

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ  
**Amen.**

Our sermon text this morning is written in the book of Acts 1:10-11

Let us pray ...

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight; we pray through Your son, Jesus Christ.

### **Where is heaven?**

Let me ask you a question, and it's not an easy one. Where is heaven? We assume that heaven is up there, somewhere! But is it up there? As we look over the artwork of the past, we get pictures of heaven as a place where angels strum harps lying about on white puffy clouds. Now I'm not sure about you folks, but every time I've flown through the clouds, I've never seen an angel! In fact as far as I know, I've never heard of any mid air incidences occurring where an angel has been sucked through the jet engines of a jumbo doing seven-hundred kilometres per hour.

Even so, the language of the bible speaks of heaven as a place to which a person has to travel upward to enter. Jesus was taken up; so was Elijah, and in the creed we say, Jesus ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father. So where did Jesus go? Where did the chariot drop Elijah off? When they ascended where did they stop?

In the New Testament the word used for heaven comes from the root word in Greek that means mountain. To go to the top of a mountain you have to go up; and entry into heaven is seen in the same sense – up is the way to heaven.

This shouldn't surprise us, because mountains are important places in the ancient world. Think of the times when heavenly experiences happened on mountains. We know of Moses on Mt Sinai in the cloud with God; there were pagan shrines built to gods on mountains, and how the Israelites copied them when they worshipped Baal against the will of God. People even tried to build a mountain at Babel. Jesus, too, utilised mountains. He prayed up mountains, taught from mountains; he spent a significant period of his time on mountains during his earthly ministry. In ancient times mountains were where earth met heaven. Mountains were seen as the pillars which held up the sky and stopped it from crashing to the ground.

Like wise we too can climb to the top of a mountain and have a mountain top experience—a heavenly experience—but is heaven there? We can fly in aircraft in the clouds but is heaven seen there either? In our technological age we send astronauts higher than the clouds and still no heavenly realm is to be seen there either; even further out into space unmanned crafts are sent in search of signs of life, have they found the Son of God at the right hand of the Father? Maybe they haven't travelled out far enough! But even at the ends of infinite space would they find heaven? I'd suggest that the answer would be no!

Using our modern day rational thinking, and through the observations by scientists, it would be easy to conclude that heaven doesn't exist because it can't be found or seen. And of course, if heaven doesn't exist because we can't see it, then it must also be concluded that Jesus Christ the Son of God never really rose from the dead nor did he ever ascend into heaven.

It saddens me to say that this is the predominant thinking today, and along with it comes the despair that this hopeless notion brings. In other words, if God or heaven doesn't seem to exist, then in hopelessness we begin to seek heaven as a concept of perception; heaven becomes a state of mind. Through Satan's prodding and our own sinful human natures, the 'where is heaven?' question, for many people has now become the 'what is heaven?' question.

Have a listen to the radio or watch a bit of television and see how heaven is portrayed in our popular culture and in the media. Often we hear heaven likened to a divine type of ice-cream or some brand of pizza or some other worldly food or drink. Or we hear that 'heaven is in your eyes, or in your heart' as musicians like to sing. Even though modern music hopes in a heaven, it is a sad reality that this heaven has more to do with the gratification of one's sexual desires, than the place in to which Jesus has ascended. For many heaven has become an individualistic concept to be understood and bound in the realm of our sensory experiences.

But this leaves us with the question 'what is heaven and where is it?' Just as the secular world struggles with this, in the church we struggle with these questions too. The way heaven is understood and perceived goes a long way in explaining the differences between denominations within Christendom.

Many churches go to great lengths to make their teachings logical and rational, defining heaven as a spatial location. That sounds logical, doesn't it. For them heaven is a precise location where Jesus is with the Father. Meaning that Jesus and the Father are there and not here with us. But this also means that for them, seeing that Jesus is in that spatial heavenly place, he cannot be in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, making the sacrament only a remembrance feast.

However, their logic is thrown into confusion with texts such as Matthew 1:23 and 28:20 where Jesus is named Immanuel meaning "*God with us*", and where he says "*I will be with you to the very end of the age*". At this point one has to make a decision between 'logic and rationality' or 'the Word of God'. If Jesus is at the right hand of God in heaven then what does Jesus mean when he says, '*this is my body and this is my blood, given and shed for you*'. As you can see there is a problem. Is Jesus with us or is he up there with the Father in heaven?

Well we know that Jesus is with us, and we know this is true because he said so. If he is with us and he is in heaven, then heaven must be with us. Perhaps the Kingdom of Heaven is nearer than most realise? So what is heaven? Is it just a concept; are we already living in heaven? After all God is everywhere!

The problems with these questions are the questions themselves. The 'what is' and 'where is' questions are questions of rational and logical minds. Heaven as a place or a location lasting for an eternity is a concept that opens up a Pandora's Box of questions. In our attempts to explain this mystery of God, we run the very serious risk explaining away this mystery, just as many other churches have done. The idea that heaven is a location in space is something that will never be proved by science or any other rational logical faculty.

However, when the questions are asked from the point of view of faith, then they take on a whole different perspective. You and I believe in heaven, not a heavenly meal or a heavenly interlude with the opposite member of sex. No! The heaven in which we believe is not born of the fruits of the flesh. Our belief in heaven is given to us in faith by the one who rules there. Heaven is where God is, it's a realm outside logic; it can't be found with the naked eye or reason. For the time being heaven and the King of Heaven are seen only through faith.

In the Nicene Creed we confess heaven and earth as places made by God; we also confess that he made all things visible and invisible. Heaven is invisible to our human eyes. It is not a place in the spatial sense. Nor is it revealed to us through our own efforts, understanding or senses. Jesus has ascended into heaven and he is hidden from our sight. Heaven too is hidden from our sight but only for now.

Jesus has ascended from our sight into the glorious reality around us, which our sinful eyes will not ever see. But right now we are called to see — through the eyes given by the Holy Spirit, the eyes of faith — ourselves made holy by the blood of Jesus, dressed in glorious royal white robes in the eternal presence of God.  
Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

**Amen**