

And Heaven Is Found!  
Sermon  
Eugene Sparrow

Heaven -- what is heaven? Is there such a place? If so -- where does it exist? If we are able to establish its whereabouts what are the qualifications for entrance?

It has been stated by many that it is far above the stratosphere and the approach to this heavenly bountry is by way of a pearly gate. Artists have, for centuries, painted their imaginary conceptions of what this great land must be like. It has been pictured in soft colors -- lovely pale blue fading into white and contrasted with crowns of gold and garments trimmed with gold. The modern movie industry has at different times put its great imaginative genius to work on the portrayal of the great land beyond the horizon. They have made films with billowy clouds as the carpets for the saints and the inhabitants of this enchanted land. Scientists, philosophers, theologians, laymen, they have all speculated about the whereabouts and the substance of this suspended land of peace and happiness. I think too, we can all agree, they have all described, painted and photographed this possible land hereafter as a very pleasant place and could easily satisfy the wants of all people regardless of back ground and personality.

While there has been a great deal of agreement on the physical make up of this land of milk and honey -- the qualifications for admittance have varied from one extreme to another.

We find some religious groups who feel that the only way to reach this land is through a cherished belief -- a belief that your life should be tied up completely during this short sojourn of wings procurement in worship; separation from the things of life that surround us each and every day. Their only responsibility is to serve the church to which they belong without question. Assistance to any group of people who are so strangely different as not to recognize their power over this serious situation are uncivilized and should be avoided at all costs. A perfect example of this groups attempts to put this idea across to their young people can be noted in their Sunday School Literature. For visual effect a picture of a cute little Eskimo boy named Itu, is used to impregnate these vicious ideas. His features are described factually; slant eyes, black straight hair and brown skin -- just different, and whats more -- he doesn't believe in Jesus. This poor child is being led by his parents and his church into a blind alley, narrowed down to the tip of his nose -- narrowed down to his self to I. I wonder -- how would this group succeed in a land of peace and sharing all with all the inhabitants, if there existed such a place. Would they be able to accept the ultimatum of St. Peter, the gate keeper, if he asks them -- "are you prepared to live in peace with the many inhabitants we have here. There are Eskimos, Negroes, & others who don't subscribe to your beliefs -- how do you think you would like it!! Could they swallow in that moment what has been built up in them for years -- I doubt it, but I would like them to be admitted, for they would then find out what it is like, to be different.

I think too, we have all met the Christian who feels he has the answer to the questions which might be asked of him before his entrance to the land of peace.

He has been rather successful here -- he has achieved a certain amount of security, holds a fine job, and lives rather well. When the holidays roll around his table is graced with the traditional

turkey, the wine closet is jammed to capacity and all the holiday necessities are on hand for festive living.

He has held the deaconship at the church for years -- has been active in the church -- has left rather healthy contributions to the church for building purposes; but for the life of him he admits bewilderment at the scripture whenever it suggests sharing with the poor that they might live. He fails to recognize the reasons for a delinquent youngster who may harm his rather sheltered and well behaved son after school. His one great cry is for the removal of such an influence from the community for the sake of all. The place for this youngster is in a reformatory, despite all its gruesome aspects contrary the needs of a youngster who needs room for expansion but must be crouped up, confined, because he felt irritable enough to fight on the eve of a holiday when remarks were made about his shabby clothes. Oh yes -- he too has the keys -- but I wonder again how he would feel being thrown into close contact with the many he had regarded as slackers in the church affairs, because although their income was less than half that which he received, were not able enough to make contributions proportionately. How short his vision here -- how long would he last rubbing elbows with those whom he had considered to be the scum. Could this attitude possibly change at the gates -- no, it will live with [him] for many a year. Entrance to him would be good. It would be better than hell -- for his suffering would be equally as great.

Then there are those who feel that they aren't quite sure as to what they should believe. Is there a heaven or not -- they speculate, and rather than be caught holding the bag -- sit on a fence hoping that this will not prevent positive action at the pearly gates. A valiant attempt to try and confuse St. Peter. They have a selfish fear that prevents them from ever reaching a stage of emancipation from this fear. They live in such a manner that they occasionally do some small act of kindness and hope that the books that are being kept will balance in favor of admittance. Last but not least are those who have the key but they refuse to worry about the possibilities in the future for they have the difficult problem of living now. If there is such a place -- they need not worry -- for one of those great people can be exemplified by a gentleman who had done a heap of living in his 55 years who would be an asset to heaven, hell, or this sick place -- the world. This gentleman and myself were riding thought the country shortly after a fresh snow on Christmas day. The destination was an open store somewhere, within a ten mile radius. His first remark was -- "Quiet." I waited, silence followed. Yes I replied, it is quiet. He replied, "All stores closed for Christmas -- few cars. Smoke curling from chimneys. Yes it was quiet -- these people were doing a heap of living. I ventured the next remark. "Sir, were you much of a church goer as a young man", silence followed -- Slowly he began -- you know son, I remember when I was a youngster my grandfather asked me what I thought was the best way to make a living -- I replied -- is it doctor, no -- is a lawyer -- no is an engineer -- no son -- a silken tongue." Then a silence followed -- slowly he began again -- "When I became a little older I can remember asking a minister who had been a friend of the family -- "Sir -- why don't you tell these people the truth -- why don't you tell them why they are segregated, discriminated and kept in a subtle form of slavery" -- and the minister replied, Sam -- "I don't dare".

Then he went on to say -- When I first began my work here in the town just beyond I was the first master plumber. I had all the trade in the building of bathrooms in the houses that were springing up. Then, I saw the beginning of an outlet for plumbing supplies moving in. As they moved in they put salesmen to work and finally I felt the wedge tightening. I went to them

looking for a job and they turned me down because they couldn't hire a negro. Then I saw fall of 1929 and the years that followed. I saw suffering, my children suffered, and charity was the only way out. The dignity of man was taken away. In the meantime I could see Sunday after Sunday the hordes going through church doors. I could hear the chant of prayers and the sadness of the singing voices and after the service was through -- to their homes they went -- with smiles on their faces, back to more charity. No my son, I seldom went to church as a youngster and as an older man -- never. Then as we rode on in silence we passed a car stuck in a drift of snow. The temperature was hovering below freezing and the sky was becoming over cast. Our Turkey dinner was just about ready to hit the table anticipating our return. But as we passed he applied the brakes -- turned around and asked if he might help. The driver of the other car obviously had a bit too much to drink and his accent was that of one from far below the Mason Dixon line. The car was pulled out of the ditch, and then we pushed the other car attempting to get it started. We pushed for quite a distance until we realized it was futile. The southerner got out of his car and thanked us for the assistance and the old gentleman asked, "well, whats to be done now."

It seemed that the only thing that could be done now was to tak call his brother and have him come and pick the party up. "Get in," the plumber said, and down the slippery road we went further and further away from home -- turkey and egg nog. As we reached a filling station the distressed driver offered, insisted, a reward for the great inconvenience. No -- you keep it -- perhaps we will meet under opposite circumstances and you will help me more -- and further -- perhaps you will extend this to someone else on the road who I may some day meet I'm in time of need. At that we turned toward home and silence fell again. As we turned back on the road to home the silence was broken again with this slow careful statement. "You know son, I have read many poets, I've read Karl Marx, I have heard many radio addresses but I once stumbled across a poem written by Paul Lawrence Dunbar.

I am no priest of crooks nor creeds,  
For human wants and human needs  
Are more to me than prophets' deeds;  
And human tears and human cares  
Affect me more than human prayers.

Go, cease your wail, lugubrious saint!  
You fret high Heaven with your plaint.  
Is this the "Christian's joy" you paint?  
Is this the Christian's boasted bliss?  
Avails your faith no more than this?

Take up you arms, come out with me,  
Let Heav'n alone; humanity  
Needs more and Heaven less from thee.  
With pity for mankind look 'round;  
Help them to rise -- and Heaven is found.

As the last words tumbled slowly -- looked at me with a warm kindly smile that went to my heart and drove on to make the turkey before it got too cold.