

How can I get to Heaven? ¹

(*Englisch, English*)

Many people try not to think about eternity.

Even those who think about death, try not to think about what will happen afterwards. As a child, the American actress Drew Barrymore (born 1975) played one of the leading roles in the film 'E.T.' At the age of 28, she said; "Should I die before my cat, then I would like her to be given my ashes to eat. At least then, I'll live on in my cat." Isn't such ignorance and short-sightedness frightening?

While Jesus was alive, lots of people came to him. Their problems usually had to do with the here and now.

- **10 lepers wanted to be healed** (Lk 17 v 13).
- **the blind wanted to see** (Mt 9 v 27).
- **someone else wanted Jesus' help with a dispute over an inheritance** (Lk 12 v 13-14).
- **Pharisees came with the trick question about whether they should pay taxes to Caesar** (Mt 22 v 17).

Few people came to Jesus to hear what he had to say about how to get to Heaven. One rich young ruler came to him and asked, "**Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?**" (Lk 18 v 18). He was told to sell all that was dear to him and follow Jesus. As he was very rich he did not follow Jesus' advice and so missed out on Heaven. On the other hand, there were people who weren't looking for Heaven but when they heard about it in their encounter with Jesus, they took the opportunity straight away.

Zacchaeus longed to see Jesus. But he got more than he expected. When Jesus went to his house – while they were having a cup of tea, if you like – he found Heaven. "**To-day salvation has come to this house**" (Lk 19 v 9).

How can I find Heaven?

From what we have already seen, we can see that

- the kingdom of Heaven is to be found at a definite point in time. That's good to know because it means that you, too, dear reader, can take hold of eternal life today.
- the kingdom of Heaven cannot be achieved by good works.
- one can attain the kingdom of Heaven without any preparation.

Our own ideas about how to get to Heaven are all wrong if they are not based on what God has said. A singer once sang a song about a clown who was retiring from the circus after years spent there. In the song, it says, "He'll surely get to Heaven, He made so many people happy". A rich woman built a poor house in which 20 women could live free of charge. There was only one condition: the women had to promise to pray for the rich woman's spiritual salvation for an hour every day.

¹ Übersetzung des Aufsatzes „Wie komme ich in den Himmel? ins Englische.

But how do we really get to Heaven? Jesus told a parable to help explain. In Luke's gospel chapter 14 verse 16, he talks about a man (in the parable, this is God) who was preparing a great feast. He sent out some personal invitations but the replies were all very disappointing : "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field ...'; another said, 'I have just bought five pair of oxen ...'; still another said, 'I have just got married, so I can't come.' Jesus ends the parable with the words of the host, "I tell you, not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of the banquet" (Lk 14 v 24).

In this parable it becomes clear that it is possible to either win or lose Heaven. The important thing is whether you accept or reject the invitation. It couldn't be easier, could it? If people are barred from Heaven when the time comes, then it's not because they didn't know the way, but because they didn't accept the invitation.

The three people in the parable are not good role models for us. None of them accept the invitation to the banquet. Is the banquet cancelled as a result? No! Since those who were invited have refused to come, the host sends invitations out into all the world. These aren't invitations with golden letters this time. It is the simple call: "Come!". And anyone who accepts the invitation is given a place at the feast. What happens? Crowds of people come. After some time, the host sees that there are still spaces. He says to the servants, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full".

At this point, I would like to look at what the parable has got to do with us today. There is still room in Heaven and God says to you, "Come and take your place in Heaven! Make the right decision and reserve your place in eternity! Do it today!"

Heaven is wonderful. That's why Jesus compares it to a feast. In I Corinthians 2 v 9, it says, **"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."** There is absolutely nothing anywhere on earth which is anything like Heaven. That's how amazing it is! We can't afford to miss out on Heaven. It is incredibly precious. Jesus, the Son of God, is the one who has opened up the way to Heaven for us! He's the one who made it so easy for us to get to Heaven. The only thing necessary for us to do is to want to go. Only those who are as short-sighted as the men in the parable will reject God's invitation.

Salvation through the Lord Jesus

In Acts 2 v 21, we read a very important verse, **"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"**. This is a central verse in the New Testament.

When Paul was in prison in Philippi, he sums it up in his conversation with the jailer by saying, **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved – you and your household"** (Acts 16 v 31). The message is concise but, at the same time, radical and life-changing. The jailer was converted that very night.

What does Jesus save you from? That's a very important question to ask. He saves us from the way that leads to eternal damnation, to hell. The Bible says that people will spend eternity in either Heaven or hell. One of the two is wonderful, the other is awful. There is no other alternative. Five minutes after they die, it will no longer be possible for

anyone to hold to the belief that death is the end. Your life will be judged by your relationship to Jesus. That's what decides where you will spend eternity.

When I was in Poland on a speaking tour, we visited the former concentration camp Auschwitz. Awful things happened there in the Third Reich (during World War II). Between 1942 and 1944 more than 1.6 million people, mainly Jews, were killed and their bodies burned. In literature, it is often referred to as 'the hell of Auschwitz'. That description went through my mind as the guide took us through the gas chamber in which 600 people could be killed at once. I don't think we can begin to imagine how awful that was. But was it really hell?

We could only visit the gas chamber because the nightmare ended in 1944. Now you can visit the camp. No-one is tortured or poisoned there anymore. The gas chambers in Auschwitz came to an end. But the hell described in the Bible is eternal.

In the entrance to the museum in the camp I noticed a picture of the body of Christ hanging on a cross. One of the prisoners had showed his hope in Jesus, the crucified one, by scratching this image on the wall with a nail. This person died in the gas chambers, too. But he knew the Saviour, Jesus. He died in a terrible place but he was welcomed into Heaven. There is no escape from the hell which Jesus describes in the New Testament (e.g. Mt 7 v 13; Mt 5 v 29-30; Mt 18 v 8). You can't visit hell – it will always be a place of continual terror.

Heaven is eternal as well. And that is the place God wants to take us to. So allow yourself to be invited to Heaven. Call on the name of the Lord and make a booking for Heaven! After a talk I gave once, a woman came up to me. She was quite upset. "How can one 'book' Heaven? That sounds something like a travel agency!" I agreed with her, "If you don't book, you'll never get where you want to go. If you want to go to Hawaii, you need a valid ticket." "But you have to pay for the ticket!" she replied. "Yes," I said, "the ticket to Heaven has to be paid for as well. But it's so expensive that no-one can afford it. Our sin prevents us from getting to Heaven. God cannot tolerate sin in Heaven. If you want to spend eternity with God in Heaven, you need to be saved from sin. This can only be done by someone who is completely without sin – and that person is Jesus Christ. He is the only one who can pay for you to go to Heaven. He paid the price with his blood on the cross."

So, what do I have to do to get to Heaven? God has invited us all. There are lots of passages in the Bible which urge us to accept God's invitation:

- **"Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to"** (Lk 13 v 24).
- **"Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near"** (Mt 4 v 17).
- **"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it"** (Mt 7 v 13-14).
- **"Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called"** (I Tim 6 v 12).
- **"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved"** (Acts 16 v 31).

These are all stirring and urgent invitations. You can feel the urgency and earnest sincerity of the texts. The only reasonable thing to do is to accept the invitation by praying a prayer something like the following:

“Lord Jesus, I have read that I can only get into Heaven through you. I want to be with you in Heaven one day. Please save me from hell, the place I deserve to go to as a result of all my sin. Because you loved me so much, you died for me on the cross and took upon yourself my punishment. You see all my sin – from my childhood until now. You know every single thing I did wrong – the things that come to mind now and the things that I am no longer aware of. You know my heart. Before you, I am like an open book. As I am, I cannot go to Heaven and be with you. I am so sorry and ask you to forgive my sins. Come into my life and make it new. Help me to give up all that is not right in your sight. Help me to develop good habits. Help me to understand your Word, the Bible. Help me to understand when you speak to me and give me an obedient heart so that I can do your will. Be my Lord from now on. I want to follow you. Show me the right way to go in every aspect of my life. Thank you that you have heard my prayer, that I am a child of God and that, one day, I will be with you in Heaven. Amen.”

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