

“Heaven”

III. “Grasping Redemption’s Far Reach”

In part 2 we discussed the reality of the Intermediate Heaven and the Eternal Heaven. This week we continue in learning more about the Eternal Heaven and the New Earth and why the work of Jesus is so significant for eternity.

-Have you ever longed for a place? Been homesick? Desired to go to your favorite vacation spot?

-What is it in us that makes us yearn to be in a place we are not?

Could it be that we live in a sin-corrupted earth, an environment not *natural* for us? Sin and death, poverty and war, are not *natural* for us, rather a result of our rebellion against God.

-Did you know that we are homesick for Eden?

We long for what the first man and first woman once enjoyed. Every attempt at human progress has been an attempt to overcome what was lost at the Fall.

Our desire for Eden is built into us, perhaps on a genetic level.

*Remember, we were CREATED by a CREATOR who desires to have a relationship with us, in a place He created; a real place, a physical place: Eden. Adam was formed from the dust of the earth, forever establishing our connection to the earth (Genesis 2:7). **Just as we are made from the earth, we are made for the earth. Therefore, it is God’s desire to complete His plan, and have us spend an eternity on a new, redeemed, perfect earth, residing with Him.**

Clues to the Nature of the Eternal Heaven

Scripture gives us images full of hints and implications about Heaven.

Hebrews 11:10, 13:14 tells us Heaven is a **city**.

Architect is God.

Has a foundation.

Everlasting.

*If Heaven is described as a city, shouldn’t it include what cities normally include? Buildings, culture, art, music, athletics, gatherings of people, conversations, work?

Hebrews 11:16 also calls Heaven a **country**.

Countries include: territories, rulers, national interests, pride in their identity, citizens who are both diverse and unified.

Only God is eternal and self-existent. All else is created. Heaven is not synonymous with God, nor is it part of his essential being. Heaven is a place God created, and chooses to dwell.

2 Peter 3:13 tells us there will be a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Revelation 21-22 tells us that God promises a New Earth, and a New City.

God doesn't promise us a non-earth, but a New Earth. If our present earth includes: atmosphere, mountains, water, trees, people, houses, cities, buildings, streets, rivers, etc., why wouldn't the New Earth? Many of these features are mentioned in Rev. 21-22.

1 Corinthians 15:40-44 tells us that we'll have resurrected bodies. We can all imagine what a new body would be like, because we have a present body on earth right now! We need to start looking at the present earth and imagining a New Earth! The present earth is as much a valid reference point for the New Earth as our present bodies are a valid reference point for envisioning our new bodies.

*When we see earthly beauty (i.e. waterfalls, beautiful flowers, a wild animal in its habitat, mountains, oceans, beaches) it should excite us for things awaiting us in Heaven. If we can appreciate beauty on our present earth, despite its being corrupted by sin, imagine how much more beautiful Heaven will be!

Revelation 14:13, Hebrews 4:10-11 tells us we'll rest.

Revelation 22:3 tells us we'll serve Christ, *working* for His glory.

**This is why it is so important to SERVE on this earth, NOW! It's good practice for eternity!*

Revelation 21:19-21 list jewels that will be in Heaven, and these jewels are among the hardest substances known. This indicates the material solidity of the New Earth.

John 14:2-3, Jesus promises us a *place* that He will prepare, a place with *dwelling places*, or *houses*, and *many rooms*. These are all physical descriptions, not spiritual ones. He then promises to *come back* and get us, to *take us to this place*. This shows movement and physical destination.

Are We Just "Passing" Through?

Is the old gospel song, "This world is not my home, I'm just a-passing through," correct? **Death** is **NOT** a *destination*, but merely a *transition* from life on this sin-corrupt earth, to life on a restored earth. The world as it was, and as it will be, *is* our home.

Remember, Jesus' work on the cross redeemed all creation! As man has been restored with God, the earth will be restored to its original splendor!

The Three Phases of Earth's History

You remember from week 2 that I stated that Heaven has a past, present, and future. So does the Earth. In order to have a biblical worldview, we must have a sense of our past, present, and future, and how they relate to each other. Understanding His original plan helps us understand His ultimate plan for all creation.

Randy Alcorn writes:

In Genesis, God plants the Garden of Eden; in Revelation, he brings down the New Jerusalem, with a garden at its center, to the New Earth. In Eden there's no sin, death, or Curse; on the New Earth, there's no more sin, death, or Curse. In Genesis, the Redeemer is promised; in Revelation, the Redeemer returns. Genesis tells the story of Paradise lost; Revelation tells the story of Paradise regained. In Genesis, humanity's stewardship is squandered; in Revelation, humanity's stewardship is triumphant, empowered by the human and divine King Jesus. These mirror images demonstrate the perfect symmetry of God's plan. We live in the in-between time, hearing echoes of Eden and the approaching footfalls of the New Earth.

This world is our home and we were created to live here. Though marred by sin, God will redeem creation and realize His ultimate plan. And because creation matters to God, all of creation will be in the Eternal Heaven.

Why is Earth's Redemption Essential to God's Plan?

Remember last week we said that we should not start with Heaven and reason down to earth, rather start with earth and reason up to Heaven. Our present earth should NOT be out of our thinking when it comes to spending an eternity in Heaven. Humanity's rebellion, Satan's seduction of man, and the weight of sin on the universe did not catch God by surprise! His plan for redemption superseded man's sin. His redemption plan is for ALL creation. His redemptive plan climaxes on the New Earth. ONLY THEN will all wrongs be made right. Only then will there be no more death, crying or pain (**Revelation 21:1-4**).

Isaiah 65:17 "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth."

Isaiah 66:22 "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me...so will your name and descendants endure."

2 Peter 3:13 "In keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness."

Revelation 21:1 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.”

God’s Earthly Renewal Plan

God could just destroy His original creation and put it all behind Him, but He won’t. Upon creating the heavens and the earth, He called them “very good” (**Genesis 1:31**). He isn’t going to abandon His creation, He is going to restore it!

***Our thinking of Christ’s redemptive work on the cross doesn’t need to stop with mankind. Christ died and rose again to redeem all creation, and one day will bring all creation together, both heaven and earth, and rule it for an eternity (Ephesians 1:10).**

Consider Biblical vocabulary that makes the point clear that God hasn’t given up on His creation: *Reconcile, Redeem, Restore, Recover, Return, Renew, Regenerate, Resurrect.*

Re – a prefix suggesting a return to an original condition that was lost or ruined (*ana* – Greek translation of our English “re” prefix).

*Religion professor, Albert Wolters writes in *Creation Regained*, “[God] hangs on to his fallen creation and salvages it. He refuses to abandon the work of his hands – if fact, he sacrifices his own Son to save his original project. Humankind, which has botched its original mandate and the whole creation along with it, is given another chance in Christ; we are reinstated as God’s managers on earth. The original good creation is to be restored.”

If God had wanted to consign Adam and Eve to Hell and start over, He could have. But He didn’t. Instead, He chose to redeem what He started with. God’s redemption was written about immediately after the Fall. God declares in **Genesis 3:15**, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

Consider what theologian, Dr. Grant C. Richison writes:

“And I will put enmity”

The context of this verse is the fall of Adam and Eve. God is speaking to the serpent who is a personification of Satan. God desires no coalition between himself and Satan. The two are mutually exclusive.

***“Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed.”***

God draws a distinction between “your seed” (Satan’s seed) and “her Seed” (Jesus). “Her Seed” refers to the humanity (incarnation) of Christ. Notice that this passage does not

say that the “Seed” was of Adam. This is an inference of the virgin birth. The New Testament calls Jesus the “Seed” (Galatians 3:16).

**“He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel.”**

God is predicting the defeat of Satan by the coming of Christ, the Messiah. God is drawing the battle lines between himself and Satan.

“He shall bruise your head” is a mortal wound. The power of Satan is crushed by the cross of Christ.

Yet even at the moment of the first fall, God promises a solution to their sin. At the fall Satan bruised the heel of Jesus. Sin was the cause of Christ going to the cross. At the cross Christ will crush Satan’s head. One is a non-lethal and the other a lethal act. At the cross Jesus dealt Satan a fatal blow. There he paid for the penalty of sin fully.

Christ not only paid for the sins of the world on the cross but he defeated Satan there (Colossians 2:14,15). Satan was executed at the cross.

“And you shall bruise His heel” refers to the death of Christ. Whether this refers literally to the heels of Jesus pressed against the cross, is not important. Jesus was bruised at the cross (Isaiah 53:10).

***With this in mind, think about the miracles and ministry of Jesus, and consider the larger view of redemption’s sweeping salvation plan.**

All of Jesus’ recorded miracles, with the exception of cursing the fig tree, are miracles of *restoration*.

SO...what is behind so many Christian’s notion that God is going to destroy the earth and be done with it? Our theology of God is weak, perhaps, and we see Him as a thwarted inventor whose creation failed, who, realizing His mistake, trashes most of what He made. But Scripture teaches us the opposite! God will not surrender the Earth to the trash heap, He will RESTORE it!

Will the earth we know now come to an end? YES. (**Revelation 21:1**). To a *final* end? NO!

*Redemption buys back God’s original design. God’s command to Noah to “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (**Genesis 9:1**) is the same command God had given to Adam in **Genesis 1:28**. So God clearly has not “changed his mind” from His original plan. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, He has offered redemption for mankind, and will redeem all of His creation!

*God has tied His glory to the earth, and everything connected with it: mankind, animals, trees, rivers, *everything!* **Isaiah 6:3** proclaims, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory.” The Hebrew can be translated *the fullness*

of the whole earth is His glory. In other words, the earth is a manifestation of God's glory. So it is not disposable, it is essential to God's plan.

***So is the New Earth the Old Earth restored?**

In **Acts 3:21**, Peter preaches that Jesus "must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."

Notice: *everything*.

Who did God send His promises through? The prophets.

Read the prophets and you will see that they are not concerned with some far-off spirit realm of disembodied spirits. They are concerned about the land, the inheritance, the city of Jerusalem, and the earth they walked on. The Messiah will come from Heaven to Earth, not take us away from Earth to Heaven.

What about Revelation 21:1 statement about the old Earth passing away? Just as people do not cease to exist when they pass away, neither will the Earth. The old must pass so the new may come. Passing and being annihilated are two different things.

In **Matthew 19:27-28**, Jesus talks about His followers sitting on thrones with Him in Heaven: "At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne..." Notice Jesus did not say after the *destruction* of all things. NO. **RENEWAL!**

The word translated "renewal" in Matthew 19:28 is, in the Greek, *paligenesia*, coming from two words which means, "new genesis" or "coming back from death to life." **This is what Jesus' incarnation, death and resurrection secured – a renewed humanity upon a renewed Earth!** The idea of an unearthly eternal heaven is not biblical!!

In **Revelation 21:5**, after the coming together of the New Heaven and the New Earth, Jesus declares, "I am making everything new!"

KJV: uses *make*

Greek: *poieo* – to execute, to accomplish, a one-time act that is not repeated.

A Prophetic Look at the New Earth

In Isaiah's (prophetic) book, chapter 60, he uses precisely the same language as John does in Revelation (apocalyptic book) 21-22, describing the New Earth.

v.5 nations will bring their wealth to the holy city Jerusalem

v.6-7 people and animals will come from all over to the holy city

v.11 uses the same language as Revelation 21:25-26, saying the gates of the holy city will never be shut and that the riches of the kingdoms will be brought and given to God.

v.17-20 describes peace in the New Jerusalem, and God being the source of light, not the sun or moon. Now look at Revelation 21:23, "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp." And Revelation 22:5 declares, "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..."

v.21 Isaiah describes all people being righteous and possessing the land forever. This HAS to be describing the New Earth, as all people are NOT righteous right now on this present earth. Now compare this with Revelation 21:27, "Nothing impure will ever enter it (the New Earth) nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

***DON'T MISS THIS!!!!** Immediately following the verses we looked at previously in Isaiah 60, **Isaiah begins in chapter 61:1-2**, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor..." THIS IS VERY SIGNIFICANT because Jesus used these exact words, actually reading from Isaiah's scroll, to proclaim HIS ministry on earth (see **Luke 4:18-21**).

The only way the Earth, Mankind, and all of God's creation can be redeemed is by the life and work of Jesus Christ! This was His mission, and he did not hide this!!

Isaiah 65:17-25 also describes the New Earth. In this passage we see that there will be no remembrance of anything unpleasant from the former earth, nor will there be any death, war, or injustice.

This may help in answering the question, "How can I enjoy my eternity in heaven if my loved ones are in hell?"

It's a tough reality, but according to Scripture, we will remember nothing from the former earth that will bring us sadness or grief. We will not witness death or even animals killing one another! There will be no evil, therefore, Satan will have NO AUTHORITY of the air.

***As much as hell is void of God's love, Heaven will be void of Satan's evil!**

In speaking of the New Earth, **Revelation 22:3** declares, "No longer will there be any curse."

If that's all we knew about the New Earth, that would be enough! The only thing keeping us from realizing God's original plan for the earth we live on is the curse of sin. But God will remove the curse. He will restore all things to His original, perfect plan.

Randy Alcorn writes:

Jesus will become the unchallenged, absolute ruler of the universe and then will turn over to his Father the Kingdom he has won (1 Corinthians 15:28). Redeemed humans will be God's unchallenged, delegated rulers of the New Earth. God and humanity will live together in eternal happiness, forever deepening their relationships, as the glory of God permeates every aspect of the new creation!

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IV. “Anticipating Resurrection”

Why is *Resurrection* so important?

John Updike said, “Make no mistake: if He rose at all it was as His body; if the cells’ dissolution did not reverse, the molecules reknit, the amino acids rekindle, the Church will fail. Let us not mock God with metaphor, analogy, sidestepping transcendence; making of the even at parable, a sign painted in the faded credulity of earlier ages; let us walk through the door.”

The PHYSICAL resurrection of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of redemption – both for mankind and for the earth.

R.A. Torrey writes, “We will not be disembodied spirits in the world to come, but redeemed spirits, in redeemed bodies, in a redeemed universe.” It is crucial we understand the resurrection of the body. That is why Paul wrote **1 Corinthians 15**.

Genesis 2:7 says God formed man from the dust of the earth and breathed life into him and he became a *living being*. The Hebrew word for *living being* is *nephesh*, often translated “soul.” The point at which Adam became a living being was when God joined his body (dust) and his spirit (breath) together. Thus, the essence of humanity is BODY and SPIRIT. Your body is as much a part of you as your spirit.

Death is abnormal because it tears apart what God created and intended for eternity. According to the Bible, a disembodied spirit is unnatural and undesirable. **When we die** it isn’t that the real us goes to the intermediate heaven and our fake, or unimportant, part goes to the grave; it’s that part of us goes to the intermediate Heaven and part of us goes to the grave to await our bodily resurrection. *We will never be all that God intended for us to be until our body and spirit are joined together again in resurrection.*

Anthony Hoekema says, “Resurrected bodies are not intended just to float in space, or to flit from cloud to cloud. They call for a *new earth* on which to live and work, glorifying God. The doctrine of the resurrection of the body, in fact, makes no sense whatsoever apart from the doctrine of the new earth.”

In other words, **if you believe in the resurrection of the body (1 Corinthians 15) you MUST believe in the doctrine of the physical new earth (Revelation 21).**

II Corinthians 5:17 says that we are new creatures in Christ, and that the old is gone and the new has come. Just as we are a new version of the old self once we trust Christ as our savior, the New Earth will still be the Earth, but a new or changed Earth.

I Corinthians 15:42-44, Paul says our natural body is raised a spiritual body and that if there is a natural body, there is a spiritual body.

*Some believe this to mean that Paul was saying our fleshly body is exchanged for disembodied spirit. But **body** mean “corporeal” or “flesh and bones.” The word *spiritual* here is an adjective describing *body*, not negating its meaning. A spiritual body is first and foremost a real body, made of flesh and bones, or it couldn't be a *body*.

Paul uses **natural** (Greek: psuchikos – lower or bestial nature, sensual)
He also uses **spiritual** (Greek: pneumatikos – non carnal, divine, regenerate, religious)

Jesus' resurrected body is the model for our resurrected body:

Luke 24:39 The resurrected Jesus declares to his disciples, “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.” Jesus was not a disembodied spirit, floating around!

John 2:19 Jesus says, “Destroy this temple (his body), and I will raise it again in three days.” The body that rose was the body that was destroyed.

Philippians 3:20-21 says that the “the Lord Jesus Christ...will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” If Jesus was flesh and bones in His resurrected body, and you and I will be like Him, we will be flesh and bone in our resurrected body!

John 20 & 21 tells us the resurrected Jesus:

- Continued in his relationships (friendships) that he had previous to his death
- Stood
- Cooked
- Fished
- Ate
- Talked
- Breathed
- Wore clothes

It's clear that Jesus had a physical, resurrected body, and so will we.

What about the resurrection of Creation?

Paul says in **Romans 8:19-23** that all creation awaits our resurrection, and that creation groans as in the pains of childbirth awaiting resurrection of all things.

Remember, as mankind goes, so does the rest of creation. Creation was affected by man's Fall, therefore, creation will be resurrected as mankind will be.

Listen to pp.123-124 of "Heaven" by Randy Alcorn.

Be encouraged that one day, you will be resurrected, as Jesus was, if you have placed your faith and trust in Him as your Lord and Savior! So will heaven and earth!