

## REIGNING IN HEAVEN Selected Verses

Our short answer question for today is, “Are we going to be the same age in heaven at which we died”? That means if we died young, will we be young? If we died old, we will be old? If one died as a child, will he be a child?

If we die old, and are the same in heaven, might we feel cheated? You’re thinking—I don’t want to get locked into eternity looking like this! That will be like going to a class reunion and thinking, “What happened to these people?” You would rather it be more like, “I think she’s had some work done.” Most of our thoughts about this are self-centered. How will I look in heaven? What will be my age in heaven because I looked better at a particular age than I look now? It is about our vanity. What if there are no mirrors there? You will have people at the river, clear as crystal, trying to see their reflection.

Most problematic are those that die as babies or children. Will they be babies and children in heaven? Isaiah 11 talks about “the child will put his hand into the viper’s nest and the infant playing near the hole of a cobra.” That is an edenic setting descriptive of the final heaven. So, could there be children there. Yes.

The truth is that we cannot answer this question. The Bible tells us enough about heaven but not everything about heaven. We have to live in that tension.

But let me share some thoughts and also tell you what others have said throughout Christian history. I don’t think that age is a factor in heaven. Hence, we cannot think of ourselves as a certain age. Age has to do with this life. There will be no limitations and frailties of our bodies, so in that sense we will be “youthful.” Jonathan Edwards said that there would be perpetual “youthfulness” in heaven. Others, like Thomas Aquinas, believed that we would be in a state of optimal development [like when we were 20-30’s—your wedding pictures]. But what about those who were not their best or strongest at that age? Some think that children in heaven will grow to that optimal development.

I think the trust is that none of these issues are going to be issues in the final heaven. It is going to be wonderful. We are going to be full of life and joy. We will have no bodily restrictions. We will be ageless. God is going to handle all of that. If the final heaven is as glorious as we know it will be, I wouldn’t waste any time worrying about your age and appearance there.

I was a history major in college. So, I had my fill reading about rulers--from the Habsburg dynasty, the Tudors of England, the Czars of Russia, the dynasties of China. But I also know about the emperors of Rome and the kings of Judah and Israel. The bottom line on rulers is—there were and are too many bad ones and too few good ones. Many were incompetent. Most rulers are/were selfish, spoiled, abusive and egomaniacs. The saying is usually true, “Power corrupts.”

So, given the history of reigning, learning from scripture that we are going to reign in heaven needs some careful understanding. How could it be heaven if we and those we know will reign there? That is really not a positive thought.

Like the matter of rewards in heaven, reigning is not something that we have proposed. It is what God has revealed to us. God’s people reigning is found in the OT, talked about by Jesus in the Gospels, spoken of by Paul in the epistles and John in the Revelation. Listen to just two verses:

***If we endure, we will also reign with Him [2 Timothy 2:12].***

***The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever [Revelation 22:3-5].***

Perfectly possessed by God, we shall serve Him by reigning along with the King. This is an amazing thought, but it is the plan of God.

As the rest of the disciples, we can get a little incensed at the mother of James and John asking—with their approval, of course-- that her sons be able to reign along with Jesus in His kingdom [Matthew 20:20-22]. She must have been thinking it was “first come first serve.” She was actually on the right track. However, the time of reigning had not come. But it is coming.

The subject of reigning in heaven brings up a lot of questions. Let’s begin with “why” we will reign. We will reign because God’s plan has always been for His people to reign and, so, His plan is going to be achieved. Let’s go back to the plan of God before sin entered the world. God created Adam and Eve to reign. It was His command to them and a part of being made in the image of God.

***Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures of that moved along the ground” [Genesis 1:26]***

God is sovereign and reigns. That is good. The need of government did not come as a result of sin. It was already there. He made man in His image to reign with Him—to be viceroys. Man was to multiply and fill the earth and extend the life-giving wisdom and purpose of God as he filled the earth. That was God’s plan and His plan had “good” stamped all over it. In fact, what God did was very good.

The problem and twisting of the plan came when man did not rule over the creation but allowed a creature to rule over him. Adam and Eve failed at *Reigning 101*. The divine ordering of creation was rejected by the human pair. Harmony gave way to chaos. Creation was subjected to frustration and decay [Romans 8:20-21], injustice, power abuse, etc.

To bring us back to the plan of God, God’s Son took on human flesh and fulfilled the expectation of human vicegerency—reigning. He inaugurated a kingdom [the Kingdom of God] over which He was King, defeated the devil and will reign until He has put all of His enemies under His feet. Then, He will hand the kingdom over to His father. Jesus reigns and extends the rule of God over everything and then presents the whole cosmos to the Father.

***Then the end will come, when He hands over the kingdom to God the Father after He has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet [1 Corinthians 15:24-25].***

Right now God reigns. Jesus reigns. But their authority is not unchallenged [people refuse to let Him reign over their lives, nations refuse to let Him reign over them]. The battle for the control of the earth rages. Human kingdoms will rise and fall until Christ sets up His kingdom that forever replaces them.

***He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed [Daniel 7:14].***

With the consummation of history, the authority of God will be complete and He will reign through His Son. Because we are joint heirs with Christ, we will reign with Him. Ruling is what the family of God will do.

***Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings in order that we may share in His glory [Romans 8:17].***

Adam and his bride [queen] failed to rule. Jesus and His bride will succeed. The plan of God will be accomplished.

“Where” will we reign? We will reign over the new creation—the united New Heavens and Earth.

“Over whom” and “what” will we reign? It will be other people and angels and the new creation. We will reign over and be reigned over.

What is the purpose in our reigning? To answer that, I think we have to look for clues with the original mandate in Genesis. It will be to extend the rule of God over His creation. It will be to enable, equip, guide, and share God’s wisdom with those under our authority [Alcorn, p. 212]. Whatever the purpose and intent of ruling was from the beginning, it was good. It would have been to bring about harmony, peace, blessing and the full potential out of creation. It may well be that creation will continue

to unfold and we will reign over that which is continuing to unfold to the glory of God. Today when a people flourish under a righteous and beneficent ruler, it gives us a glimpse, as limited as that glimpse is, as to how it will be in that day. Gone will be the incompetent, selfish, corrupt, inefficient, arrogant ruling that is a perversion of what God intended.

Think of it this way. We will extend the rule of God. How is the rule of God now for us who have made Jesus Lord and King of our lives? Have we been blessed or hurt? Have we withered or flourished? Have we experienced freedom or constriction? Have we become more of what we were meant to be or less? Do we know the benefits now of living under the rule and authority of Christ? The answer is "yes." How is it when He rules over your home? How is it when He rules over the church? The benefits of Christ's rule now give us a sense of how the benefit of the rule will be in the New Creation.

The way we extend His kingdom now is through our obedience to Him. We declare His message of salvation, we are ambassadors allowing Him to make His appeal through us, we give so that the word and work of God can go forward, we live as salt and light, etc. Can you imagine what a completely obedient people can do to continue to extend the rule of God?

Obviously our ruling involves responsibility. You may think that you have had enough responsibility in this life and you want to kick back and relax in heaven. We are tired. When we think like that we are seeing work and responsibility as it presently is in a cursed world. With the curse removed it will be completely different. Doing what God wants and what we have been created to do will bring us the deepest joy.

Listen to this verse:

***"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness'"***  
***[Matthew 25:23]!***

When we are doing what God wants, we will not only have happiness and joy. We will share His joy and happiness, which is inexhaustible.

But notice how in this verse the faithfulness of stewardship now is tied to that of the future.

***"You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things."***

What we do now is preparing us for what is coming. So what is God expecting of us now? Anticipating reigning in Heaven, what is God looking for now?

1. He is expecting us to be faithful as royal priests.

***But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into wonderful light [1 Peter 2:9].***

As royalty and ones who will reign with Him, we are to minister now showing what the rule of Christ looks like in our lives and its benefits. We are to show the power of forgiveness, grace and mercy, prayer, care. In the OT when the priest was consecrated for his task, the blood of the sacrificial animal was placed on his right ear lobe, his right thumb and his right big toe. He was to hear the word of God, do the work of God and walk in the way of God. We are to declare praise of Him who brought us out of darkness.

2. We are to extend the rule of God in our places of authority.

As a husband, you are seeking to extend the rule of God over your marriage and home. You are to extend His love, grace, wisdom. You seek to bring the greatest potential out of those under your care. Parents are seeking to extend the rule of God over their children. They pray for them, live godly lives before them, instruct them in His truth, so that the child will want to invite the rule of God over their lives. Bosses and supervisors are to seek to extend the rule of God over those under their watch. They are fair, gracious, wise, so that people realize the blessing of being under the rule of God. Owners of businesses seek to do that with their companies. Doctors seek to do that with their patients. Teachers are seeking to do that in the classroom so that the students flourish.

3. We are to assume a position now that is opposite of the ruling of the world.

***“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” [Matthew 20:25-28].***

If you want to be ready for what’s coming, grab a towel and serve. Humble yourself. In the new creation, God will use those to rule who followed the example of Christ here. Zechariah said that the King, righteous and having salvation comes gentle and riding on a donkey [Zechariah 9:9].

One day all of creation will experience the blessing of the rule of God. But you can personally experience His rule over your life right now.