

## Minister's Message – May 2013

### Heaven

'I did not see any god up here' are words widely attributed to Yuri Gagarin, the first man to orbit the earth in space. Whether or not the quote is true, it is a common misunderstanding portrayed in cartoons depicting God as an old man sitting on the clouds. But God is a Spirit, not a man. 'No one has seen God at any time' (John 1:18).

The word 'heaven' may lead some to think that God is 'up in space' somewhere. I have not heard of any miners saying 'we did not see any god down here'. 'Heaven' is a very common word in the Bible (267 times in the Old Testament and 237 times in the New Testament). It is found in the first chapter and in the penultimate chapter of the Bible. It is often used in reference to the creation as that which is above the earth (Genesis 1:1). God, of course, is not part of the creation. God put the 'lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and it was so' (Genesis 1:15). In this verse heaven is a physical place.

Heaven is all that is beyond the earth, including the planets and the stars – so called heavenly bodies. When man sinned the whole creation was subjected to futility and it groans as with birth pains (Romans 8:20-22). God will create a new heaven; the present heavens will pass away (Isaiah 65:17, II Peter 3:10).

The word 'heaven' is also used in a different but related sense – a metaphysical sense. It is the name given to God's dwelling place. 'Thus says the Lord, 'Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool'' (Isaiah 66:1). It is different in that it is not a place we see with our physical eyes – no matter how far we go out into space. It is related in that it is a high and exalted place – there is no higher place (Isaiah 57:15).

God's throne is in heaven. He is on the throne as creator and judge. Jesus taught his disciples to pray to 'Our Father who is in heaven'. In heaven there is a 'heavenly host' including angels and the 'spirits of just men made perfect' (Hebrews 12:22-23).

Jesus spoke a lot about the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. He began preaching saying 'The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe the gospel' (Mark 1:15). Jesus spoke of people entering the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 7:21). The apostle Paul spoke of those who believe in Jesus being citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20).

This kingdom of heaven is 'not of this world', but it is no less real than the kingdoms that are. It is difficult to comprehend this place where God has his throne, but we dismiss this truth at our peril. Do not turn away as Pontius Pilate did (John 18:38). The words of a children's chorus may help:

*Heaven is a wonderful place,  
Filled with glory and grace,  
I want to see my Saviour's face,  
Heaven is a wonderful place.*

John saw into heaven in a vision from God. He saw dazzling beauty, beauty beyond words. He heard God on the throne and Jesus with him being praised day and night (Revelation 4, 5). At the resurrection and final judgment God will consign 'anyone not found written in the Book of Life' to the lake of fire. The new heaven and new earth will then appear. It will be illuminated by God rather than the sun and the moon (Revelation 21:23). It will be the answer to billions of prayers from millions of people praying 'your kingdom come'. Only people whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will enter this kingdom of God and dwell there for eternity. Will you be there?

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*