

Heaven on Earth

Fred Astaire equated heaven to dancing cheek-to-cheek with Ginger Rogers in the movie, *Top Hat*. We often qualify exhilarating experiences in life as heaven on earth. The Bible has quite a different perspective of heaven on earth, as we shall see in today's Templates of Truth.

Once Moses had ascended to the top of Mount Sinai, God began to give him specific instructions about how to construct a tabernacle – *Tell the sons of Israel to...construct a sanctuary for Me...according to all that I am going to show you, as a pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it* (Exodus 25:2-9). The next five chapters of the book outline in every detail the exact specifications for the construction of the tabernacle and all its furnishings.

It could all serve as boring reading, until you realize that God was having His people construct on earth a semblance of what already exists in heaven. Not only does the writer of Hebrews reveal this to us in 8:1-5, but the Apostle John was taken into the Throne Room of heaven during his Revelation vision and observed these similarities: a brazen altar, an altar of incense, a throne, lamps, cherubim, and the ministry of elders & priests. When you study these parallels and their symbolic meanings, the long list of specifications becomes much more meaningful. The basic principle seen in all of it is the importance of living our life in such a way that we follow the pattern of heaven and not the pattern of earth.

Jesus taught this basic principle in the model prayer – *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven* (Matthew 6:10). The principle was reiterated in the conversation with Peter and the disciples upon their acknowledgement that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus told them – *I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven* (Matthew 16:19). People have erroneously assumed that this means whatever we declare on earth, God is obligated to establish in heaven. That has led to the popular “name-it-and-claim-it” approach to spiritual living that mockingly suggests we can invoke God's obligation to make happen on earth whatever it is we desire. That is not at all the meaning of Jesus' words. The exact Greek translation of the phrase is literally, “having already been” bound or loosed in heaven. The point is, God's will involves earth coming into compliance with heaven; not heaven coming into compliance with earth. We establish here what has already been established by God in heaven, not the other way around! God doesn't work according to our specifications, we work according to His. We seek to understand His will, and then He empowers us to replicate His heavenly will in our earthly lives.

One of the more practical applications of this principle is when Jesus taught – *If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained* (John 20:23). The same Greek tense translates these phrases as well. The sins of those to whom Jesus refers have already been forgiven them in heaven. He is teaching that we should

extend the same forgiveness toward others that God extends to them from heaven. More specifically, when God has forgiven a person for his sinful choices and behavior in life, we should also forgive him. On the other hand, when a person has failed to come to confession and repentance and God is dealing with him through conviction and discipline, we should also deal with him accordingly. God doesn't regard a person's sin based on man's perspective or response; He expects us to regard the sin of each other according to the way God has already dealt with it in heaven. By the same token, when we have genuinely & sincerely confessed our own sin, repented from it, and God has forgiven us, we should also forgive ourselves and move on in a renewed commitment of obedience and holiness. To fail to forgive reaps serious consequences for the violator – *For if you forgive men their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions* (Matthew 6:14-15). This may be the only situation whereby a condition is established in heaven based on that which is determined on earth; not related to the person and his transgression, but to the believer who refuses to forgive him.

One of the features of the earthly tabernacle was the mercy seat built atop the ark of the testimony. It symbolized and represented God's love, grace and tender mercy extended to all people for the forgiveness of sin and salvation from the guilt & condemnation of sin. Heaven on earth is not dancing cheek-to-cheek with some beautiful lady. It is doing the will of God as it is already determined in heaven, and extending to others the same grace, mercy, love and forgiveness already extended to us from heaven.

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide in Christ. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in the Lord Jesus.