could see that she would die soon.
 - 'My darling, he said, are you conscious that you are dying?'
 - She replied surprised – 'Dying?' Do you think so? What makes you say so?'
 - He replied 'I can see it darling, your strength is giving away'
 - 'Can it be so', she said – 'I feel no pain only weariness'
 - Hudson with tears in his eyes said – 'Yes darling, you are going home. You will soon be with Jesus'
 - 'I am sorry' – Maria whispered.
 - 'You are sorry to be with Jesus?' Hudson questioned.
 - 'Oh no! – it is not that. I cannot be sorry to go to him', she whispered – 'but it does grieve me to leave you alone at such a time, yet he will be with you and meet all your needs.'
 - She reached up and put one arm around Hudson's neck and one on his head and pointed him to look toward heaven.
 - When he glanced back to her – she was smiling, but there was no longer any breath. Maria had gone to glory.
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- We have an Attractive Future, we can be reassured about Death, and we have every reason to be prepared.
 - Bring on heaven.

Closing Prayer

Note – Point out the 'Personal Reflection Questions' – for use following the weekend.