

PRESENTLY HEAVENLY-MINDED
1 Corinthians 15:58; 2 Peter 3:14; 1 John 3:3

Our short answer question today deals with the saints who were raised and came out of tombs in conjunction with Jesus' resurrection. Matthew [Matthew 27:51-53] is the only gospel writer that records this. This was one of the miracles that took place around His death—along with the rending of the veil in the temple, the earthquake, etc. The earthquake broke the tombs open and some “holy” people were raised to life. Although they were raised to life, they did not appear to anyone in Jerusalem until after Jesus' resurrection. This, no doubt, symbolized the truth that those who belong to Jesus share in His triumph over death. His resurrection guarantees ours. His power is sufficient to do that.

We used to have a touch lamp on the night stand next to our bed. During a storm with lightning, the lamp would always turn on. It was touched by the power in the air. God demonstrated the power of the resurrection with this miracle.

The text does not tell us what happened to those people after they scared the day lights out of those they appeared to. Apparently, they were like Lazarus and died again in time.

For our message today, we are looking at living in the present in light of heaven.

The statement: “so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good”, which I do not hear or read as much as I used to, is completely wrong. On the contrary the scripture tells us, while living here, to set our minds on things above. If we are not presently heavenly-minded, we become vagrants rather than pilgrims [vagrants wandering aimlessly rather than pilgrims moving to a destination]. We forget that what we do here matters. We don't live with the right perspective and sense of urgency. There are too many Christians simply reacting to one circumstance after another and making decisions based on what appears to be in the present rather than walking with a clear agenda. There are too many today that have made money the master and all treasure is earth-side. Schedules revolve around the person, with God inserted if there is time. Too many Christians today live by the American dream rather than by kingdom agenda. How many of us are living as if we are passing through rather than permanent residents here?

How much of our living this week was ordered by thoughts of heaven? Young people don't think about heaven. It is too far off. Our problem is that we think of heaven as a place that we go when we die. Who wants to think about dying? But heaven is about the plan of God, the agenda of God that helps us to know what this life should be about. It's like both looking at the architectural plans of a great building and seeing the completed project and being sent to earth to build that building. It is being given the class syllabus upon enrolling in a course. It tells us what to do and what is required of us. What we know about heaven should permeate everything we do.

You have heard me tell before that the reason I went into the doctoral work at seminary was mainly because of one of my professors in OT. He took an interest in me and encouraged me to consider continuing my work. I am convinced [and of course God could have intervened in another way] that left to my own thinking, I would have done only masters work and stopped. The Lord had called me to the ministry, so I went to seminary. I was going to go through the basic program and then leave. I was not thinking of anything beyond that. But then one man introduced a future to me and, after he did, I began to look at what I was presently doing in a completely different way. I got more dedicated to my studies. I chose to take the course of study with “languages.” I began to take all of my elective courses in the area of the OT. It caused Brenda and me to postpone having a family. It changed the decision we made on housing. It resulted in my first pastorate. Seeing my future altered everything. Likewise, when we are pulled aside and told about heaven—a future reality—it ought to change our whole lives.

To reinforce this, let me point something out to you in the Bible. After devoting a complete chapter to the resurrection of Jesus, our coming resurrection and our resurrection bodies that will inhabit final heaven, concludes the chapter this way:

Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain [1 Corinthians 15:58].

In a passage talking about the future and our bodies in the final heaven, Paul concludes with a “therefore” and addresses how we live now. He challenges us, understanding our destination, to abound [give self fully to] to the Lord’s work because what is done for Him will not be wasted. We will not stand with empty hands which we will do if we work for money, honor and the temporaries. What we do for the Lord here will not be erased or forgotten. Don’t worry about planting roses in a garden that is about to be dug up for a building site. What you do in the Lord will not be in vain. Every act of love, every time you brought glory to God, brought honor to Jesus, every time you ministered, etc.-- none of these things will be lost.

So, today, I want to talk about living presently heavenly-minded. I want to deal with that subject in two ways. I want to talk about living in light of what is going to happen. Then, I want to talk about living in light of what has already happened

I. Live Now In Light Of What Is Going To Happen

Have you considered that we are called upon to do things now that will not be necessary in the final heaven? For example, you will not need to share the gospel in heaven. We will rejoice over the gospel but we will not need to share it with someone for the purpose of redemption. There will be not one around you in heaven that is not there by the grace of God and celebrating the Lamb that was slain. So, what are we waiting for here? The clock is ticking. Presently, we are called to be ambassadors for the King. He desires to make His appeal through us. I read nothing in the final heaven about ambassadors for salvation purposes. That role is over. Fulfill that role now.

We are to act as salt and light because we encounter decay and darkness. There is no decay and darkness in heaven. So if we do not apply salt here and shine a light here, we miss the opportunity. If we do not engage the culture with truth now and live a life that makes a difference now, we will lose the opportunity. Our conduct needs to leave its stamp on the world now. [Give your employer your best, you are not the critical one, you are the first to help a colleague in need, you are the last with a barbed comment, you work for the interests of others, etc.]. Don’t live without the vision of your witness.

This is the only chance that we will have to give a cup of cold water in His name, to feed the hungry and to clothe someone. There will be no one needing cold water, food and clothing in heaven.

This is our only opportunity to lay up treasure in heaven. Laying up treasure is an earth-side opportunity.

There are other things I could mention, but the point is this, there are things we must do here because those things will not be done in heaven.

There is also another side. We should be doing those things now that we know we will be doing in heaven.

When I was in the doctoral program in seminary, my study carrel [enclosed place of study in the library stacks] was adjacent to Steve Hick’s. When Steve finished his work, he was on his way to be a missionary in Mexico. Because of that, Steve was readying his stomach for Mexico. So often we would go to Poncho’s, a Mexican restaurant in New Orleans, for Mexican food. He would select some really spicy dishes, with hot peppers, to get ready for what was coming. One night he coaxed me to try one of the peppers and I found out will quickly that God had not called me to Mexico.

As we said last Sunday, if we know that we are going to reign in heaven, extend the rule of God here now. Let Him reign over our lives, over our homes, over our work, the class, practice.

We know that we are going to be glorifying God in heaven. So, we should be living to glorify Him now. Don’t behave in a way that diminishes His glory. Do what enhances it. Piper says that we most glorify God when we are most satisfied in Him. Are we satisfied in Him now?

II. Live Now In Light Of What Has Happened

As we talk about the consummation of history and the final heaven, we need to understand that the new world we anticipate has already broken into our present. We need to wake up to the fact that we are already a part of the new world.

God's new world burst into our world when Jesus came out of the tomb. He has the resurrected, glorified body that we will have when the age is consummated. Because the resurrection of Jesus, which will be like our resurrection, has happened in our present world, its implications and effects are to be felt within our own world now. After His resurrection Jesus said that He had all authority in heaven and earth. Now, right now, under His authority and with the enablement of the Holy Spirit we are to be agents working in this world reflecting how it will ultimately be. We are to be signposts.

The old saying, "so heavenly minded that we are no earthly good" assumes that earth and heaven are detached and have nothing to do with each other. But in the Bible heaven and earth are made for each other. They are a single created reality.

In Genesis God created His sanctuary on earth so He could dwell and fellowship with man. Heaven and earth were combined. Following sin's disastrous effects, Jesus came to earth from heaven emphasizing again the union of heaven and earth. He is one at home on earth and in heaven. In the coming consummation, there will be the union of heaven and earth. For us that union presently exists. We who have shared in Jesus's death and resurrection are presently seated with Him [Colossians 2:12; 3:1-3]. We are to living now in light of heaven.

We have all heard of those instances where a student in grade school is so bright that, while still in grade school, he is allowed to enroll in college courses. So, while he continues to take courses in grade school and be with his friends, at the same time he is also taking college courses that are really seen as a part of the future. But he combines both of these in his life. His future has broken into his present and his present and future converge.

That is what is happening to us. We live in light of the coming new world now. What does that mean? It means that our lives and the mission of the church reflect right now the new creation.

It is not that we live here in misery, tears, hopelessness, need and one day experience heaven which reverses all of that. The new creation has broken into this world and we know how it will be. We are to address the misery, the tears, hopeless and need right now because we know how it is going to be. In the new creation all will be healed. We are to bring healing now. In the new creation our joy will be full. We are to bring joy now. During Joy Prom one of our men hosted a lady paralyzed and in a wheel chair. As he pushed her through the building and she experienced the different things, he asked her what she thought about everything. She said, "I think this is the way heaven will be." [He told her that in heaven she would not be in a wheelchair.] Heaven's joy is coming but the church should be bringing joy to lives right now.

In heaven all needs will be met. The church should be meeting needs now, because the new creation has already invaded. The church in Acts, after the resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit, understood that. They were not waiting until heaven. The scripture [Acts 2:45] said that they gave to anyone as he had need. The believers were together and had everything in common. They were living in light of heaven in the present. To labor for a better future in this world—for the poor, the sick, the lonely, those enslaved, hungry, downtrodden—is because of the hope that is in the future. Jesus' ministry was about doing things now that He was promising long-term in the future.

We seek to wipe away tears now, because He is going to wipe away all tears. There will be no injustice in heaven. So fight for justice now.

As we do so, remember what Paul said:

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain [1 Corinthians 15:58].

The scripture also reminds us that our personal lives are to reflect the truth that the new creation has already invaded our present. Let me give a few illustrations of the application of that.

Holiness. When we see ourselves as not going to be in His presence but already there, we will not spend our time watching pornography here. We are already seated next to Jesus. When we understand that we purify ourselves now. The more we contemplate the truth, the more we will strive for holiness. The Holy Spirit is present to help us live holy now.

What kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God....[2 Peter 3:11-12].

But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure [1 John 3:3].

Scripture. Studying scripture is not some duty to perform. It isn't just there to tell me about the New Creation, but to foster the work of the New Creation in me right now.

Prayer. Through Jesus, God is my Father now. The intimacy that Jesus knew with the Father is something that I have now. Talk to Him. Claim victory now.

Love. We don't love now because it is a duty. We love because it is our destiny.

Delayed gratification. In the Beatitudes, Matthew 5:2-12, except for "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven", which has present fulfillment, all the rest have a future fulfillment. Because I am so aware of the reality of the new creation, if I have to experience delayed gratification on some things now, so be it.

The New Creation has its outposts right now in you and me and thus the church. As we live our lives in light of heaven and as people see through us something of how it is going to be, perhaps they will want to go with us. That is ambassadorship—God making His appeal through us.

I want us to realize that the last thing the devil wants us to do is to set our minds on things above and live presently heavenly-minded. But that is exactly what God expects of us.