

“Heaven”

VI. “Celebrating Our Relationship with God”

Recap important points:

-There are two stages of heaven: Intermediate and Eternal Heaven (New Heaven and New Earth)

-When mankind fell, creation fell. Both are under the curse of death.

Therefore, both were redeemed through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

-Jesus’ physical resurrection is the model for our physical resurrection.

-This present Earth will not be annihilated, rather restored, resurrected, redeemed, transformed from this *prototype* to the final New Earth.

-We will rule with Jesus, under His authority, on the New Earth.

-God’s original plan had no “oops” in it. Redemption was part of His original plan, and God’s original plan will be realized (Revelation 21:1).

In part 6, we focus on “Celebrating Our Relationship with God” by answering 3 main questions:

- 1. What will it mean to see God?**
- 2. What will it mean for God to dwell among us?**
- 3. How will we worship God?**

CONSIDER YOUR RELATIONSHIPS here on Earth. Do you have relationships with people or things? Do you have relationships with people you can see, touch, feel, dialogue with, experience things with, etc. or do you have relationships with objects that are incapable of seeing, feeling, talking, etc.?

WHY IS IT SO HARD to imagine having a *relationship* with God?

What will it mean to see God?

When you think of “seeing God,” what do “see” with your mind’s eye? Is your image of God influenced by Christoplatonism? Naturalism? Just as we have established that we will have physical resurrected bodies and live in a physical place called Heaven, we need to understand that seeing God is more than dull stereotypes, and vague and lifeless caricatures.

Psalm 63:1 declares, “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water.”

More than anything, we long for God's presence. Our longing for Heaven is really a longing for God, a longing that involves ALL of us: our inner beings as well as our bodies. Every other heavenly pleasure will derive from and be secondary to His presence.

Revelation 22:4 says that God's servants on the New Earth "will see his face." This is an incredible statement, understanding that prior to this, the Biblical understanding of seeing God's face resulted in death!

-Uzzah was struck dead after touching the Ark of Covenant (**2 Samuel 6:7**)

-Moses was allowed to see God as He passed by, but not allowed to see God's face (**Exodus 33:18-23**)

-**1 Timothy 6:16** says that God "lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see."

-In ancient Israel, only the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and had a rope tied around his ankle so in the event of death, no one would have to enter to retrieve his body, risking death, but could pull him out.

So **Revelation 22:4** suggests that for God's servants to see him, they must undergo something radical: holiness.

Hebrews 12:14 says that "without holiness no one will see the Lord." This holiness only comes through the redemptive work of Jesus! Only when we are covered with the righteousness of Christ, as Christians, will we be able to see God face to face!

Even now, here on this earth, we can enter the presence of God, though it be through prayer (**Hebrews 10:19, Hebrews 4:16**). However, in eternity, when we are resurrected beings, God will welcome us to live in His presence, to see Him, and to enjoy Him as He dwells with us!

John 4:24 records the words of Jesus as He is talking with the Samaritan woman at the well, "God is spirit (Gk: *Pneuma* – current of air, breath, superhuman, divine)..." Did Jesus mean that God is solely a spirit, and has no physical characteristics?

In **Psalms 27:4** David asks to see God (God's beauty or glory) and to dwell with Him. In other words, David longed to be in the very presence of God. He understood God as having characteristics to gaze upon. What do you think David imagined God to "look like"?

Matthew 1:23 tells us that God came to us in the person of Jesus: Immanuel, or *God with us*.

John 1:14 tells us that God became flesh and made His dwelling on earth.

In **John 14:9** Jesus told us that anyone who sees Him sees the Father.

In **Matthew 5:8** Jesus said that the pure in heart will see (Gk: *optomai* – to look, see, gaze, appear, show self – all in active, not passive tense) God.

Revelation 22:3-4 comes after the bodily resurrection, and declares, “The throne of God...will be in the city, and his servants will...see his face.”

Consider Job’s words in **Job 19:25-27**, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” The anticipation of seeing God, in our resurrected bodies, is ancient and heartfelt.

With this understanding, if we accept that: (1) Jesus is the physical representation of God on earth, (2) the Eternal Heaven will be a realm where the New Heaven and the New Earth will come together under the rule of Jesus, (3) Jesus is our model for *resurrection*, therefore our existence in Heaven will be a physical one experiencing physical things, (4) Jesus’ nature doesn’t change in heaven [Hebrews 13:8 says Jesus is the same yesterday, today and *forever*], **it’s not so hard to imagine we will be able to see God!** So whenever we see Jesus in Heaven, we will see God! Our real eyes will behold our real God!

Even though we can catch glimpses of God here on earth (**Romans 1:20, Psalm 19:1**) as we behold His creation and see His mighty acts, our vision is hampered by the same curse that infects all creation. One day, we and creation will be cured of sin, **and we will see God!** Thus, our joy will be complete in Heaven. Seeing God allows us to enjoy all that He has prepared for us. We experience the joy of our salvation (the work of God) but in heaven, we will experience the fullness of joy because we will see, we will behold the One who saved us!

What will it mean for us God to dwell among us?

In Eden, God came down to Earth, the home of mankind (**Genesis 3:8**). On the New Earth, God and mankind will be able to come to each other whenever they wish.

Leviticus 26:11-12, “I will put my dwelling place among you...I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.”

Ezekiel 37:27, “My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

II Corinthians 6:16, “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.”

Understanding that God and mankind will dwell together in the Eternal Heaven, the New Earth, we also understand that Earth will become Heaven – and it will be truly Heaven on Earth. **Ephesians 1:10** says the purpose of God will be achieved: “To bring all

things in heaven and on earth together (Gk: to sum up, to gather together as one) under one head, even Christ.”

*Philosophy and theology professor, Dallas Willard, argues there is only one universe, even now, not two. However, because of the fall of man, we are blind to heaven, which is our future in this universe. He says God created the heavens and the earth. That’s it. And much of the difficulty in having a believable picture of heaven and hell today comes from centuries-long tendency to “locate” them in “another reality” outside the created universe. He continues that time is within eternity, not outside of it. The created universe is within the kingdom of God, not outside of it. And the created universe is adequate to fulfill God’s eternal purposes.

It might be better, then, if we imagine the Intermediate Heaven as part of our universe we cannot see, due to our spiritual blindness, rather than it being in “another universe.”

Revelation 21:3 says that God *himself* will be with us in Heaven. He won’t send us a delegate, but He will be with us. His glory will permeate the entire New Heaven, not just be in one centralized place. Therefore, when we realize Heaven, we will realize the very presence of God. And we will see what was once held from us: the GLORY of GOD!!

What does this mean? We will never be separated from Him. He will be the air we breathe. We’ll be freed of self-righteousness. We’ll never question God’s goodness; we’ll see it, savor it, enjoy it, and declare it! Our faith will be sight!! The presence of God is the essence of heaven (just as the absence of God is the essence of Hell). Seeing God’s glory is seeing the glory of Jesus. In **John 17:24** Jesus desires that His followers be with him in heaven and see his glory, the glory he was given before the creation of the world.

Jesus declared in **John 14:3**, “I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

II Corinthians 5:8 says that when we die we will be “present with the Lord.”

With God’s presence comes God’s promises. **Hebrews 11:16** says God has (not *will* prepare) prepared a city (the New Jerusalem) for us. **Revelation 21** goes on to say that God will relocate the holy city, Jerusalem, to Heaven, the New Earth. God’s new center of government will be the New Earth. This will be the ultimate answer to the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy kingdom (Gk: basileia – realm, kingdom, reign) come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven (**Matthew 6:10**).

How will we worship God?

Have you ever had the thought that worship could, over time, become boring in heaven?

God is anything but boring. In fact, we'll explore God's beauty and unfolding new mysteries *forever!* **Revelation 4-5** suggests an ever-deepening appreciation of God's greatness. Alcorn writes, "Remember, the members of the triune God exist in an eternal relationship with each other. To see God is to participate in the infinite delight of their communion."

So what will *worship* look like?

Revelation 5:13-14 Multitudes of people from every nation and tribe will gather to worship and praise God's greatness, wisdom, power, grace and mighty work of redemption.

Revelation 7:9-12 Unrestrained happiness and an overwhelming of joy and thankfulness at God's majesty

Revelation 19:7-8 describes the wedding feast and the coming together of the Bride (the saints, the church, Christ-followers) and the Bridegroom (Jesus). Notice that we, the church or the bride, is wearing fine linen. **What is the fine linen?** Notice the last part of v.8, "Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints." Our worship and service to our Lord, while living in this life on this earth, will be our wedding dress at the wedding feast! This gives us a great reason to stay alive, and keep living for Jesus: we're sewing and making ready our wedding dress!

What will worship *NOT* look like?

-A church service. **Revelation 21:22** tells us there is no temple in Heaven. The Church (Christ's people) will be with Him.

-Eternally at the feet of Jesus, bowed on our faces. Scripture teaches that we'll be doing many other things: living in dwelling places, eating and drinking, reigning with Christ, and working for Him. **I Thessalonians 5:16-18** says we are to "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances." That God expects us to do many other things, shows that He expects us to live life *while being joyful, praying and giving thanks!*

-Loss of identity, as in Buddhism, Hinduism, or New Age mysticism, where the person is caught up and absorbed by the "higher power" or "supreme being." Jesus said in **Matthew 16:25**, "Whoever loses his life for me will find it."

-Individual pursuit of God. Remember, the Bride of Christ is the Church, all believers, collectively. That's why it is so important to be part of a body of Christ here on earth and not try to pursue Jesus without the encouragement and accountability of

others. **Hebrews 10:25** suggests that we cannot successfully seek God on our own. **We will be part of the body in Heaven, so be part of the body here on earth!!**

Will we always be engaged in worship?

Yes and no. If our view of worship is narrow, then the answer is “no.” If we have a broader view of worship, then the answer is “yes.”

This begs the question: “How do you define *worship*?”

Author Cornelius Venema, in his book, *The Promise of the Future*, writes, “No legitimate activity of life – whether in marriage, family, business, play, friendship, education, politics, etc. – escapes the claims of Christ’s kingship...Certainly those who live and reign with Christ forever will find the diversity and complexity of their worship of God not less, but richer, in the life to come. Every legitimate activity of new creaturely life will be included within the life of worship of God’s people.” Remember, **we were created to worship**. Once we see God as He really is, no one will need to beg, threaten, or shame us into praising Him.

Author and teacher J.I. Packer writes, “Hearts on earth may say in the course of a joyful experience, ‘I don’t want this to end.’ But invariably it does. The hearts of those in heaven say, ‘I want this to go on forever.’ And it will. There is no better news than this.” Alcorn writes, “In Heaven, worshiping God won’t be restricted to a time posted on a sign, telling us when to start and stop. It will permeate our lives, energize our bodies, and fuel our imaginations.”