

Sermon: How to Get to Heaven

Text: [II Peter 1:3-11 ESV](#)

Gary L. Wackler

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Introduction: After a long illness, a woman died and arrived at the gates of heaven. While she was waiting for Saint Peter to greet her, she peeked through the gates. She could see it was absolutely beautiful.

Saint Peter came by, and the woman said to him: “This is a wonderful place! How do I get in?” “You spell a word,” Peter told her.

“What word?” the woman asked.

“Love,” Saint Peter said.

And the woman correctly spelled “Love” and was welcomed into heaven.

About six months later, Saint Peter came to the woman and asked her to watch the gates of heaven for him that day. While the woman was on duty, guarding the gates of heaven, her husband arrived.

“I’m surprised to see you,” the woman said. “How have you been?”

“Oh, I’ve been doing pretty well since you died,” her husband told her. “I married the beautiful young nurse who took care of you while you were ill. And then I won the lottery, I sold the little house you and I lived in and bought a big mansion. And my wife and I traveled all around the world. We were on vacation, and I was water-skiing today when I fell, the ski hit my head, and here I am. How do I get in?”

“You have to spell a word,” the woman told him.

“What word?” her husband asked.

“Czechoslovakia.”

Thankfully getting into heaven does not require a spelling test. There are *some* requirements, however, because not everyone is going to heaven just because they think they are. Currently, if you go to your computer and type in “heaven” and do a Google search, you can see there have been 29.5 million inquiries. There certainly is no lack of information to be found. But not all information is equally valid, is it?

There is only one dependable source of truth about heaven and how to get there, and that is the Bible, the Word of God. We may laugh about silly jokes regarding heaven and hell, but really this is serious business.

In a recent Harris Poll, 82 percent of Americans said they believed in heaven, and of these, 63 percent said they were likely to go there. Only 1 percent said they were going to hell. Since the mid-1970s, the percentage of Americans who believe in the afterlife has increased slightly, even though other ways of measuring religious belief, including attending services or identifying with a particular faith, have declined *dramatically*, according to surveys by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago.

It seems to me that how one gets to heaven is like going on a journey. It also seems to me that how ones gets to heaven is a lot like a vacation to see family where one just stays. Yes, we're still talking about heaven. At Christmas, we took a couple of trips to see our family. Why? Because they love us, and we love them. If that were not the case, we would never plan time and sacrifice money to make these trips.

Before we go on these trips we need to let our family know that we are coming. They need to prepare to make sure everything is ready for our arrival (like Jesus). They also have sacrificed for us to come and to take care of us while we are there.

I hear a lot of talk just like you, how Uncle Joe, who just died, is in heaven even though we never saw anything to indicate he was a follower of Jesus while alive. People who will go to heaven are expected because they enjoyed God's company and the fellowship of other believers while they lived here on earth. They came to faith in God through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They were baptized for the forgiveness of their sins and received a down payment of the Holy Spirit while they lived among us.

Listen to the opening greeting by Peter to the church in this his second letter (epistle):
II Peter 1:1-2 ESV ¹ Simeon[a] Peter, a servant[b] and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: ² May grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Footnotes: [a] 2 Peter 1:1 Some manuscripts Simon

[b] 2 Peter 1:1 For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*,

It is clear from the very beginning:

I. God Has Made Provisions for His People (vv. 3-4).

II Peter 1:3-4 ESV ³ His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to[a] his own glory and excellence,[b] ⁴ by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Footnotes: [a] 2 Peter 1:3 Or *by*

[b] 2 Peter 1:3 Or *virtue*

God Has Made Provisions for His People (vv. 3-4).

A. God calls us to live godly lives (v. 3).

God has not just told us, but chosen us to represent Him. God took the initiative with us and chose us to be a part of His family - adopted in with full rights and to be heirs of everything.

John Charles Ryle once said, “If you cannot give your heart to God now, how is it possible you could enjoy God’s heaven hereafter” (quote from his sermon: “Heaven” taken from *Classic Sermons on Heaven and Hell* compiled by Warren Wiersbe, p. 44).

Living a virtuous life, one that honors God, ought to be our primary desire. And everything we do should reflect God’s glory (δοξα is used 10 times in I Peter and 5 times in II Peter) and goodness (αρετας). Christians are to show forth the *goodness* (αρετας) of their Redeemer not just in word, but in deed as well. The Christian’s life is about imitation of Christ Jesus and is our witness for (to) others.

B. God makes promises to us (v. 4).

I Thessalonians 4:7-8 ESV 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

God does not give us everything we ask for, but everything we need. The Holy Spirit helps remind us of our Father’s wishes for us. The Holy Spirit helps us to be like our Father. And without the gift of the Holy Spirit, heaven is off the table.

Speaking to the Church, Paul makes this very clear: Romans 8:9 ESV 9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

C. God provides escape from this evil world (v. 4).

This escape happens clearly at our baptism when we make a break with what the world wants and begin to seek out what God desires for us. It is an escape from what is dying and fading away compared to eternal life with God that can begin NOW!

This does not mean we are not in the world. It *does* mean we no longer share the world’s values or eternal destination. We can live life that is truly life with the power of God. We escape destruction and separation from God because we are taking a different path. Our Guide on this walk is the Holy Spirit.

II. God Encourages Progress by His People (vv. 5-10).

II Peter 1:5-10 ESV 5 For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue,[a] and virtue with knowledge, 6 and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, 7 and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. 8 For if these qualities[b] are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. 10 Therefore, brothers,[c] be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall.

Footnotes:

[a] 2 Peter 1:5 Or *excellence*; twice in this verse

[b] 2 Peter 1:8 Greek *these things*; also verses 9, 10, 12

[c] 2 Peter 1:10 Or brothers and sisters. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, the plural Greek word adelphoi (translated “brothers”) may refer either to brothers or to **brothers and sisters**

Green in his commentary (Tyndale, Revised Ed. *2 Peter and Jude*, p. 75) calls this: “The Ladder of Faith.” Verses 5-7 form a catalog of qualities to be found in those who follow Christ. Baptism may be the point at which we escape this evil world, but it is only the *beginning* of our “new life.”

“Moffatt quotes a cynic’s description of Christian experience as ‘an initial spasm followed by chronic inertia.’” - Green, p. 76

We cannot live long on the spiritual memories and thin diet of experiences from our past. We must create new ones, more recent ones. That is exactly why Peter says you must “supplement your faith” or “add to faith” (NIV) which is really the foundation of this new life we have in Christ Jesus. There also are a number of other qualities. And love ends the list. This is how we are to be motivated as Christians (loving God and our neighbor). We must cooperate with God as he richly supplies us with what we need.

We need:

A. to live a virtuous life (vv. 5-7).

Faith - is the first requirement; and we build our faith through study, prayer and godly action. The false teachers of Peter’s time, who are among us today, were saying that since Christians were justified by faith that morality was not important. **Gnosticism**

Virtue (*goodness*, NIV) - is the idea of excellence. It is said that “the excellence of a knife is to cut, of a horse to run.” But what is the excellence and virtue of man? Peter says it is to be Christlike. It is the quality that leads others to commit their lives to God and for his purposes. It is a part of our witness for Jesus.

Knowledge - is a practical wisdom that can be achieved through study of the Bible to help us know Jesus better. Yet again, I still remind you that all knowledge is not of equal value. It always depends on the quality of the source. Your unchurched friends are probably not the best resources for understanding theology or what God really wants you to do.

Self-control - is not just about food and drink or sex and whatever else may go into the body or be done by the body, but also what goes into your mind through sight and hearing. It is submission to Christ’s guidelines. It is a fruit of the Spirit (**Galatians 5:23**).

Steadfastness (*perseverance*, NIV) - is that “temper of mind which is unmoved by difficulty and distress. “It is the difference between a star and a meteor” (Green, p. 78). It is an attitude of “no matter what happens” I will not walk away from my promises and commitments to God. It is not how you start, but how you finish!

It is the same attitude of our Lord Jesus Christ from whom we should take example.

Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV ¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

“We are enabled to see our apparent misfortunes in the calm light of eternity.” - Green, p. 78
It is the big-picture perspective and a view of the end-game we should have in mind!

Godliness - is a reverence for God that works itself out in proper behavior that honors him. It is not just about knowing, but also doing what is right.

Brotherly affection (*brotherly kindness*, NIV) - is a way of knowing whether a person is of God and actually “born again.” On a practical level it is about “bearing one another’s burdens.” This is a critical test of *genuine* faith.

I John 4:20 ESV ²⁰ If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot[a] love God whom he has not seen.
Footnotes: [a] 1 John 4:20 Some manuscripts *how can he*

Love- is a word that is used loosely in our speaking about anything from the weather to Reggae music to escargot. But this love in our text is God's love. It might be defined "as a deliberate desire for the highest good of the one loved, which shows itself in sacrificial action for the person's good." - Green, p. 80

The Apostle Paul defines this kind of love for us: **I Corinthians 13:4-8a, 13 ESV** ⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. ^{8a} Love never ends. ¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

While many of these attributes Peter gives us might be found in our pagan neighbors, who will not go to heaven without a saving relationship with Jesus, the difference is motivation. For Whom do we live our lives? Only "God" is the answer that will bring eternal life and a home in heaven.

God Encourages Progress by His People (**vv. 5-10**).

B. to live a productive life (**v. 8**).

Just like in the physical world - "lack of spiritual growth is a sign of *atrophy and* spiritual death." - Green, p. 81

It is a deep relational knowledge of Jesus Christ that will provide for a good foundation in our lives. It should be our goal to know Jesus better every day. The Apostle Paul strove for that! **Philippians 3:10-11 ESV** ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

An example of how Jesus felt about "nonproductiveness" is found in the *Parable of the Fig Tree* (**Luke 13:6ff**).

C. to **NOT** live a myopic (short-sighted) life (**v. 9**).

Jesus often talks of blindness and distractions that keep us from seeing the truth and intentionally not following him. It is one of the devil's strategies to keep us busy with wrong ideas and unproductive goals. Paul told the church: **II Corinthians 4:4 ESV** ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

A lot of things may look right and even seem right, but if they are not from God, they lead to death. And if this near-sightedness in **verse 9** is an intentional closing of one's eyes, there can be no hope for heaven. Unrepentant sin always brings death and separation from God.

God Encourages Progress by His People (**vv. 5-10**).

D. to live a victorious life (**v. 10**).

We must follow God. There must be an earnestness and diligence to our following God. There is no place for half-hearted, lukewarm disciples. We dare not have attitudes of just doing the minimum, what is good enough to get by. Our Lord demands, expects, and is entitled to our very best, out of love for what he has done for us (salvation), and his precious promise of his present and eternal presence (in heaven).

III. God Has Made Promises to His People (**v.11**).

II Peter 1:11 ESV ¹¹ For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

A. to welcome us into heaven.

Not just any welcome, but an entrance into heaven will be provided. This will be like a homecoming beyond your imagination. Heaven is described physically by extraordinary opulence and beauty - extravagance just for us. Yet, God (in my opinion) will be there taking up *all* our attention.

Revelation 21:4 ESV

⁴ He (God) will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

Heaven will be free from everything that is not good or holy. There will be joy and happiness which sometimes can be misplaced here on earth. It will be perfect!

B. our stay will be eternal.

We were never meant to die and suffer originally. God has always wanted us to be His people who would shout forth His praises. AND eternal life is *only* found in, an through, Jesus Christ.

The Apostle John understood this when he wrote: **John 3:36 ESV** ³⁶ Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

John 6:40 ESV ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”

To get to heaven, you must put your faith in Jesus Christ and follow Him.

Conclusion: All of this, of course, is by God’s grace. No virtuous life, no matter how admirable, assures anyone of going to heaven. Yet, with God’s help and righteousness, those who have committed their lives through faith and in love to serve Jesus will find a place of welcome around the family table - and we will be Home forever!

Heaven is like a journey, and like any journey, there may be difficult times, even dangerous travel, but we have a God who goes with us in every situation. God works patiently with us to help develop and grow us into an adult of whom any Parent would be proud.

The difference between a pagan (unbeliever) and a Christian is not that one is bad and the other good in themselves, or that the pagan is immoral and out-of-control where a Christian is moral and self-controlled. The difference is Who we live for. If a person does not live for God, no matter how good he/she appears, heaven is not where that person will be found.

I hope you both know and love Jesus, today, and you want to live your life in such a way as to provide a godly example to others through your obedience. God, the Father, wants you to take the journey with His Bride, the Church, and come home.