



## **The Horrors of Hell (cont.) Final Conclusions ...**

### **We must declare this doctrine unapologetically.**

In light of the horror of hell, one we must declare this doctrine unapologetically. So many Christians claim to believe in the doctrine of hell, but they keep silent about it, almost like they are embarrassed of it. Ajith Fernando, who wrote a helpful book on hell, observed:

Evangelicals are often apologetic about the biblical view of retribution. They say that they wish that what the Bible says about the punishment of sinners is not true, that they find it hard to accept this doctrine emotionally, but that because the Bible teaches it they are forced to believe it. This type of thinking is understandable, given our human frailty and inability to fully understand God's ways. We do not see the seriousness of sin as strongly as God sees it. But many today seem to be proud that their hearts rebel against the judgment of God. The message they convey to an outsider is that they think God is wrong and unfair, but that's what he is going to do, so they reluctantly include it in their statement of faith.

Bottom line: We need to stop apologizing for God. I so appreciate Francis Chan's personal confession here, because I, and probably others, can so identify with it. He said, "Like the nervous kid who tries to keep his friends from seeing his drunken father, I have tried to hide God at times. Who do I think I am? The truth is, God is perfect and right in all that He does. I am a fool for thinking otherwise. He does not need nor want me to 'cover' for Him. There's nothing to be covered. Everything about Him and all He does is perfect."

We need to stop apologizing for God, and we need to start apologizing to God. Francis continues:

Would you have thought to rescue sinful people from their sins by sending your Son to take on human flesh? Would you have thought to enter creation through the womb of a young Jewish woman and be born in a feeding trough? Would you have thought to allow your created beings to torture your Son, lacerate His flesh with whips, and then drive nails through His hands and feet? It's incredibly arrogant to pick and choose which incomprehensible truths we embrace. No one wants to ditch God's plan of redemption, even though it doesn't make sense to us. Neither should we erase God's revealed plan of punishment because it doesn't sit well with us. As soon as we do this, we are putting God's actions in submission to our own reasoning, which is a ridiculous thing for clay to do.

We must declare this doctrine unapologetically.

### **We must declare this doctrine humbly.**

Second, we must declare this doctrine humbly. Oh, let this doctrine humble you. Don't ever say, "Well, David, I could never love a God who..." Who what? A God who would disagree with you? A God who would do things that you would never do? A God who would allow bad things to happen to good people? A God who would be more concerned about His glory than your feelings? A God who would send people to hell? Humble yourself, man or woman, brother or sister.

Humble yourself in view of God's sovereignty. Lamentations 2:20-21 is such a humble cry amidst a world of evil and suffering. It says,

*Look, O LORD, and see! With whom have you dealt thus? Should women eat the fruit of their womb, the children of their tender care? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord? In the dust of the streets lie the young and the old; my young women and my young men have fallen by the sword; you have killed them in the day of your anger, slaughtering without pity.*

Amidst a world in which people are suffering and dying, but over which God is sovereign, Jeremiah, the author of Lamentations, knows that God is sovereign, which then leads him humility in view of our salvation. Hear Jeremiah's conclusion, even in light of suffering and pain. He writes in Lamentations 3:19-24,

*Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."*

The doctrine of hell leads us all to greater humility before the love of God, particularly His love expressed in Christ experiencing the wrath we deserve on the cross. Charles Spurgeon said, "Think lightly of hell, and you will think lightly of the cross. Think little of the sufferings of lost souls, and you will soon think little of the Savior who delivers you from them." We must declare this doctrine humbly.

### **We must declare this doctrine continually.**

We must declare this doctrine continually. If this is true, then we can't stay silent about this. When was the last time you told someone who is apart from Christ that hell is real? You say, "Wouldn't it be offensive for me to do that?" The most offensive thing you can do is to not do that! How much do you have to hate somebody to know that they are on a road that leads to hell and you never even say a thing to them about it. Acts 17:30-31 says, "*The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.*" A.W. Pink said:

What is most needed today is a wide proclamation of those truths which are the least acceptable to the flesh. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the character of God—His absolute sovereignty, His ineffable holiness, His inflexible justice, His unchanging veracity. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the condition of the natural man—his total depravity, his spiritual insensibility, his inveterate hostility to God, the fact that he is

'condemned already' and that the wrath of a sin-hating God is even now abiding upon him. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the alarming danger in which sinners are—the indescribably awful doom which awaits them, the fact that if they follow only a little further their present course they shall most certainly suffer the due reward of their iniquities. What is needed today is a scriptural setting forth of the nature of that punishment which awaits the lost—the awfulness of it, the hopelessness of it, the unendurableness of it, the endlessness of it.

**We need to be reminded that divine judgment is coming.**

Oh, we need to be reminded that divine judgment is coming. This is what John the Baptist came warning and proclaiming as He prepared the way for Jesus, and we need to tell people, remind people of this. Matthew 3:1-12 says,

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.'" Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."*

Tozer said, "The vague and tenuous hope that God is too kind to punish the ungodly has become a deadly opiate for the consciences of millions. It hushes their fears and allows them to practice all pleasant forms of iniquity while death draws every day nearer and the command to repent goes unheeded." We need to be reminded that divine judgment is coming.

We need to be reminded that the pleasures of sin are fleeting. It's not worth it; sin is not worth it, we need to tell people. Hebrews 11:24-26 says, "By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward." C.S. Lewis described how the devil is luring people to sleep on the soft, gradual slope that leads to hell, and the truth of hell is a wake-up call to change course. He says in *The Screwtape Letters*, "It doesn't matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man way from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts."

We need to be reminded that the pleasures of sin are fleeting, and we need to be reminded that wealth in this world is passing. All of the wealth that we enjoy in Western culture, in states and provinces all across North America, one day, it's all going to burn up! The pursuit of possessions will inevitably lead to eternal punishment. First Timothy 6:9-10 says, *"But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs."* James 5:1-5 says,

*Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter.*

And we need to be reminded that unrighteousness is unrewarding. Sin kills. Sin damns; it damns! Revelation 21:8 says, *"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."* A.W. Pink said,

It is just because these truths have been withheld so much from public ministrations to the saints that we now find so many backboneless, sentimental, lopsided Christians in our assemblies. A clearer vision of the awe-inspiring attributes of God would banish much of our levity and irreverence. A better understanding of our depravity by nature would humble us, and make us see our deep need of using the appointed means of grace. A facing of the alarming danger of the sinner would cause us to "consider our ways" and make us more diligent to make our "calling and election sure." A realization of the unspeakable misery which awaits the lost (and which each, of us fully merited) would immeasurably deepen our gratitude, and bring us to thank God more fervently that we have been snatched as brands from the burning and delivered from the wrath to come; and too, it will make us far more earnest in our prayers as we supplicate God on behalf of the unsaved.

### **We must declare this doctrine with holiness.**

This leads us to this next reality: We must declare this doctrine with holiness. Meaning it makes no sense to tell people about the deadly, eternal consequences of sin while willfully indulging in sin. Jesus' teaching on hell in Mark 9:43-48 is couched in a clarion call to purity and holiness. It says,

*"And if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than with two hands to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame than with two feet to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into hell, 'where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.'"*

### **We must declare this doctrine with compassion.**

Obviously, we must declare this doctrine with compassion. With the compassion of Jeremiah, who wept over the sinfulness of God's people. Jeremiah 8:21-9:1 says, "*For the wound of the daughter of my people is my heart wounded; I mourn, and dismay has taken hold on me. Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of the daughter of my people not been restored? Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!*" With the compassion of Jesus, who wept over the city of Jerusalem in Luke 19:41-44:

*And when he drew near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, "Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up a barricade around you and surround you and hem you in on every side and tear you down to the ground, you and your children within you. And they will not leave one stone upon another in you, because you did not know the time of your visitation."*

A.W. Pink said, "If you can witness, unmoved, men and women hurrying down the broad road which leadeth to destruction, then it is seriously to be doubted if you have within you the Spirit of that One who wept over Jerusalem." And as we've talked about, Paul was willing himself to be thrown into hell on others' behalf. Romans 9:1-5 says,

*I am speaking the truth in Christ—I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit—that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.*

R.W. Dale said, "I have never heard D.L. Moody refer to hell without tears in his voice."

### **We must declare this doctrine with urgency.**

We must declare this doctrine with compassion, and ultimately, we must declare this doctrine with urgency. We don't have time to waste. In the hardest, most trying, most stretching, most challenging, most difficult, most dangerous, most deadly places in the world, we must declare this doctrine, and the glorious truth of God's grace for the salvation of the peoples of the world no matter what it costs us. Now, we see why Paul would say in Acts 20:22-24,

*"And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."*

What is more eternally urgent for you to do than to proclaim this truth with people you know and love, live with, work with, live around, and what is more urgent for you to do than to make this news known to people groups around the world who have never heard it? The horror of hell.

## The Hope of Heaven

Thankfully, not the end of the gospel. The gospel points us, yes, to the horror of hell, and the gospel points us to the hope of heaven. The good news in Philippians 3:20-21, *"But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself."* This is good news that we need to think about. We need to think well and wisely about heaven. Colossians 3:1 tells us, *"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."*

And it makes sense. I love these quotes from J.C. Ryle and Jonathan Edwards. Ryle said,

The man who is about to sail for Australia or New Zealand as a settler, is naturally anxious to know something about his future home, its climate, its employments, its inhabitants, its ways, its customs. All these are subjects of deep interest to him. You are leaving the land of your nativity, you are going to spend the rest of your life in a new hemisphere. It would be strange indeed if you did not desire information about your new abode. Now surely, if we hope to dwell forever in that "better country, even a heavenly one," we ought to seek all the knowledge we can get about it. Before we go to our eternal home we should try to become acquainted with it.

Edwards said, "It becomes us to spend this life only as a journey toward heaven...to which we should subordinate all other concerns of life. Why should we labor for or set our hearts on anything else, but that which is our proper end and true happiness?" So, let's think as followers of Christ, even as you may be trusting Christ tonight truly for the first time, let's think about "our proper end and true happiness..."

## Heaven Contemplated...

### **We hold fast to biblical revelation.**

Now, as we think about heaven, we hold fast to biblical revelation. We have passages like Revelation 21:1-3 that envision heaven for us, and this is where we must put down the anchors of our understanding of heaven. The passage says,

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."*

At the same time, 1 Corinthians 2:9-13 makes clear to us that we don't know everything about heaven, and we won't know a lot of things about heaven until we are in heaven. Paul writes:

*But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything,*

*even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

But notice, even in this passage, that God by His Spirit has revealed much to us, so we need to hold fast to Spirit-inspired biblical revelation.

### **We tread carefully into theological speculation.**

Second, we tread carefully into theological speculation. In the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12,

*Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

1 John 3:2 says, *"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."*

So, the Bible, again, is clear that there are some things we don't know, and we won't know until we are in heaven, but this doesn't mean we need to avoid thinking about what we can't know altogether. I was helped in my study for tonight so much by this quote from Millard Erickson in his systematic theology. He said, "Speculation is a legitimate theological activity, as long as we are aware that we are speculating."

### **We leave room for personal imagination.**

Then, even beyond theological speculation, we leave room for personal imagination. Ephesians 3:20-21 says, *"Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."* We know that God is able to do and bring about far more than we can even ask, think, or imagine, but here again, we must be careful. Imagination must never fly away from truth. Instead, imagination must always fly upon the truth.

So, from the beginning, I want to be clear: There are some things we're going to talk about where our conclusions about heaven are firmly planted in biblical revelation, i.e., Scripture has spoken clearly, and we can bank our lives and our future and our understanding of heaven on these things. At the same time, there are various things that we'll contemplate tonight that are more in the realm of speculation and imagination. Again, speculation based upon truth, and imagination that doesn't fly away from but flies upon truth, and I'll try to distinguish between the two...biblical revelation on one hand and theological speculation/personal imagination on the other hand...as we go. So, just keep this in mind as we examine truth about heaven, and based on that truth, we contemplate how to best understand our future home, the place where we will spend all of eternity.

## Heaven Defined...

### **The expanse of God's creation.**

When you read through Scripture, you see the actual word "heaven" described in different ways. At some points, heaven refers to the expanse of God's creation often, like we see it coupled with the earth in these Genesis and Matthew texts below. Genesis 1:1, "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" Matthew 5:18, "*For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*" Matthew 24:35, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*"

### **A synonym for God's name.**

Other times, we see heaven actually used as a synonym for God's name. Luke 15:17-21 says,

*But when he came to himself, he said, "How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.'" And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."*

You look at John 3:27, where John says that all we receive, we receive from heaven, i.e., from God. "*John answered, 'A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.'*" Matthew 21:25 says, "*The baptism of John, from where did it come? From heaven or from man?' And they discussed it among themselves, saying, 'If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say to us, 'Why then did you not believe him?'"*

Or the references to "the kingdom of heaven" that we see throughout Matthew, which is a synonym for "the kingdom of God" in the other Gospels. Matthew 4:17, "*From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'*" Mark 1:14-15, "*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'*"

### **The place where God dwells.**

So, heaven is the expanse of God's creation, a synonym for God's name, and heaven is the place where God dwells. The throne of God is in heaven. Isaiah 66:1 says, "*Thus says the LORD: 'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest?'"* The Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9, "*Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'*" Matthew 7:21, "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."*

Matthew 10:32-33, "*So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.*" Matthew 16:17, "*And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'*" Matthew 18:10, "*See that you do not despise one of these little*

ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven." Also, a few verses later in Matthew 18:19, "Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven."

According to Scripture, angels come from heaven. Matthew 28:2, "And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it." Luke 22:43, "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him." Luke 2:15, "When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.'" Luke 2:15

The Son, Jesus, came from heaven. John 3:13, "No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man." John 3:31, "He who comes from above is above all. He who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks in an earthly way. He who comes from heaven is above all." John 6:42, "They said, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?"

The Son returned to heaven, just as we read in Acts 1:9-11:

*And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

First Peter 3:21-22, "Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him." Also, Hebrews 9:24, "For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf."

In addition, the Son resides in heaven. As Stephen is about to die, he says in Acts 7:55-56, "But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And he said, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" And Paul tells us in Romans 8:34, "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us."

In addition, as we've talked about, the Son will return from heaven. In John 14:2-3, Jesus says, "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Acts 1:9-11, which we read above, says,

*And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was*

*taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."*

First Thessalonians 4:16-18,

*For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

All of this leading to the reality that as followers of Christ, anticipating the return of Christ, we look forward to heaven. The Bible describes heaven as a city to come. Hebrews 11:10, "For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." Hebrews 13:14 says, "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come."

Heaven is a country to come. Hebrews 11:16, "But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city." And heaven is a kingdom to come, which is what we ultimately pray for in the Lord's prayer. Matthew 6:9-10, "Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.'" Also, Matthew 25:34, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

**The eternal heaven is the new earth where God and His angels will dwell with His people in unhindered communion and unimaginable joy.**

So, all of these uses of the specific word "heaven" then lead us to a definition of what I'll call the "eternal heaven" here. So, the Bible doesn't just talk about heaven as all of creation or as a synonym for God's name, or even just as the place where God and Christ dwell now, but the Bible talks about the "eternal heaven", which is the city, the country, the kingdom that we are looking forward to, and here is the way the Bible describes the eternal heaven where those who have trusted in Christ will spend all of eternity: The eternal heaven is the new earth where God and His angels will dwell with His people in unhindered communion and unimaginable joy. The eternal heaven is the new earth where God and His angels will dwell with His people in unhindered communion and unimaginable joy.

This eternal heaven is anticipated in the Old Testament. Isaiah 65:17-19 says,

*"For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness. I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people; no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress."*

Isaiah 66:22-23 says, "For as the new heavens and the new earth that I make shall remain before me, says the LORD, so shall your offspring and your name remain. From new moon to new moon, and from Sabbath to Sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, declares the LORD." Second Peter 3:13, "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

These words then reappear almost verbatim in the end of the Bible, Revelation 21:1-4:

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

So, this is where all of redemption history is headed; this is the ultimate end of the gospel: A new heaven and new earth coming down out of heaven from God.

So, follow this: the ultimate end of the gospel...so the end of the story here in the Bible, and our ultimate hope...is not that we will go to heaven when we die. Obviously, we've talked about that when we discussed the intermediate state, where as soon as we breathe our last breath here, we will immediately enter the presence of God, but that's not our last stop. That's a rest stop on the way to a greater stop. The Bible doesn't just say that one day Christians will go from this earth to heaven. The Bible says that one day heaven will come down to this earth. The ultimate end of the gospel is not that we will go to heaven, but that heaven will come to us.

And this is so key to realize, so follow this: The Bible gives us a very earthly picture of heaven. When the Bible describes the eternal heaven, it's not some ethereal, otherworldly picture where we're all sitting on clouds in the sky in some spirit world. No, the Bible pictures a very earthly heaven, a new earth. Anthony Hoekema puts it best, saying, "God will make the new earth his dwelling place...Heaven and earth will then no longer be separated as they are now, but they will be one. But to leave the new earth out of consideration when we think of the final state of believers is greatly to impoverish biblical teaching about the life to come."

Oh, this is so key, and when we realize this, we start to realize that in this sense, there is no such thing as "the end of the world", because this world that is destined for eventual destruction is also destined for ultimate restoration, which leads to some careful questions that we need to ask.

First, we start to ask, "Well, then, will the earth as we know it be obliterated?" A variety of verses in Scripture seem to indicate that it will be so. Psalm 102:25-27 says, "*Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you will remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away, but you are the same, and your years have no end.*" Luke 21:33 says, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.*"

Hebrews 1:10-12 says the same thing. It says, "*And, 'You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.'*" Second Peter 3:10 says, "*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.*"

And then Revelation, including the passage we just read from Revelation 21, says that the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Revelation 20:11 says, *"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them."* Revelation 21:1-2 says, *"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."*

So, we find ourselves asking, "Will the earth as we know it be obliterated, or will the earth as we know it be restored? After all, everything God made on the earth originally, He made as good. Genesis 1:31, *"And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day."* Then, we see other verses in Scripture like Ecclesiastes 1:4 and Psalm 78:69, that talk about how the earth remains forever. Ecclesiastes 1:4 says, *"A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever."* Psalm 78:69 says, *"He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded forever."*

So, how are we to square this with what we read in the other verses about the earth passing away or being destroyed. I think Piper's comments are helpful here:

When Revelation 21:2 and 2 Peter 3:10 say that the present earth and heavens will "pass away," it does not have to mean that they go out of existence, but may mean that there will be such a change in them that their present condition passes away. We might say, "The caterpillar passes away, and the butterfly emerges." There is a real passing away, and there is a real continuity, a real connection.

What a helpful illustration: Does the caterpillar pass away? Well, yes and no, because there's obvious continuity between the caterpillar and the butterfly. So, in a similar way...the analogy is not perfect...this earth will pass away, but a new earth will continue in a much grander, more beautiful way, when God, through Christ, ultimately, in the words of Colossians 1:19-20 reconciles *"to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."*

Again, this is the end of the gospel. Russell Moore writes: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and declared it 'good.' God does not surrender this good creation to Satan but wins it back through the blood of Christ, which frees creation's rulers from the sentence of death for sin." And when this happens, Numbers 14:21 says, *"But truly, as I live, and as all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD..."* In perfection, the heavens will declare the glory of God clearly and powerfully and completely. Psalm 19:1 says, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."*

The earth will shine God's glory, like Ezekiel 43:2 talks about. It says, *"And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory."* Isaiah 11:9-10 says, *"They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious."* Same thing in Habakkuk 2:14, *"For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea."*

So, then we start to ask will the earth as we know it be the same? Oftentimes, when the Bible talks about heaven, it talks about it in the language of Eden, of restoration back to the

original beauty of God's creation. We see this in texts like Isaiah 51 and Ezekiel 36. Isaiah 51:3 says, "For the LORD comforts Zion; he comforts all her waste places and makes her wilderness like Eden, her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the voice of song." Ezekiel 36:35: "And they will say, 'This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden, and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are now fortified and inhabited.'"

Then, look at what happened in Genesis 3, when man sinned and was cast out of the presence of God, when sin marred creation in this way. Genesis 3:22-24 says,

*Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.*

So, that's at the beginning of the Bible, but then look at the end of the Bible, the last chapter. As this eternal heaven is being described, John writes in Revelation 22:1-3:

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.*

So, that certainly seems like a restoration of earth to its original picture of beauty. I also put Genesis 2:10-14 here because we see this picture of Eden with four rivers, and it talks about the beauty of the onyx stone there in Eden. The passage says,

*A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.*

And interestingly, not by coincidence, when you get to Ezekiel 28, and you see the high priest's attire, he is commanded to wear two onyx stones as a memorial to Eden. These onyx stones on the priest's shoulders would recall the imagery of Eden and remind the people of the hope to which they were looking forward. Ezekiel 28:9-13 says,

*"You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. As a jeweler engraves signets, so shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall enclose them in settings of gold filigree. And you shall set the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before*

*the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper, sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle; and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created they were prepared."*

Then, when you get to the end of the Bible and this picture of heaven, there is only one reference to onyx in the entire New Testament, and it's when the foundations of the eternal heaven, the new Jerusalem, are being described, and you'll never guess what kind of stone you see. It's right there in the middle of Revelation 21:19-20. It says, "*The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst.*"

So, obviously there is some continuity between Eden and what we are looking forward to in the new heaven and the new earth. So, in some, maybe many, ways, it will be the same, but then we wonder, "Are there any senses in which it will be different? Will the earth as we know it be the same, or will the earth as we know it be different?" And I think there's no question that in many senses, though it will be earthly, similar to Eden, it will be different.

First of all, there will be a lot more people there! But just as the Christian life is described as a new creation in which the old has passed away and the new has come, in a similar way this is how we picture the new heaven and the new earth. Second Corinthians 5:17, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*" God will, as we already read about in Colossians 1, reconcile all things in heaven and on earth to Himself. Colossians 1:16-20 says,

*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

And, as a result, it will certainly be a very different earth from the one we live in now. Even as Revelation 21 emphasized, there will be no more sin or sorrow or mourning. We sing these lines from Isaac Watts:

No more let sins and sorrows grow  
Nor thorns infest the ground;  
He comes to make His blessings flow  
Far as the curse is found.

The curse of sin will be gone, which will have a drastic effect on everything in all creation. Everything will be restored according to God's perfect and beautiful design. This is what we're hoping for. Remember the lines of this song by Maltbie Babcock?

This is my Father's world. O let me ne'er forget  
That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.  
This is my Father's world: the battle is not done:

Jesus who died shall be satisfied,  
And earth and Heav'n be one.

So, we need to correct some misconceptions. Acts 3:19-21 says, *"Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago."*

So, first, we need to realize that heaven is not non-earth, but new earth. Any picture of heaven as unearthly is unbiblical. The earth is good, and will be good forever; a new heaven and a new earth. This is the ultimate end of the gospel. In the words of Greg Beale, "New creation is the goal or purpose of God's redemptive-historical plan; new creation is the logical main point of Scripture."

Along these lines, heaven is not unfamiliar and otherworldly, but familiar and earthly, which is why Paul in Romans 8 talks about creation longing to be redeemed and restored ultimately. Romans 8:19-21 says, *"For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God."* So, we're seeing that, in the words of Randy Alcorn, "The gospel is far greater than most of us imagine. It isn't just good news for us—it's good news for animals, plants, stars, and planets. It's good news for the sky above and the earth below."

Heaven is not non-earth, but new earth. Heaven is not unfamiliar and otherworldly, but familiar and earthly, and as a result, heaven is not foreign, but home. So, think about heaven not as some foreign, weird place, but as home; an earthly place that is, in the words of A.A. Hodge:

Heaven, as the eternal home of the divine Man and of all the redeemed members of the human race, must necessarily be thoroughly human in its structure, conditions, and activities. Its joys and activities must all be rational, moral, emotional, voluntary, and active. There must be the exercise of all the faculties, the gratification of all tastes, the development of all talent capacities, the realization of all ideals .... Heaven will prove the consummate flower and fruit of the whole creation and of all the history of the universe.

Which, then, leads to the realization that heaven is not boring, but fascinating. Oh, this is so important! If we're honest, I think many of us, when we think about heaven, if we're completely honest, have a pretty boring picture of what it's going to be like. "I mean, what are we going to do? Just stand around with each other and sing songs and stare at light for a few quadrillion years?" And the answer Scripture gives is, "No, no, no; there's so much more to hope for in heaven." This is not an endless choir practice we're going to; this is a place where we are going to experience the fulfillment of all our desires in a new earth, a complete earth. C.S. Lewis put it this way: "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world." Obviously, the implication here, is another world where it will be satisfied.

So, ladies and gentlemen, heaven is not a place where we have nothing to do but float on the clouds, but a new earth where we have everything to do: A God to worship, a kingdom to rule, a universe to explore, work to accomplish, and friends to enjoy. I put an excerpt here from the Chronicles of Narnia, because so much that C.S. Lewis writes there is

imagination flying upon the truth of Scripture, but listen to how he describes Narnia in the conversation that happens between Lucy and Edmund and Peter, because I think it so clearly pictures this continuity between this earth and a new heaven and a new earth to come. He writes:

“Those hills,” said Lucy, “the nice woody ones and the blue ones behind—aren’t they very like the southern border of Narnia.”

“Like!” cried Edmund after a moment’s silence. “Why they’re exactly like. Look, there’s Mount Pire with his forked head, and there’s the pass into Archenland and everything!”

“And yet they’re not like,” said Lucy. “They’re different. They have more colours on them and they look further away than I remembered and they’re more . . . more . . . oh, I don’t know . . . .”

“More like the real thing,” said the Lord Digory softly.

Suddenly Farsight the Eagle spread his wings, soared thirty or forty feet up into the air, circled round and then alighted on the ground.

“Kings and Queens,” he cried, “we have all been blind. We are only beginning to see where we are. From up there I have seen it all—Ettinsmuir, Beaversdam, the Great River, and Cair Paravel still shining on the edge of the Eastern Sea. Narnia is not dead. This is Narnia.”

“But how can it be?” said Peter. “For Aslan told us older ones that we should never return to Narnia, and here we are.”

“Yes,” said Eustace. “And we saw it all destroyed and the sun put out.” “And it’s all so different,” said Lucy.

“The Eagle is right,” said the Lord Digory. “Listen, Peter. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or a copy of the real Narnia, which has always been here and always will be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan’s real world. You need not mourn over Narnia, Lucy. All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door. And of course it is different; as different as a real thing is from a shadow or as a waking life is from a dream.” ...

The difference between the old Narnia and the new Narnia was like that. The new one was a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can’t describe it any better than that: if you ever get there, you will know what I mean.

It was the Unicorn who summed up what everyone was feeling. He stamped his right forehoof on the ground and neighed and then cried: “I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life, though I never knew it till now. The reason why we loved the old Narnia is that it sometimes looked a little like this.”

Oh, don't you love this? One day, we will come home at last! That will be our real country, the country where we belong, the land we have been looking for all our lives. And the things you love most about this world...the good gifts that God has given us on this earth...are just a foretaste of the good gifts God has in store for us in a new heaven and a new earth. Oh, see it: Heaven is not a place where we have nothing to do but float on the clouds, but a new earth where we have everything to do: A God to worship, a kingdom to rule, a universe to explore, work to accomplish, and friends to enjoy.

## Heaven Envisioned...

### **Heave is a place of full reconciliation with God.**

So let's envision heaven, what the Bible describes as a place. Heaven is a place of full reconciliation with God. Supremely, heaven is the place where we will dwell with God. Revelation 21:3 says, *"And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.'"*

Now this is key, that even as we think about heaven as a new earth filled with new earthly pleasures, the fount of all those pleasures is supremely God. And the reason why all of these pleasures will be present will be because God is present, and everything good flows from Him. And that's where we really need to understand what Jesus is saying in John 14:1-3, when He says, *"Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."* So, you've got a lot of people who have imagined heaven in terms of mansions.

The only problem is that's not what that word "rooms" means. The word for "rooms" there in John 14 is dwelling place; it's the same word in the original language of the New Testament that appears again in Revelation 21 to describe the place where we will dwell with God and all the new earthly pleasures we have will be there because we are dwelling with God. And the reason I emphasize this is because there's a whole lot of people in the world who would say they are Christians, who believe they're going to heaven where a mansion is waiting for them, but in their lives on this earth, they want nothing to do with the presence of God. They are far from God, and we need to see this clearly in Scripture: The goal of the gospel, and our hope of heaven ultimately is God, and you won't go to heaven if you don't want God.

Heaven is the new earth where we will be with God. We will be with Him in His presence with fullness of joy. Psalm 16:11, *"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."* And the imagery, the picture Scripture gives us are of priests in the temple. I love this picture of Solomon building a temple where people can encounter the glory of God. It's a temple with various courts: A court for the Gentiles, a court for Jewish women, a court for Jewish men, and again, at the center, is the holy of holies. And the holy of holies is a cube-shaped area in the middle of the temple that symbolizes the glory of God's dwelling among His people, and only the high priest on rare, special occasions can enter into that place, the place where the holy God of the universe dwells among His people. First Kings 6:19-20 says, *"The inner sanctuary he prepared in the innermost part of the house, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD. The inner sanctuary was twenty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and twenty cubits high, and he overlaid it with pure gold. He also overlaid an altar of cedar."*

So, then you get to Revelation 21:15-22, and you read this:

*And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.*

Now, people read this and think, "Okay, this is the architecture for what heaven will look like," and they figure the numbers and calculate the measurements and envision this place accordingly, but that is not the point! Instead of being some literal picture of how high this or that is going to be, the painting here is a collision of Old Testament images: A city, a new heaven, a new earth, a bride, and a temple.

You look at these measurements, and you realize that heaven is shaped like a cube, and you wonder, "Well, why would that be?" And that takes us back to the temple in the Old Testament, where God dwelled among His people in the holy of holies, and the holy of holies was shaped like a what? Like a cube. And you put together these measurements, and you realize this is like one giant, massive holy of holies, and all of a sudden, it hits you. Wow! Once a year, the high priest could go into the holy of holies, into the presence of God, and so here is heaven, and we're going to be living in the holy of holies! We're going to dwell with God, like, every day in His presence. That is the point of these descriptions of heaven, not what this wall or that gate will look like, but the fact that one day, the skies will open up, and this earth will be rolled back like a scroll, and God's holy dwelling will literally come down to man, and we will be with Him.

Like priests in the temple, and as a bride with a husband. So, again, this is imagery that the Bible intentionally uses to describe how we will be with God. So, picture the expectant bride waiting, waiting, waiting until the moment she unites her life with her husband. Obviously, I don't know this from a bride's perspective, but I do know it from a groom's perspective. So, this is how the Bible pictures a new heaven and a new earth, this eternal heaven. We will be as a bride with a husband. Revelation 19:6-8 says,

*Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

Then, Revelation 21:2 says, "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

Then, we will be as children of a Father. Luke 12:32, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Also, as heirs of a King. Our Father is a

King, and He's waiting to give us a kingdom! Over and over and over again in Scripture, read through these verses, and you'll see that all things belong to God our Sovereign King, this God, this Sovereign King, has a kingdom prepared for us, and we will be with Him. Psalm 8:1-9 says,

*O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

Psalm 24:1, "The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein..." Isaiah 57:13, "When you cry out, let your collection of idols deliver you! The wind will carry them all off, a breath will take them away. But he who takes refuge in me shall possess the land and shall inherit my holy mountain." Matthew 25:34, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" Romans 8:16-17, "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

Revelation 5:9-10, "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.'" Also, Revelation 11:15-18:

*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."*

Revelation 22:5, "And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."

We are also as participants in a banquet. Oh, see all the ways that Scripture envisions us with God! Luke 22:28-30 says, "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Also, Revelation 19:9, "And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.'"

We will be with Him, and we will behold Him. We have glimpses of this in Scripture. Exodus 33:11 says, *"Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent."* A little farther down in Exodus 3:18-23, we read,

*Moses said, "Please show me your glory." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."*

Psalms 27:4, *"One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple."* Job 19:25-27, *"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"*

Then, John 14:9, Jesus tells His disciples that in Him, they have seen God. *"Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, "Show us the Father"?"*" But then Jesus dies, rises from the dead, and ascends into heaven, and the New Testament leaves us with the hope that one day we will see Him again. And so, Revelation 22 gives us this promise in five of the most beautiful words in all of Scripture. Revelation 22:4, *"They will see his face..."*

Jonathan Edwards said, "The seeing of God in the glorified body of Christ is the most perfect way of seeing God with the bodily eyes that can be; for in seeing a real body that one of the persons of the Trinity has assumed to be his body, and that he dwells in for ever as his own in which the divine majesty and excellency appears as much as 'tis possible for it to appear in outward form or shape." I also love what Randy Alcorn says: "Not only will we see his face and live, but we will likely wonder if we ever lived before we saw his face!"

We will be with God, we will behold Him, and we will worship Him. John writes of heaven in Revelation 19:1-8:

*After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just; for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants." Once more they cried out, "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!" And from the throne came a voice saying, "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great." Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride*

*has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”— for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.*

Revelation 22:3, *“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.”*

We will gather for corporate worship. Revelation 4 and 5 and 7 all envision a heavenly assembly comprised of all creation giving God glory and honor and praise. Revelation 4:4-11 says,

*Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, and rumblings and peals of thunder, and before the throne were burning seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God, and before the throne there was as it were a sea of glass, like crystal. And around the throne, on each side of the throne, are four living creatures, full of eyes in front and behind: the first living creature like a lion, the second living creature like an ox, the third living creature with the face of a man, and the fourth living creature like an eagle in flight. And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who is seated on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who is seated on the throne and worship him who lives forever and ever. They cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.”*

Revelation 5:8-14 says,

*And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Also, Revelation 7:9-17 says,

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God*

*who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

We will shout as we consider God's incomprehensible works. Revelation 11:15-18,

*Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged, and for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints, and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth."*

We will sing as we behold God's incomparable worth. Revelation 15:2-4,

*And I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire—and also those who had conquered the beast and its image and the number of its name, standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands. And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."*

But we will not just gather for corporate worship in heaven. The picture is that we will live in continuous worship. Just as 1 Corinthians 10:31 exhorts us, "*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*" So, in heaven, this will be a reality. Everything we do...everything...eating and drinking, living and breathing and working and relating to people around us, everything will be done to the glory of God. So, don't just think about singing when you think about eternal worship; think about living. Cornelius Venema 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.

We will worship God; we will serve Him. We serve Him day and night. Revelation 7:15 says, *"Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence."* In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus pictures heaven as the reward of a good Master for His servants. The passage says,

*"For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here I have made five talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here I have made two talents more.' His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'*

*He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'"*

And this is key, again, because heaven is not an endless choir practice, nor is it just sitting around doing nothing all day. Instead, we will work, just as Jesus worked the glory of the Father when He was on earth. John 5:17 says, *"But Jesus answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I am working.'"* But the difference is, remember back in Genesis 3, when sin entered the world, one of the consequences of sin was a curse from God upon man's work, so that work was a labor/toil, and not a joy. Genesis 3:17-19 says,

*And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."*

But then Revelation 22:3 pictures that curse gone as we serve and worship God. It says, *"No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him."* And so our work will be done with the joy of God to the glory of God. We will work in heaven, but our work will not be laborious and burdensome to us; our work will be a delight to us.

Many of you know that sensation when you are working in some way, maybe it's not even at your job, but something totally different, and you're working in some way, doing something, and you have a sense of joy as you're doing it, even fulfillment, thinking, "Yeah, I'm good at this. I actually enjoy doing this." Now, transfer that kind of feeling into every kind of work you're doing, and you have a picture of serving/working to the glory of God. Russell Moore said,

*"The eternal state is hardly inactivity for the redeemed but instead work—work that is joyously freed from the frustration of a cursed earth. The new earth is not simply a restoration of Eden but a glorious civilization with a city, and the glory of the nations redeemed and brought into it. One can expect that the new earth would be abuzz with culture—music, painting, literature, architecture, commerce, agriculture, and everything that expresses the creativity of human beings as the image of God."*

We will serve God, and...watch this...we will be served by God. We will be served by Him. When Jesus talks about heaven, He talks about our Master serving us. Luke 12:37 says, *"Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them."* Christ Himself said He came to serve us. In Mark 10:45, Jesus says, *"For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* John 13:8 says, *"Peter said to him, 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus answered him, 'If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.'"*

The Old Testament prophesies this for the people of God. Isaiah 25:6 says, *"On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined."* In heaven, we will be served by God.

We will reign with Him. So, follow this: God created us in Genesis 1 with dominion over all of creation. Genesis 1:26-28 says,

*"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

Randy Alcorn writes, "God's intention for humans was that we would occupy the whole Earth and reign over it. This dominion would produce God-exalting societies in which we would exercise the creativity, imagination, intellect, and skills befitting beings created in God's image, thereby manifesting his attributes." Obviously, when sin entered the world, that marred our leadership and the good dominion we were intended to have over creation, but then, when you look at the Old Testament and New Testament hope of heaven, you see the

hope of restoration when it comes to this dominion. Daniel 7:27 says, *"And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him."*

Jesus describes His people as sitting on thrones. Matthew 19:28, *"Jesus said to them, 'Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" He will give us authority over cities. Luke 19:17, "And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.'" Also, Luke 22:28-30 says, "You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

2 Timothy 2:11-13 says, *"The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself."* There's a reason why rewards in heaven, which we've talked about, are described as crowns. Second Timothy 4:8, *"Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."*

Revelation also speaks to our reigning with Christ. Revelation 2:10 says, *"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life."* Revelation 2:26-27, *"The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father."* Revelation 3:11, *"I am coming soon. Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown."*

The promise in Revelation for those who persevere in faith is in Revelation 3:21: *"The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."* What a promise! Do you hear that? He will grant to His people to sit with Him on His throne. Now, exactly what that means and how that plays out, we're not sure, but whatever it is, it's good news!

We will reign with Him, and we will rest in Him. This is the picture of rest we see in Scripture. We see God resting in Genesis 2:1-3 on the seventh day of creation. The passage says, *"Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation."*

We also see God commanding His people to rest on the seventh day. In the Ten Commandments, Exodus 20:9-11 says,

*"Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy."*

Then, in Leviticus 25:3-5, it says,

*"For six years you shall sow your field, and for six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its fruits, but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a Sabbath to the LORD. You shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap what grows of itself in your harvest, or gather the grapes of your undressed vine. It shall be a year of solemn rest for the land."*

Then, when you get to Hebrews, you see in Hebrews 4:9-11, *"So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience."* This is a rest from striving in a world of sin and suffering. And this is key. Notice the imagery in 1 Kings 5 when the Bible says that David as king could not build a temple for the Lord because he did not have rest from the adversaries that surrounded him, but Solomon did, so during a period of peace, apart from adversaries advancing or misfortune attacking, Solomon built the temple. First Kings 5:3-4 says, *"You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side. There is neither adversary nor misfortune."*

Revelation 14:13 gives us a glimpse of heaven. It says, *"And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'"* So, the picture of heaven in Revelation 14 is no more striving against sin in a world of suffering. Even as we work, we will work from a place of rest in God as in His temple, with peace surrounding us on all sides.

So, all of this to say, based upon a biblical understanding of heaven as a place of reconciliation with God, and as a place where we will be with God, where we will behold God, where we will worship, serve, be served by, reign with, rest in God...we realize, based upon a biblical understanding of heaven as a place of reconciliation with God that to long for heaven is to long for God; to love heaven...biblically, in light of a right understanding of heaven as a place of reconciliation with God, then to love heaven is to love God. To fill your heart and mind with truth about heaven is to fill your heart and mind with truth about God.

And if all this is true...which I hope we see it's true...but if all this is true, then to think unworthy thoughts of heaven is to think unworthy thoughts of God. This is why we need to think well about heaven, because how we think about heaven is ultimately a reflection of how we think about God. If we think heaven is boring, then this exposes the reality that we ultimately think God is boring. If we think heaven is glorious and good, then we think that God is glorious and good. Oh, let's not think unworthy thoughts of heaven, and in the process think unworthy thoughts of God. Spurgeon said, *"To come to Thee is to come home from exile, to come to land out of the raging storm, to come to rest after long labor, to come to the goal of my desires and the summit of my wishes."*

### **Heave is a place of final resurrection for our bodies.**

Heaven, a place of full reconciliation with God, and heaven is a place of final resurrection for our bodies. We'll move quickly here since we have already discussed the resurrection of the dead, but I want us to think about this a bit more practically as it relates to our resurrection life in the new heaven and the new earth. Based on 1 Corinthians 15:40-44, as we've already seen, we will be raised spiritually. The passage says,

*There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is of one kind, and the glory of the earthly is of another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.*

Entirely Spirit-filled, which means, we will be completely free from sin. Nothing unclean in heaven. Revelation 21:27, *"But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."* Also, Revelation 22:14-15, *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates. Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."*

According to Revelation, we will be perfectly robed in righteousness. Revelation 7:13-14 says, *"Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, 'Who are these, clothed in white robes, and from where have they come?' I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' And he said to me, 'These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" Also, Revelation 19:8, "...it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints and completely untouched by temptation."*

Perfectly robed in righteousness and untouched by temptation. Don't you long for the day when not only will we be free from sin, but we will be free from any temptation to sin? Revelation 20:10 says, *"...and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."* In that day, we will be utterly free to obey. Paul Helm said, *"The freedom of heaven, then, is the freedom from sin; not that the believer just happens to be free from sin, but that he is so constituted or reconstituted that he cannot sin. He doesn't want to sin, and he does not want to want to sin."*

Heaven: A place where sin will literally be unthinkable to us, and sin will ultimately be undesirable to us. We won't even want it. Romans 8:24-25, *"For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."*

Heaven: A place of spiritual resurrection for our bodies, but not just spiritual. As we've seen, we will be raised physically. Hank Hanergraaff said, *"If the blueprints for our glorified bodies are in the DNA, then it would stand to reason that our bodies will be resurrected at the optimal stage of development determined by our DNA."* The Bible envisions the eternal heaven as a place where we will eat and drink. The Lord's Supper is a meal for a reason because it symbolize the anticipation of a banquet feast in heaven. Isaiah 25:6 says, *"On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined."* Matthew 8:11 also says, *"I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven..."* In Matthew 26:29, Jesus says, *"I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* Luke 22:18 says, *"For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."* Also, Luke 22:28-30, *"You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a*

*kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

We even see Jesus, in His resurrected body, physically eating and drinking. Luke 24:36-42:

*As they were talking about these things, Jesus himself stood among them, and said to them, "Peace to you!" But they were startled and frightened and thought they saw a spirit. And he said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. And while they still disbelieved for joy and were marveling, he said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave him a piece of broiled fish...*

Physically, we will eat and drink, and we will sing and shout. Revelation 7:9-10: *"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"*

Our senses will enable us to experience our surroundings. As John receives this vision from heaven, all of his senses are involved: Seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling. We will have senses that enable us to experience the new heaven and new earth around us. Revelation 21:10-11 says, *"And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal."*

Our abilities will allow us to achieve our aspirations. Heaven is a place where we will have physical abilities that align with our natural aspirations. No physical disability or inability to do anything God has created us to do. In 1 Corinthians 15:49, Paul says, *"Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven."*

As we've already discussed when it comes to whether or not we will be recognizable, Scripture teaches that our personality will be preserved. Numerous Scripture passages speak to this. Job says in Job 19:25-27, *"For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!"* Luke 16:25 says, *"But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.'"* Matthew 26:29, *"I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."* Also, Revelation 20:15, *"And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."*

Our names are personally written in the book of life, and each of us personally who has trusted in Christ will be welcomed at the table. And this is important because it is so different a world religion like Buddhism. Bruce Milne writes:

*We can banish all fear of being absorbed into the 'All' which Buddhism holds before us, or reincarnated in some other life form as in the post-mortem prospect of Hinduism ... . The self with which we were endowed by the Creator in his gift of life to us, the self whose worth was secured forever in*

the self-substitution of God for us on the cross, that self will endure into eternity. Death cannot destroy us.

Our personality will be preserved; our humanity will be pure. Luke 9:29, "*And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white.*" First John 3:2-3, "*Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*" Also, Matthew 13:43, "*Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.*"

In the new heaven and the new earth, we will be perfectly human, as Jesus is perfectly human physically. Our bodies will be pleasing to the Lord, our bodies will be pleasing to ourselves, and our bodies will be pleasing to others.

So, we will be raised spiritually, physically, and mentally. Scripture teaches that our knowledge of God will always be true. First Corinthians 13:8-12 says,

*Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.*

Now, when 1 Corinthians 13:12 says that we shall know fully, this doesn't mean that in heaven, we will all of the sudden become omniscient and know everything. We're not going to get to heaven and become God. Wayne Grudem writes, "1 Corinthians 13:12 does not say that we will be omniscient or know everything (Paul could have said we will know all things, '*ta panta*', if he had wished to do so), but rightly translated, simply says that we will know in a fuller or more intensive way, 'even as we have been known,' that is, without any error or misconceptions in our knowledge."

So, our knowledge of God will always be true, but it will never be complete. In the words of Psalm 145:3, "*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable.*" Ephesians 2:4-7:

*But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*

Both of these words make clear that the greatness of God can be searched and the grace of God can be measured for millions and millions of years, and there will still be more greatness to search and still be more grace to measure. God is infinitely great, and God is infinitely goodness. And don't miss this; this is where the joy of heaven is found! This is one of my favorite quotes from Stephen Charnock's "Discourse on the Eternity of God". It is quite a volume. Listen to what he says.

When we enjoy God, we enjoy him in his eternity without any flux ... Time is fluid, but eternity is stable; and after many ages, the joys will be as savory

and satisfying as if they had been but that moment first tasted by our hungry appetites. When the glory of the Lord shall rise upon you, it shall be so far from ever setting, that after millions of years are expired, as numerous as the sands on the seashore, the sun, in the light of whose countenance you shall live, shall be as bright as at the first appearance; he will be so far from ceasing to flow, that he will flow as strong, as full, as at the first communication of himself in glory to the creature. God is always vigorous and flourishing; a pure act of life, sparkling new and fresh rays of life and light to the creature, flourishing with a perpetual spring, and contenting the most capacious desire; forming your interest, pleasure, and satisfaction; with an infinite variety, without any change or succession; he will have variety to increase delights, and eternity to perpetuate them; this will be the fruit of the enjoyment of an infinite and eternal God.

Oh, for all of eternity, we will continue to discover more and more and more of God's greatness and goodness. If in pride we want to be equal to God in knowledge, this will depress us. "You mean we'll never arrive?" If in pride we want to be equal to God in knowledge, this will depress us. If in humility we want to enjoy God in heaven, this will delight us. Our knowledge of God will be true and ever-increasing, and so will our knowledge of the world. In heaven, our knowledge of the world will continually expand as we perpetually explore more and more and more of the new heaven and the new earth. Oh, contemplate the mental wonder of a resurrected body in a new heaven and a new earth.

We will be raised emotionally. So, think about our emotions, the seat of our affections. Psalm 37:4 exhorts us, "*Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*" So, when we delight ourselves in God, we find all the desires of our hearts fulfilled. The problem is in this world, our delight in God is imperfect; we have competing affections warring with our emotions, and we are tempted to delight in things in this world other than God, and this affects us negatively. We are not always fulfilled. But now, consider heaven, a place where we will perfectly delight in God, and in that place, all the desires of our heart will be fulfilled. Our feelings will be entirely enjoyable. Luke 6:21-23 says,

*"Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets."*

See the reversal there, even as Revelation 21:4 promises us that mourning and crying and pain will be gone. It says, "*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.*"

Our feelings will be entirely enjoyable, and our cravings will be completely satisfied just as Jesus promised in John 6:35: "*Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.'*" Follow this: Hunger and thirst will not be ultimately quieted in heaven. Revelation 7:16-17 says, "*They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*"

However, when Scripture says in Revelation 7 that we won't hunger anymore nor thirst anymore, this doesn't mean that we won't want to eat or drink. Instead, it means, as you read farther along, that all our hunger and all our thirst will be unfailingly quenched; hunger and thirst will be unfailingly quenched. Revelation 21:6, *"And he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.'"*

Our desires will be totally fulfilled. Adoniram Judson, missionary to Burma, said, "When Christ calls me Home I shall go with the gladness of a boy bounding away from school." Again, this is so different from world religion like Buddhism, where the goal of Buddhism is the elimination of all desire. With Christianity, the exact opposite is true. The goal of Christianity is the gratification of all desire. Revelation 22:17, *"The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price."*

Our desires totally fulfilled, and not only will our desires be totally fulfilled...I love this...in heaven, our wants will be fully trustworthy. We will want only what God wants, so we won't ever have to question whether or not what we want is good. Oh, I love the way Alcorn puts this. He says, "One of the greatest things about Heaven is that we'll no longer have to battle our desires. They'll always be pure, attending to their proper objects. We'll enjoy food without gluttony and eating disorders. We'll express admiration and affection without lust, fornication, or betrayal. Those simply won't exist." This is why C.S. Lewis wrote in *The Chronicles of Narnia* that Lucy said, "I've a feeling we've got to the country where everything is allowed." Finally, what Augustine talked about in the fourth century will be true: "Love God and do as you please."

### **Heaven is a place of future reunion with the church.**

Oh, heaven: A place of final resurrection for our bodies spiritually, physically, intellectually, and emotionally in every way! And relationally: Heaven is a place of future reunion with the church. Hebrews 12:22-24 envisions us coming. It says,

*But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.*

Heaven, a place of reunion where we will recognize one another, just as Peter, James, and John recognized Moses and Elijah in Matthew 17:1-8.

*And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. And Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah." He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only.*

We will recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Matthew 8:11, *"I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven..."* First Thessalonians 4:14-18 encourages us with words of reunion. It says,

*For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. Therefore encourage one another with these words.*

J.C. Ryle, commenting on this text, says, "There would be no point in these words of consolation if they did not imply the mutual recognition of saints. The hope with which he cheers wearied Christians is the hope of meeting their beloved friends again .... But in the moment that we who are saved shall meet our several friends in heaven, we shall at once know them, and they will at once know us." I love Amy Carmichael, missionary to India, who asked:

Shall we know one another in Heaven? Shall we love and remember? I do not think anyone need wonder about this or doubt for a single moment. We are never told we shall, because, I expect, it was not necessary to say anything about this which our own hearts tell us. We do not need words. For if we think for a minute, we know. Would you be yourself if you did not love and remember? We are told that we shall be like our Lord Jesus. Surely this does not mean in holiness only, but in everything; and does not He know and love and remember? He would not be Himself if He did not, and we should be ourselves if we did not.

In the new heaven and new earth, we will love one another as the overflow of perfected love for God. Matthew 22:34-40,

*But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*

John 13:35, *"By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."* First John 3:16-18 says, *"By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth."*

We will be a family before our Father, as brothers and sisters and mothers and children. In Mark 10:29-30, it says, *"Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the*

*gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”*

We will be a bride with our Savior. We’ve already talked about the imagery of heaven as a bride joining together with her bridegroom, so let’s pause at this point and ask, “Will there be marriage in heaven?” And the Bible answers that with a yes and with a no. No, there will not be marriage in heaven in the sense of the earthly signpost. Jesus makes this clear in multiple passages. Matthew 22:30 says, *“For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”* Mark 12:25, *“For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.”* Also, Luke 20:34-36, which says, *“And Jesus said to them, ‘The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.’”*

So clearly there will be no marriage in heaven in the sense of an earthly signpost, and I put it that way because the purpose of marriage in this earth is to be a signpost that points to marriage in heaven.

So, yes, there will be marriage in heaven in the sense of the eternal destination. Remember what the Bible teaches in Ephesians 5:31-32 which says, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.”* God created marriage for a purpose. It is an illustration of Christ’s love for His church in a groom’s love for his bride. Marriage on earth is intended to be a signpost that points to Christ’s love for His church, and so once we get to heaven, and that marriage is perfect and Christ’s relationship with His people completely restored, then the earthly signpost is no longer necessary.

Now for married couples, some may be in a sense disappointed by this; the thought of being separated from their wife or husband does not sound appealing. But don’t picture heaven as a place of separation from your wife or husband. If your wife or husband is a follower of Christ, then you will be reunited with each other in a greater way than you ever were on this earth. On this earth, there was sin in your relationship with your spouse. In heaven, there will be no sin in your relationship with your spouse. So, if you were best of friends with someone here, for example, in marriage, then don’t think that when you get to heaven, that will be somehow lessened. It will only get better. But this earthly institution called marriage simply won’t be necessary in that relationship.

Well, then, some might ask...and here it is, one of the moments you’ve been waiting for: Will there be sex in heaven? And the answer, here again, is both yes and no. Yes, there will be sex in heaven in the sense of gender uniqueness. God created people as male and female in Genesis 1 as a complement to one another in Genesis 2, and Scripture gives no evidence that all of the sudden we become hermaphrodites upon entrance into heaven. Genesis 1:26-28, which we have looked at numerous times tonight, says,

*Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the*

*earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

Then, Genesis 2:18-23 says,

*Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him." Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man."*

After all, when Jesus rose from the dead, He rose from the dead as a man.

So God saves and redeems and resurrects us as men and women, brothers and sisters, and yes, there will be sex in heaven in the sense of sexuality, gender uniqueness, but no, there will not be sex in heaven in the sense of marital union. Sex, as in sexual intercourse, is designed by God for pleasure and procreation in marriage. First Corinthians 7:1-9 says,

*Now concerning the matters about which you wrote: "It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman." But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband. The husband should give to his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband. For the wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. Likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another, except perhaps by agreement for a limited time, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, so that Satan may not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion.*

Since there will be no marriage and no procreation, for that matter, in heaven, there will be no sex.

Now, some people will hear that and be disappointed, thinking, "I thought sex was a good gift from God. So, why would He withhold this good gift in a perfect place like heaven?" And that's a good question, because sex is a good gift from God just as marriage is, but just like we saw with marriage, as great and as wonderful as marriage is in this world, it's intent is to point to something even better. So, in a similar way, the gift of sex in marriage is intended to point to a joyous union that's even greater in heaven. And remember, heaven is a place where all of our desires will be totally fulfilled. So, we're not talking about a situation here where we will have a frustrated desire in any way.

Some people even think, "Well, it's human to have sex, and I thought we'd be perfectly human," but this kind of thinking takes sex as good and turns it into sex as god. No one has to have sex in order to be fully human. If that were the case, then Jesus Himself was not fully human. In all of this, we need to realize that in not including sex in heaven, God knows what He's doing. I love the way C.S. Lewis puts this:

I think our present outlook might be like that of a small boy who, on being told that the sexual act was the highest bodily pleasure should immediately ask whether you ate chocolates at the same time. On receiving the answer, "No," he might regard absence of chocolates as the chief characteristic of sexuality. In vain would you tell him that the reason why lovers in their carnal raptures don't bother about chocolates is that they have something better to think of. The boy knows chocolate: he does not know the positive thing that excludes it. We are in the same position. We know the sexual life; we do not know, except in glimpses, the other thing which, in Heaven, will leave no room for it.

Oh, in heaven, we will be a family before our Father, a bride with our Savior, and we will be a people from every nation with diverse ethnicities. Acts 2:5-13 gives us the account of Pentecost, and it says,

*Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. And they were amazed and astonished, saying, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God." And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine."*

Revelation 7:9-10 tells us of a day coming where all nations will be represented around the throne. It says, "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"

We will be an ancestry from every generation. Jonathan Edwards said, and just imagine this:

Every Christian friend that goes before us from this world is a ransomed spirit waiting to welcome us in heaven. There will be the infant of days that we have lost below, through grace to be found above. There the Christian father, and mother, and wife, and child, and friend, with whom we shall renew the holy fellowship of the satins, which was interrupted by death here, but shall be commenced again in the upper sanctuary, and then shall never end. There we shall have companionship with the patriarchs and fathers and saints of the Old and New Testaments, and those of whom the world was not worthy ... And there, above all, we shall enjoy and dwell with God the Father, whom we have loved with all our hearts on earth; and with Jesus Christ, our beloved

Savior, who has always been to us the chief among ten thousands, and altogether lovely; and with the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier, and Guide, and Comforter; and shall be filled with all the fullness of the Godhead forever!

Now, Edwards mentioned at the top of that quote, and people often ask, "What about infants who have died? Will they be in heaven?" And obviously, this is a hugely emotional question and hugely important question for many families who have experienced the death of a child, even a miscarriage. So, what happens to infants who have died? And much like the question of what happens to people who have never heard of Jesus, we don't have a place in Scripture where Jesus says, "At some point you may wonder what happens to infants who have died. Well, here's the answer..." But even though we don't have that kind of explicit reference, we do have exhortations throughout Scripture that apply to this question.

When asking this question, it seems that Scripture exhorts us, first, to revere: God is merciful, righteous, and good. In the words of Genesis 18, the Judge of all the earth will do what is right and just without question. Genesis 18:25 says, "*Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*" In addition, Matthew 18:10-14 makes clear that Jesus and the Father love children and are especially merciful to children. The passage says,

*"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven. What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly, I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish."*

And, as we've already seen, God desires that all would be saved. Second Peter 3:9 says, "*The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*" Again, this is not universalism; this doesn't mean that all people everywhere will be saved, but simply see God's character and bring God's character to bear on this question. God is right and just; He is merciful toward children, and He desires their salvation.

So, start with reverence for God. Then, recognize: The Bible expresses confidence that believers will see young children after death. Second Samuel 12:19-23, when David's infant son dies, the passage says,

*But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David understood that the child was dead. And David said to his servants, "Is the child dead?" They said, "He is dead." Then David arose from the earth and washed and anointed himself and changed his clothes. And he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. He then went to his own house. And when he asked, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, "What is this thing that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive; but when the child died, you arose and ate food." He said, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept, for I said, 'Who knows whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead. Why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."*

So, David expresses confidence that when he goes to heaven, he will go to his son. So, recognize the that Bible expresses confidence that believers will see young children after death.

Revere, recognize, then reflect: The Bible holds young children to a different measure of accountability before God. Now, this doesn't mean that young children are born sinless in some way; that's certainly not what the Bible teaches. But when Romans 1 talks about the sinfulness of man, it talks about all who know God and rebel against God. Romans 1:18-21 states,

*For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

And then, Romans 2:14-16 talks about how we have a knowledge of right and wrong written on our hearts which we all know we have transgressed. It says,

*For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.*

All of this is setting the stage for an understanding of the gospel. In order to call out for God to save from sin through faith in Christ, a person must have a moral awareness of their sin, an ability to understand their transgression against God. So, there must be, in some sense, a state of moral awareness in order to even understand the gospel, something that young children don't have the capability of comprehending.

And Scripture speaks to this. You go back to Deuteronomy 1:34-39, and you see a different measure of accountability before God for children who are not held accountable for the sin when God's people refused to enter into the promised land. It says:

*"And the LORD heard your words and was angered, and he swore, 'Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh. He shall see it, and to him and to his children I will give the land on which he has trodden, because he has wholly followed the LORD!' Even with me the LORD was angry on your account and said, 'You also shall not go in there. Joshua the son of Nun, who stands before you, he shall enter. Encourage him, for he shall cause Israel to inherit it. And as for your little ones, who you said would become a prey, and your children, who today have no knowledge of good or evil, they shall go in there. And to them I will give it, and they shall possess it.'"*

So, you see this reference to little ones who don't have knowledge of good and evil; they will be held to a different measure of accountability before God.

Now, what the line is between “little ones” who aren’t held accountable and those who are held accountable is not specified, so we’re not sure, but we know that even these little ones, though they were born in sin, were not held accountable for sin in this way.

This leads to this next exhortation: Remember: The only way for sinful mankind (including children born with a sinful nature) to be saved is by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. In other words, no one gets a pass on their sinful nature before God. Christ is the only way we can be restored to God. Romans 5:12-21 says,

*Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Also, 1 Timothy 2:3-7 says,

*This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.*

So, you put all of this together, and you realize we can only go to heaven through Christ, children are held to a different measure of accountability before God, the Bible expresses confidence that children who die go to heaven, and the Bible teaches that God is not only just and right but particularly loving and merciful toward children. Based on all of that, I believe we have good reason for confidence that children who die are eternally safe in the arms of Jesus.

And then, even as we think about heaven, people may wonder, “Well, what about loved ones who are in hell?” In other words, “Will it be possible to be happy in heaven when you know that some people you know and love are in hell?” Obviously, this is an intensely emotional question, one that I really can’t even begin to comprehend, but Scripture does speak clearly of people in heaven praising God, even for His justice in sinners’ eternal condemnation. Revelation 15:3-4, “*And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, 'Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the*

*Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.*” Though I won’t presume to understand this completely, I can’t improve on the words of J.I. Packer:

God the Father (who now pleads with mankind to accept the reconciliation that Christ’s death secured for all) and God the Son (our appointed Judge, who wept over Jerusalem) will in a final judgment express wrath and administer justice against rebellious humans. God’s holy righteousness will hereby be revealed; God will be doing the right thing, vindicating himself at last against all who have defied him .... (Read through Matt. 25; John 5:22-29; Rom. 2:15-16, 12:19; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 18:1-19:3, 20:11-35, and you will see that clearly.) God will judge justly, and all angels, saints, and martyrs will praise him for it. So it seems inescapable that we shall, with them, approve the judgment of persons—rebels—whom we have known and loved.

### **Heave is a place of complete restoration of creation.**

Heaven is a place of future reunion with the church, and heaven is a place of complete restoration of creation, just as we’ve talked about. This isn’t just about our resurrection and renewal and restoration, but the restoration of all creation. Heaven is a place of physical reality. Just as Eden was, so will the new earth be. Genesis 2:8-9, *“And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”* Revelation 22:1-2, *“Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.”*

Heaven is a place of visual beauty. These descriptions of heaven in Revelation 21 and 22 give beautiful images to imagine regarding heaven. Revelation 21:10-11, *“And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.”* A few verses later in Revelation 21:18-21, John writes,

*The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

Alcorn writes:

Look at God’s track record in creating natural wonders in this universe. On Mars, the volcano Olympus Mons rises 79,000 feet, nearly three times higher than Mount Everest. The base of Olympus Mons is 370 miles across and would cover the entire state of Nebraska. The Valles Marineris is a vast canyon that stretches one-sixth of the way around Mars. It’s 2,800 miles long, 370 miles

wide, and 4.5 miles deep. Hundreds of our Grand Canyons could fit inside it. [And] the New Earth may have far more spectacular features than these.

Heaven, a place of visual beauty and a place of natural harmony. Complete harmony, not only among men, but between men and creation. Revelation 22:3, *"No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him."* And, as we've talked about, heaven is a place of continual worship. Psalm 19:1-3, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard."*

Now, when we think about the restoration of creation, people often ask, "What about animals? What does the Bible teach about animals, and specifically animals in the new heaven and the new earth?" Well, go back to the beginning of Scripture, and realize that animals were created good by God. Genesis 1:28-30 says,

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.*

Genesis 2:19-20a, *"Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field."*

You look at descriptions of animals in the book of Job and Psalm 104, and you realize that animals are created to reveal the glory of God. In Job 39:19-40:2, God says,

*"Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? Do you make him leap like the locust? His majestic snorting is terrifying. He paws in the valley and exults in his strength; he goes out to meet the weapons. He laughs at fear and is not dismayed; he does not turn back from the sword. Upon him rattle the quiver, the flashing spear, and the javelin. With fierceness and rage he swallows the ground; he cannot stand still at the sound of the trumpet. When the trumpet sounds, he says 'Aha!' He smells the battle from afar, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting. "Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars and spreads his wings toward the south? Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up and makes his nest on high? On the rock he dwells and makes his home, on the rocky crag and stronghold. From there he spies out the prey; his eyes behold it from far away. His young ones suck up blood, and where the slain are, there is he."*

Psalm 104:24-30:

*O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom have you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Here is the sea, great and wide, which teems with creatures innumerable, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it. These all look to*

*you, to give them their food in due season. When you give it to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.*

You get to Psalm 148:5-10, and you see a picture of all creatures, including animals, being exhorted to praise God. It says,

*Let them praise the name of the LORD! For he commanded and they were created. And he established them forever and ever; he gave a decree, and it shall not pass away. Praise the LORD from the earth, you great sea creatures and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and mist, stormy wind fulfilling his word! Mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars! Beasts and all livestock, creeping things and flying birds!*

So, animals are created good by God for the glory of God. And, in Genesis 2, reiterated in Psalm 8:3-8, animals were placed under the authority of man, under his dominion. The Psalmist says of man:

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.*

But then, animals were affected by the fall of man. After sin entered the world, God took the skin of an animal and clothed Adam and Eve. Genesis 3:21, *"And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them."* And the effects of sin infuse the rest of the created order after that, to the point where Romans 8:20-22 talks about all creation longing for redemption, and animals are certainly included in that created order. It says, *"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."*

When, after sin entered the world, God determined to flood the earth, animals were spared in that flood; animals were spared in the flood of the old earth. It's interesting that God took care to save not just a family of people, but two of each animal. Genesis 6:17-22 says,

*"For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you. They shall be male and female. Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground, according to its kind, two of every sort shall come in to you to keep them alive. Also take with you every sort of food that is eaten,*

*and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them." Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.*

Genesis 9:9-17 says,

*"Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth." God said to Noah, "This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth."*

So then, we are not surprised when we see that Scripture seems to teach that animals will be included in the restoration of the new earth. Isaiah 11:6-9 envisions the restoration of creation in the new heaven and the new earth, saying:

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*

Now, we need to be careful here not to equate the restoration of sinful humans with the restoration of animals, because the Bible doesn't look at them the same at all. The Bible gives no evidence that certain dogs or cats or cows or fish that die in this world will be resurrected from the dead. So, do all dogs go to heaven? Will your dog go to heaven? Scripture doesn't specifically indicate that it will. And remember that Jesus obviously did not die for animals in the same way that He died for humans. We are created in the image of God, we have sinned against God, and we need His redemption. Animals are not created in the image of God, and they don't sin in a way that necessitates a Redeemer.

At the same time, animals generally are a part of the created order, and as a result, are a part of creation that is longing for re-creation and restoration. How that will happen is not certain, i.e., what animals would be resurrected, how they would be resurrected, etc., Scripture doesn't speak to this. But Scripture does speak to animals' inclusion in the restoration of the new earth.

Now, one other thing. The text there in Isaiah 11 seems to envision a new earth with no human or animal predation, a picture that's also reiterated in Isaiah 65:25: *"The wolf and*

*the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,' says the LORD."*

So, you put that together, and you realize, if there's no human or animal predation, then that means animals will not die, which seems consequently to indicate a new earth where we will likely eat a lot of vegetation. Though I'm not absolutely, 100% certain, it does seem like we won't be eating steak and seafood in the new heaven and the new earth. Heaven is not paleo. Genesis 1:29-30 says, *"And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.'* And it was so." Also, Genesis 9:1-3:

*And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything."*

Moving on from animals. What about the sun, moon, and stars? Isaiah 60:19-21 says, *"The sun shall be no more your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give you light; but the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun shall no more go down, nor your moon withdraw itself; for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended."* Revelation 21:23-25, *"And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there."* Revelation 22:5, *"And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever."*

At the same time, we know from the beginning that God created the sun as light and the moon for darkness, and neither of them were evil. This was the picture before sin ever entered into the world. Genesis 1:3-5, *"And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day."* So, it would not be surprising for there to be a physical sun and moon. Based on what the Bible teaches, at the very least, we would say that the presence of God will so overshadow everything in all creation that a sun or moon will not be necessary.

What about the sea? The Bible says in Revelation 21:1 that the sea will be no more. At the same time, Isaiah 60:5-9 envisions peoples and wealth coming from the sea, by way of the sea. It says,

*Then you shall see and be radiant; your heart shall thrill and exult, because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house. Who are these that fly like a cloud, and like doves to*

*their windows? For the coastlands shall hope for me, the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your children from afar, their silver and gold with them, for the name of the LORD your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because he has made you beautiful.*

Again, much like with the sun, moon, and stars, we don't really know if the picture of no sea in Revelation 21 is intended to be taken literally or symbolically. All throughout Revelation, the sea is symbolic of evil, so it wouldn't be surprising for Revelation 21 simply to be a description of man's perfect restoration to God, no longer separated by the evil of sin. Or, it may be literal; there may literally be no sea.

What about weather? What about lightning and thunder and rain and snow? Well, much like we saw with animals in the book of Job, we know that God creates and sends weather like this for His glory; the weather is a display of His glory. Job 37:3-13 says,

*"Under the whole heaven he lets it go, and his lightning to the corners of the earth. After it his voice roars; he thunders with his majestic voice, and he does not restrain the lightnings when his voice is heard. God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend. For to the snow he says, 'Fall on the earth,' likewise to the downpour, his mighty downpour. He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom he made may know it. Then the beasts go into their lairs, and remain in their dens. From its chamber comes the whirlwind, and cold from the scattering winds. By the breath of God ice is given, and the broad waters are frozen fast. He loads the thick cloud with moisture; the clouds scatter his lightning. They turn around and around by his guidance, to accomplish all that he commands them on the face of the habitable world. Whether for correction or for his land or for love, he causes it to happen."*

So again, we wouldn't be surprised to see all these demonstrations of His glory in the new heaven and the new earth, but, obviously, we know that even amidst lightning or thunder, wind, rain, or snow, no one would be hurt by these elements. Using his imagination, Randy Alcorn asks questions like, "When we live on the New Earth, could we go hiking in a snowstorm without fear of trauma or death? Could we jump off a cliff into a river three hundred feet below? Could we stand in an open field in flashing lightning and roaring thunder and experience the exhilaration of God's powerful hand?" Some of these things we don't know, but what we do know is that heaven is a place of complete restoration of creation.

### **Heaven is a place of comprehensive redemption of culture.**

And finally, heaven is a place of comprehensive redemption of culture. Again, the purpose of the Bible is not to give us specifics about every detail of heaven and to satisfy all our curiosity concerning what it will be like, but just as we can imagine how all the good elements of creation will be totally restored by God, we can only imagine how all the good elements of culture will be completely redeemed. Culture encompasses commerce, the arts, sciences, athletics, anything and everything that God-empowered, creative human minds can conceive and strong human bodies can implement. Art, music, literature, crafts, technology, clothing, jewelry, education, food preparation...all are part of society or culture, which is the creative accomplishment of God's image-bearers.

Music and the arts will be totally redeemed and perfectly used for the glory of God. Revelation 5:9-10 says, "And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for

*God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”* Writing and storytelling will be redeemed. Just as Psalm 145:4-13a exhorts us to tell stories to one another of God’s greatness, just imagine the storytelling we’ll do in heaven. The passage says,

*One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts. On the glorious splendor of your majesty, and on your wondrous works, I will meditate. They shall speak of the might of your awesome deeds, and I will declare your greatness. They shall pour forth the fame of your abundant goodness and shall sing aloud of your righteousness. The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made. All your works shall give thanks to you, O LORD, and all your saints shall bless you! They shall speak of the glory of your kingdom and tell of your power, to make known to the children of man your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.*

And stories we’ll hear. John himself told us that if everything Jesus had done were written down, the world itself could not contain the books that would hold them. John 21:25 says, *“Now there are also many other things that Jesus did. Were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”* That sounds like we’ve got a lot of stories to hear in heaven!

Even beyond Christ, just imagine hearing the stories that unfolded in the drama of church history. Philip Melancton, who served alongside Martin Luther, envisioned Luther the storyteller who loved church history, now in heaven embracing the people he had talked about. He said,

We remember the great delight with which he recounted the course, the counsels, the perils and escapes of the prophets, and the learning with which he discoursed on all the ages of the Church, thereby showing that he was inflamed by no ordinary passion for these wonderful men. Now he embraces them and rejoices to hear them speak and to speak to them in turn. Now they hail him gladly as a companion, and thank God with him for having gathered and preserved the Church.

What joy we’ll have in storytelling in heaven. Imagine the complete redemption of drama and entertainment. C.S. Lewis wrote of Narnia: *“And there was greeting and kissing and handshaking and old jokes revived (you’ve no idea how good an old joke sounds after you take it out again after a rest of five or six hundred years).”*

Drama and entertainment, inventing and building. Even when we see the descriptions of heavens, there are gates and walls and foundations, all implying and pointing to the possibilities for inventing and building and creating in heaven. Revelation 21:10-21 says,

*And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve*

*foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement. The wall was built of jasper, while the city was pure gold, like clear glass. The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with every kind of jewel. The first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoptase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls, each of the gates made of a single pearl, and the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

Imagine the redemption of trade and business as we work to the glory of God. Revelation 21:24-25, *"By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there."*

Imagine the redemption of sports and recreation. Will there be sports in heaven? It certainly seems that sports are a good gift created by God and given to us, much like arts and entertainment. Sports throughout the New Testament are an illustration of the Christian life, and they are an avenue through which we glorify God. First Corinthians 9:24-27 says,

*Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.*

Paul says in Philippians 3:12-14, *"Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."* Again, he says in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing."*

You remember Eric Liddell's famous quote from "Chariots of Fire": "He made me fast, and when I run I feel God's pleasure .... To give up running would be to hold him in contempt." Imagine the redemption of sports and recreation. Maybe I'll finally be the baseball player I always dreamed I'd be. Will I finally be able to jack it out of the park? I think I may be!

And imagine the redemption of travel and exploration in a new heaven and a new earth. Alcorn writes:

*Skydiving without a parachute? Maybe, maybe not. Scuba diving without an air tank? I hope so. Will we be able to tolerate diving to depths of hundreds of feet without special equipment? We know that our resurrection bodies will be superior. Won't it be fantastic to test their limits and to invent new technologies that extend our ability to explore and enjoy God in the mighty*

realms he makes? Those who know God and believe his promise of bodily resurrection can dream great dreams. One day we will live those dreams.

Again, in our imagination, we don't want to fly away from truth, but upon truth, and Scripture gives us truth to imagine much upon. A good and gracious God who delights in giving good gifts to His creation. What does this God have in store for the people He loves to enjoy Him forever and ever?

## **Heaven Anticipated...**

### **We long for a new earth ...**

We long for a new earth, don't we? A new earth where we will exalt God's glory continually. First Corinthians 10:31, "*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*" We want to exalt God's glory continually as we enjoy God's gifts eternally. In the words of Romans 8:32, "*He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*" We will be with the author of every good and perfect gift! James 1:17, "*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*" Jonathan Edwards says:

God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.

And I love this perspective from Packer: "Hearts on earth may say in the course of a joyful experience, 'I don't want this ever 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."

### **We live on this earth ...**

Oh, we long for a new earth, and we live on this earth with a commitment to holiness. This is the way the Bible talks about our hope of heaven, with a commitment to holiness. Listen to 2 Peter 3:11-13:

*Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.*

We live on this earth with a commitment to holiness in our purity, turning aside from the fleeting pleasures of sin because we know we have a better possession. Second Corinthians 3:18, "*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*" Also, Hebrews 11:24-26, "*By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered the*

*reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward."*

We live on this earth with our possessions, knowing that we are not storing up treasures on earth, but in heaven! We're living for another world, and that changes the way we live in this world! Matthew 6:19-21, *"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."* Randy Alcorn says, "When we realize the pleasure that awaits us in God's presence, we can forgo lesser pleasures now. When we realize the possessions that await us in Heaven, we will gladly give away possessions on Earth to store up treasures in Heaven." Also, Hebrews 10:32-39 says,

*But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.*

We live on this earth with a commitment to holiness in our purity, with our possessions for one purpose: We want to take other people with us here. This is what we give our lives for! This is what we want our life to count for. In Acts 20:22-24, Paul says,

*"And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God."*

Second Thessalonians 1:5-12 also says,

*This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering—since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

C.S. Lewis said, "I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others do the same."

We live on this earth with a commitment to holiness, and with confidence amidst hardship, knowing that this world is not all there is. Amidst the worst of days, amidst the most difficult of times, like every saint of old described in Hebrews 11, we are looking forward to another home. Hebrews 11:1-2 says, "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.*" Hebrews 11:13-16,

*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.*

Hebrews 11:32-40,

*And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.*

Not this earth, but a new earth and a new heaven where we will be with God. Emmanuel, God with us. It is the theme of Anne Cousin's hymn and a beautiful expression of our hope.

The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of heaven breaks,  
The summer morn I've sighed for, the fair sweet morn awakes;  
Dark, dark hath been the midnight, but dayspring is at hand,  
And glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.  
The king there in his beauty without a veil is seen;  
It were a well-spent journey though sev'n deaths lay between:  
The Lamb with his fair army doth on Mount Zion stand,  
And glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

O Christ, he is the fountain, the deep sweet well of love!  
The streams on earth I've tasted, more deep I'll drink above:  
There to an ocean fullness his mercy doth expand,

And glory, glory dwelleth in Emmanuel's land.

The bride eyes not her garment, but her dear bridegroom's face;  
I will not gaze at glory, but on my King of grace;  
Not at the crown he giveth, but on his pierced hand:  
The lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land.

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