

HEAVEN

Romans 8:19-22; Ephesians 1:9-10; 6:12; Philippians 3:13-14; Colossians 3:1-2; 1 John 3:3; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-3; 22:3

In the series of messages that we began in January, we started with the subject of the Cross—the way God justly dealt with human sin. God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. He wanted to reclaim us as His people, so He could have a relationship with us and be with us. To talk about us dwelling with God and God dwelling with us is to talk about Heaven.

We moved to our second series, Turf Wars, and said that as we win the battle of the mind, masters and heart regarding money and possessions, we will lay up treasures in Heaven.

So, now, we come to the series on Heaven—the place where the redeemed will be with God and the place we have sent the treasures. We need to know about Heaven. It is our eternal and final home. Each week we will do two things: deal with something that the scripture teaches about heaven in a message and address one often-asked question about heaven.

Recommended book: Heaven, by Randy Alcorn.

Question

Will we know each other in heaven? George MacDonald asks: Should we be greater fools there than we are here? Here we know and recognize each other by laugh, voice, walk, appearance, etc. That is true though we have only partial knowledge here. In heaven we will have full knowledge. Of course, we will know each other. In fact, we will not have to “get to know” anyone. We will not be strangers to one another. We will be family.

In 1982 a movie appeared in the theaters that was a big hit. It was entitled ET [for Extra-Terrestrial]. Many of us saw the movie. Though that was 30 years ago, some of the younger generation may have seen the movie on DVD. I thought of ET this week as I was preparing this message on Heaven. The story line of the movie has some similarities to the present existence of a believer in that the Bible tells us that we are aliens here, looking forward to going home. Going home was the longing of ET’s heart. Though he had found good friends here in Elliot and others, who loved and helped him, earth was not where he belonged.

We have “homes” here—where we are loved, cared for, where we feel comfortable and the most at ease, etc. Home is a goal for us when we have been on a long, tiring trip. Take all the best that home is to you and understand that Heaven is truly home. We have heard statements like, “All good things must come to an end” and “It doesn’t get any better than this.” Both of those statements are wrong. All good things will not come to an end. The best hasn’t even begun yet. And it will get better than the best of whatever we’ve experienced. That is Heaven.

During my ministry I have heard and read statements like: If you have your head in the clouds [referring to thinking about heaven] and your feet off the ground, practically speaking, you are no good. Or the statement: Too heavenly minded to be any good earthly.

I have never met any of those types of people. I have never known anyone ruined because of their focus on heaven. In fact, it is the opposite of that. I think our problem is that we have too weak of a view or uninformed view of heaven. Thinking and knowing about heaven has great benefits for here and now. It shifts the center of gravity and changes the perspective on life. When we understand that Heaven is our home, then wasting our lives on things that don’t matter and won’t last is seen as foolishness. It helps us deal with pain and sorrow. Anticipating Heaven does not eliminate pain, but it certainly puts it in perspective. Anticipating Heaven gives us hope, because it is the sure promise of God. It is an incentive for holy lives.

Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure [1 John 3:3].

Focusing on the home of righteousness will help us not to be easy prey for the Devil and his lies.

Living mindful of heaven doesn’t hurt. It helps. In fact, the scripture tells us to focus on Heaven.

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things [Colossians 3:1-2].

The word “set” means to keep seeking [as Jesus came to seek the lost]. That kind of thinking helps discipline my living here, reminding me that this is not my home. It gives me an incentive to live righteously because of where I am going. It helps me reset my goals.

...Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus [Philippians 3:13-14].

Focusing on Heaven has great benefits. But another thing that greatly benefits is to clearly understand what is meant by Heaven? What do you think of when you hear the word “heaven”? Cloud floating, harp playing, the only alternative to hell but better than hell, white robes [hopefully without starch], boring sameness. Where do we get our ideas? It is most likely a cut and paste approach from what we have heard, what we imagine, what we see on TV and in movies and read in some book. But what does the Scripture teach about Heaven? When most people think of heaven, Christians included, they think of a place “up”, where Jesus presently is. That is correct. We think of Heaven as the place we go to after we die. That, too, is correct. There is a Heaven where we will be with Jesus after we die. But that is only part of the scriptural teaching about Heaven. It doesn’t end there. If God were to end history and take us to heaven [the intermediate heaven] or if God just intends to gather all of us there as we die one by one and remain there, then earth would be left as a testimony to the devastation of sin [like a junk yard on the side of a highway—abandoned rusty heaps]. The God of victory is not going to abandon earth and give the devil bragging rights. He is going to redeem and refashion this world and this is going to be the location of the Eternal Heaven. The Bible clearly teaches this in Revelation 21-22 [and other places]. There is an Intermediate Heaven [probably the best designation] where God’s people will be until the consummation of history. But when Jesus returns, there are events that will begin to unfold which will result in the fashioning of New Heavens and Earth where God will dwell with His people. I think that many Christians get no further than the Intermediate Heaven when thinking about heaven. To do that is to have a restricted view of Heaven. We have that restricted view of heaven because we do not understand the plan of God, because we have too narrow a view of redemption and because we have not fully considered the resurrection. Let’s look at these three.

The plan of God. God’s plan is to unite all things in heaven and earth under Christ.

And He made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ [Ephesians 1:9-10].

Presently, Heaven is God’s home. Earth is our home. The incarnate Jesus forever linked the two together. You have that kind of union in Eden where Heaven [God’s home] and earth [man’s home] came together in a temple that God had created for the union. However, that union was severed because of sin. God could have destroyed Adam and Eve and started over. Or, if had decided to forgive them and take them to heaven where He was, the earth would have been left as a testimony to the damage of sin. But His plan was to redeem sinners, bring them to Himself and ultimately live with them in a place where heaven and earth are united. That is the Eternal Heaven.

Too narrow a view of redemption. We usually think of redemption in terms of our individual salvation. It is about me being saved. But redemption goes further. It involves the earth and the heavens. The power of the cross not only brings redemption to us but also to the earth. Our redemption has undone, is undoing and will completely undo the damage done to us by sin and its curse. But for there to be complete victory the extent of redemption has to go as far as the extent and consequences of sin. For there to be complete victory, the curse of sin will have to be completely removed. That involves the redemption of the earth and the heavens.

...creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God [Romans 8:21].

No longer will there be any curse [Revelation 22:3].

We know the earth has been cursed. We learned about that in Genesis 3. But the heavens are also tainted by sin and rebellion.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms [Ephesians 6:12].

God is going to redeem all of His creation. His plan will be fully realized when He dwells with a redeemed people on a redeemed earth. That is the Eternal Heaven spoken of in Revelation 21.

We need to understand that when the Bible talks about the creation being liberated or as in 2 Peter 3:8-11, disappearing, it is not a wiping the slate clean and beginning over. It is a “loosing” from bondage and a transformation. It is like our redemption. When we came to Christ, we were changed. We became new creations. But although we were new people, we were the same people. We were not destroyed. After my conversion, I answered to the same name, lived in the same house, my clothes still fit, etc. It was still me. There is a continuity factor in God’s redeeming work. The continuity factor testifies to victory. He takes fallen and sinful people and restores them to His original design. He will do the same for creation. The New Earth will be a changed Earth but still the same Earth.

The continuity factor is seen with the resurrection of Jesus. The empty tomb is the ultimate proof that Jesus’s resurrection body was the same body that died on the cross. If not, the old body would have been left in the tomb and death would not have been defeated. Jesus was raised. He had a spiritual body, but He was not a spirit. He ate food, met with His disciples and bore the markings from His crucifixion. He was suited for earth.

Now, with Jesus’ resurrection in mind, consider this last point.

Fully considering the resurrection.

Jesus’ resurrection guarantees our resurrection. He was first-fruits. We will be raised bodily—transformed, but bodily. We will be suited for life on earth. Our resurrection triggers the restoration of the cosmos.

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed [Romans 8:19].

And our resurrection calls for a new earth. We were designed to live on the earth. But because of sin, God has to redeem us and resurrect us and put us back on a refashioned earth for that plan to be fulfilled. In the future the Resurrected Lord will live with His resurrected people on a resurrected earth free of the curse of sin. That is Eternal Heaven.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God [Revelation 21:1-3].

The plan of God—dwelling with His people and heaven and earth united—will have been achieved.

If we can see the beauty of the universe now, if the heavens can declare the glory of God now [Psalm 19:1-2] and if the beauty of the earth can take our breath away now, can you imagine what it is going to be like in the New Heavens and Earth—Eternal Heaven? Come, Lord Jesus!

Now are you going to be in Heaven? The scripture says that in the Eternal Heaven God will dwell with His people. Are you one of His? You are if you have been redeemed and transformed, loosed from the bondage of sin. If that is the case, you will reside in Eternal Heaven. If not, you won’t. Reservations are being taken. You have to make the reservation before departure time. I have my confirmed ticket. Do you?