

“A Dull Heaven and a Sprightly Hell!”

Revelation 21:1-8

Intro. – March 10, 1944, Irvin S. Cobb, well known American humorist died. Prior to his death, Cobb wrote a letter that was not to be opened until his death. March 11, 1944, this letter was published in the *Chattanooga Times*. The contents of this letter were Cobb’s views of “God, religion, and the hereafter.” I’d like to read a portion of that letter and urge you to listen carefully to what Irvin Cobb wrote:

“In deference to the faith of our dear mother, who was through her lifetime a loyal, though never a bigoted communicant of that congregation, perhaps the current preacher of that church would consent to read the 23rd Psalm, which was her favorite passage in the Scriptures and is mine since it contains no charnel words. No morbid mouthings about corruption, decay and being mercifully without creed or dogma, carries no threat of eternal hell fire for those parties we do not like, no direct promise of a heaven which, if one may judge by the people who are surest of going there, must be a powerfully dull place, populated to a considerable and uncomfortable degree by prigs, time-servers and unpleasantly aggressive individuals. Hell may have a worse climate, but undoubtedly the company is sprightlier.”

I fear Cobb’s evaluation of heaven and hell is not all that uncommon. Prevalent is the attitude that heaven must be awfully dull, carried by the idea that God’s people are dull... and that hell at least will be interesting...

Illus. – while working at Penz Plastics in Mishawaka, IN was asked sincerely by a co-worker that “wasn’t heaven going to be pretty dull...?”

Illus. – heard a well known doctor say, “Floating around on a cloud with a harp in hand for eternity has no appeal. In fact, it sounds rather boring.”

Thus, I present to you the idea of a dull (boring) heaven and sprightly (exciting) hell is almost universal.

Purpose: to gain a better Biblical understanding of heaven and hell

An open and honest study of the Bible makes clear that heaven will be anything but dull and hell will be anything but sprightly. By answering the following question we will accomplish our purpose: If heaven isn’t dull and hell isn’t sprightly, what will they be?

I HELL WILL BE LIKE...

- not given much detail concerning hell, but this much we do know:

A. A Place of Unmatched Destruction

- Illus. – Spring of 1968, Wheelersburg, Ohio I witnessed a tornado come right up the Ohio river. It hit within three miles of the house and killed several people... Remember going and seeing the destruction... Believe me, it was not a pretty sight...

1. Hell is described in like fashion – devastating fire and destruction... the second death...

2. Revelation 9:1-2 described as a bottomless pit

- Illus. – ever dream of falling, falling and just as you feel you’re about to hit you jerk awake?

3. Hell is described as *Gehenna*

a. Canaanite god Moloch – twice a year, human sacrifices were offered on its continuous burning furnace of an altar...

b. 1200 years the Jews regarded the valley of this god with horror and fear.

c. refuge dump site of Jerusalem – dead animals... garbage... fires constantly burning and the smell was putrefying...

d. when Christ described/pictured hell, called it *Gehenna* = idea of unmatched destruction...

B. A Place of Suffering

1. Matthew 13:40-42 *“Therefore just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire, in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

2. Mental/physical suffering; yet, there are many who try to minimize this:

a. hell is a real, prepared place...those who will be there will be there as total, human beings...

- b. Matthew 10:28 “*And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*”
- c. sufferings of hell will be mental... and physical...

C. A Place of Torment

- 1. Through fear – e.g. Cain
- 2. Through memory – e.g. Dives (rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16)
- 3. Through conscience – e.g. Judas
- 4. Through guilt – e.g. Pilate

There will be no comfort, no easing of the pain and torment. In hell, love will turn to hate & hope to dread!

D. A Place with Terrible Company

- 1. A place of total *restlessness* and *no satisfaction*
- 2. Inhabitants described in our text – not a group with which anyone in their right mind would desire.
 - Illus. – real poor example, but, like being around a depressed person all the time...
- 3. All the ungodly people from the beginning of time to end and to this group include Satan and his hosts... It really sounds like a “sprightly” place doesn’t it?

I pray that you will see with me that hell is nowhere anyone would desire to be!

II HEAVEN WILL BE LIKE...

- again, we’re not given great detail, but given enough to know the following about heaven:

A. A Place of Incomparable Beauty

- 1. Think of the most beautiful sight you ever saw (Colorado/Wyoming & Rockies “What’s God going to do for an encore?”) – all but a preview of what heaven will be!
- 2. Revelation 21:10-11 “*And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.*”
- 3. Revelation 21:14ff tells what it will be like on the inside – it will be lovely beyond description
 - lights, colors... surroundings of heaven will more than surpass most brilliant scenes on earth!
- 4. Our God has more than an encore prepared for us!!

B. A Place of Endless Time

- 1. Revelation 22:5 “*And there shall no longer be any night; and they shall not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall illumine them; and they shall reign forever and ever.*”
- 2. I.e. you and I will have all the time to appreciate the blessings of God...
- 3. Think about how having endless time will make life so much different:
 - a. we are a time conscious society... time flies... nothing lasts... everything changing and eventually time just runs out...
 - b. heaven means we will never again feel the pressure of running out of time...
 - c. heaven means we will never be parted from our loved ones... never grow older... never be frustrated again by an unfinished task...
 - d. we are promised to have “forever” to explore and experience heaven!

C. A Place of Total Satisfaction

- as Christians we experience a “sense” of satisfaction/fulfillment, but, it is never complete...
- God created us to know Him, worship and serve Him... Anyone here think they totally know God and are perfect in their worship and service of God? Heaven will be entirely different:
 - 1. Knowledge of Him will be complete:
 - a. nothing will stand in between us and our Lord to cover up our understanding Him...
 - b. perplexities/misunderstandings of life will be gone...
 - 2. Our worship of Him will be perfect:

- a. distractions will be missing... worries gone... concentration will be no problem...
 - b. we will be preoccupied with Him and His glory and not with anything or anyone else!
3. Service to Him will be perfect
- a. Revelation 22:3 *“And there shall no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His bondservants shall serve Him.”*
 - b. work will occupy us in heaven – rewarding... interesting... purposeful...
 - c. instead of playing harps and floating on a cloud, we will be living a full/active/productive life by doing His will completely and without temptation and sin!

This service, along with our perfect worship and knowledge of God, will be more than satisfying to us!

Conclusion: The Fiske Planetarium (on campus of U. of Colorado), needed money, so its directors dreamed up the following. They had printed up brochures that offered 1,000 acre lots on the planet Mars for twenty dollars. “This land steal features pink skies, unlimited rock gardens, and not one but two moons. So peaceful, quiet and romantic... -- even the natives are friendly.” Also they promised, “At one sixth the gravity of earth, your golf game will improve immensely – drives will be six times longer. Mars will provide worlds of adventure for the entire family.” Well, people from across the US sent in their \$20 for a “deed, space flight insurance, and a simulated sample of red Martian soil.”

Sound sprightly? Might I suggest God has offered the ultimate real estate. Heaven is a real place where the Lord will live with His people. The additional features are beyond description. There will be no more tears, pain or death, and the occupants will rejoice forever in God’s presence and for His service.

Brethren/friend, I present that heaven will be anything but dull and hell will be anything but sprightly!