


Community And... Heaven

Various Texts

Nov 17, 2019 PM

Speaker: Pastor Mark Schindler




Community and...
Heaven

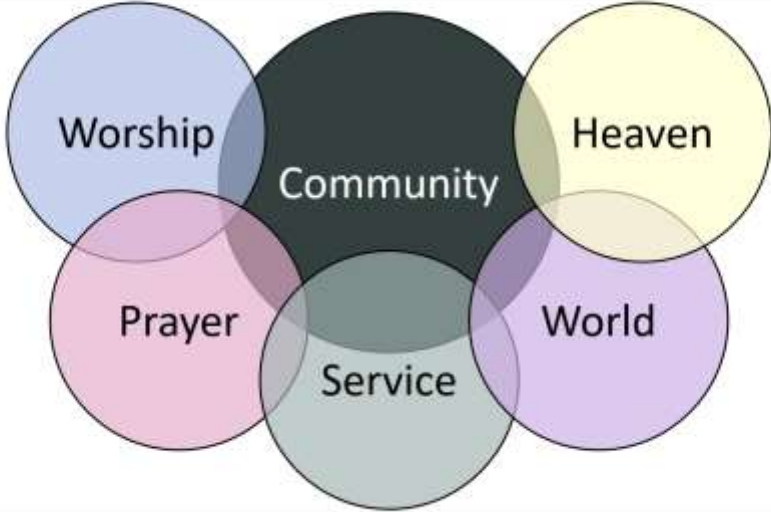
COMMUNITY AND... SERIES

NOVEMBER 17, 2019

Clearcreek Chapel Pulpit Ministry



Community And...



Worship

Prayer

Service


Heaven

World

Community

COMMUNITY AND HEAVEN

Slide 2



This evening is the final message in our “Community And” series. Our focus this evening is different than the first three as we consider the intersection of community and heaven. I originally had four messages in this series and Pastor Russ suggested adding this final topic. I was a bit hesitant at first, but the more I thought about it, the more it seemed a fitting final message. Not only is our gathering as a community of believers truly an intersection of heaven and earth. So many aspects of our present gathering as a church point us to our future gathering in heaven. But spending an eternity in heaven with Christ is the final and ultimate community for true believers.

Our community on earth is about gathering in worship and gathering to hear His word before God as His people. Jesus said that we worship in Spirit and in truth. In community we meet with one another, but more importantly we meet with God. As God’s people, we share His Spirit and our prayers and praise ascend to His throne. What we do here in community is not constrained to these walls nor to this world. We gather both in the presence of one another and in His presence, which dwells within us by His Spirit.

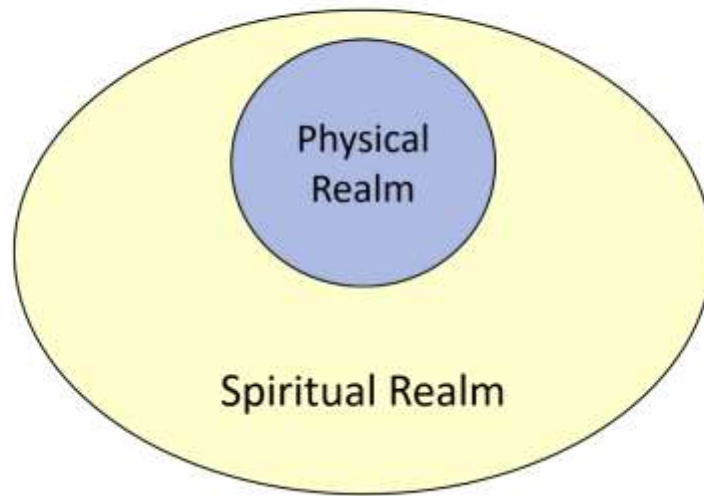
Tonight, we will take some time to consider how the intersection of heaven and community is seen in our gathering as a reflection of what eternal community will be like. It reminds us of our hope in the greater gathering that is to come. What we do here on earth as a gathered community is limited to our physical minds and bodies. But we hope and long for a day when our gathering as a community is not limited to walls and physical laws. We will someday gather together with Christ for eternity to forever dwell in His presence.

One more point about the intersection of heaven and community. Our gathering as a community on earth is also about being an heavenly outpost while we wait for our true home with Christ. Last Sunday evening we talked about our enmity with the world and the culture around us. In that same sense, the church is then a place where we stand firm together on the edge of the world’s influence, looking and waiting for the day when Christ shall come and bring us home. In this sense, heaven intersects into his world through our community as garrisons for God’s kingdom in hostile territory as we battle against Satan’s power and corruption.

My purpose for this message tonight is to consider how living and gathering in community both reminds us of heavenly realities **and** is a picture of what heaven will be like. True faith in Christ produces a hope and longing for heaven. We are to live in community in a way that encourages others toward a steadfast hope in heaven and looks for Christ’s coming. We gather to proclaim our faith in God’s promises to deliver us from this fallen world and to live out heaven on earth as His people until He comes.

[opening prayer]

Earth and Heaven



COMMUNITY AND HEAVEN

Slide 1



In last week's evening message, I noted that one of the reasons that God established the church and our community together is as a protection against the world. While we are in this world, we live within the physical realm that God created. And though God's Spirit dwells in us, our relationships and lives are impacted by a fallen world. Our community and fellowship with one another has a visible side that is, in effect our reality. Yet we know that while it is a physical reality, it is a temporary reality. This physical realm had a beginning and it will have an end. Heaven is a part of the spiritual realm and is eternal.




We have a tendency to think about these two realms as being independent one another. But God's word tells us that what we experience in this earthly reality is a part of a greater spiritual reality. However real this world feels and appears, there is a spiritual realm that is also real; and it is a permanent realm. Paul writes in Ephesians 1:3, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places*". Note that Paul says that we are blessed, present tense, in Christ with spiritual blessings in heavenly places. As believers, heaven is a real place and our future home. But we are blessed both here on earth and for eternity in Christ.


But the interaction with the spiritual realm is not all blessings. Paul writes later in Ephesians, Chapter 6, verse 12, that "*we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*" Satan and his demons roam this earth in opposition to God and the church.

We often live as if there is no spiritual reality beyond this world and this earthly realm. However, I believe we have a responsibility to live with an awareness of the spiritual realities of heaven and the spiritual forces at work in the world around us. I'm not talking about seeing the devil in

everything or everyone that opposes us. But neither are we to live ignorant of a greater spiritual reality that is present in our everyday lives.

Heaven's
Nature Seen

-  An Eternal Kingdom
-  An Eternal Fellowship
-  An Eternal Home

COMMUNITY AND HEAVEN Slide 4 

One of the wonderful and amazing aspects to biblical community here on earth is how it pictures for us the realities of community in heaven. There are three key aspects to this reflection of eternal community that are important for us to be reminded of. Our community together is a reflection of heaven's nature seen in an eternal Kingdom, an eternal fellowship, and our eternal home. Each time we gather we are given a taste of what heaven will be like.

First, let's look at how our community is a reflection of an eternal kingdom. Revelations tells us in Chapter 1, verse 5 and 6, *"5 To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever"*. What I would like you to note from this verse is that as believers we **have been made** a kingdom. It is ours even in the here and now. We have already been transferred from the realm of this world into the realm of Christ our King. We live between these two realities. As a community we gather on earth under the authority of Christ as King. As such, we are now citizens of His kingdom with all the responsibilities and blessings. Philippians 3:20 affirms this saying that *"our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."* The church is Christ's kingdom on earth and we are its heavenly citizens even though while we wait a while to realize it fully.

Additionally, our gathering as a people of Christ's kingdom points us to a heavenly reality that we shall someday be a part of. Revelations 11:15 tells us this. *"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"."* Someday, we will gather together with all of the believers from all of time, before the one true King who shall

reign forever and ever. Psalms 103:19 reminds us of this. *“The LORD has established his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all.”* By faith we look to a time when Christ will complete the promise of an eternal Kingdom. So as we gather together in this present day, we look to a day when Christ will reign from His throne and His people shall bow down and worship Him in Heaven for all eternity.

The second way our community reflects the nature of heaven is through our fellowship together. Our gathering in fellowship shows the power of the Gospel to bring together people who were once selfish and prideful into a community of love and service. Our gathering reflects a unity around Christ while celebrating our diversity as a people of God. Every Lord’s day, across this earth believers bring prayers and praise together as an offering in one voice to God. Together, we hope for the day when Christ shall deliver us from this world. Hebrews 10:24-25 reminds us, *“And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, **and all the more** as you see the Day drawing near.”* There is a clear connection to our hope for that coming day of deliverance that should cause us to encourage one another **all the more** toward love and good works in our fellowship as God’s people.

What our gathering as a local community pictures will one day be seen on a far larger scale. In heaven, we will be a part of a fellowship made up of people from every time, nation, and culture of this world. Revelations 7:9-10 tells us, *“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!””* Such a grand proclamation will be the fulfillment of the kingdom mission of the church to make and mature disciples from all the peoples of this world. In that day we will stand united as one, in perfect fellowship with one another, joined in a great wedding feast and in worship of Christ our Savior and Lord.

The third way our community reflects the nature of heaven is in seeing it as our eternal home. Our gathering together in community is a reminder that this world is not our home. I believe that the closest thing we have to home this side of heaven is gathering as a church. We’ve probably all heard the phrase “home is where the heart is”. I think there is a lot of truth in that statement. Whenever I am absent for a week or two from gathering at the Chapel, I miss being here. And my heart is filled with joy the next Sunday that I am back to worship and fellowship here with you. You see in a very real way, our community draws our hearts not only to one another, but closer to heaven and the hope of Christ’s glory. And as we grow older, our longing for that eternal home grows as our physical bodies begin to fail.

But our community as believers here on earth is still a temporary connection to our true home in heaven. While on earth, by faith, we look over the horizon for our real home. That is the place that our heart should be. That is the place we should be laying up our treasures. That is the place that our hopes of eternity with Christ rest. There we will find a home that will end all the ills and suffering of this world. Young people, it may be hard to understand, but this present life is just a fleeting breath. Compared to eternity in heaven, our lives are a short journey taking us from the troubles of earth to the glories of a heavenly home.

Hebrews 11:13-16



Faith to see...

Believed in the promise; welcomed them from the distance; confessed that the earth is not their home



As strangers...

Desired to be in their homeland; understood the greater reality of a spiritual place



Going home...

No longer wanted to return; yearned for a better place; we do not belong in this world



Perhaps one of my favorite passages in scripture is from Hebrews 11, verses 13 through 16. Here, the author of Hebrews is looking back to those men and women of faith in the Old Testament who looked forward to God's promise of a new and better home. If they, from a distant perspective had believing faith to seek an eternal home, how much more should we seek heaven from a perspective so much nearer the cross. Listen as I read these verses. *"13 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. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 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."*

Verse 13 opens by referring to some of the early ancestors of the nation of Israel. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah all died before they were able to see the fulfillment of God's promises to them. Note the two elements of their faith. First, by faith they saw and believed in the promise of a better place from afar. They greeted them; that is, they welcomed them, even from a great distance of time, as a reality. Second, they acknowledged or confessed that the earth was not their home. They realized that this world was not where they belonged. They thought of themselves as aliens, exiled in a foreign place. We are no less a similar community. Joined together in faith, as a community of strangers and aliens in a foreign world.


Look at verse 14. What is the reason they thought of themselves as strangers in foreign land? Because they desired to be in their homeland. We often think of our birthplace or the area we grew up as where we are from. I generally tell people I am from Wisconsin when asked where I am from. But as we will see from this passage, they identified not with a place on earth. Look

back to verse 10. Abraham looked forward to a city designed and built by God. They understood the greater reality of a spiritual place, a heavenly place where they would one day dwell. This was where they longed to be. That is why we should long to be together in community. Like these heroes of faith, we gather as exiles from this world, garrisoned in community together for the kingdom of God.

In verses 15 and 16, we get to see even more of what they were thinking. Note that they no longer wanted to return to their earthly homes; even though they possibly could have. Why not? Because they yearned for a better place. They didn't want to go back. Their hearts were set on going to new home to which they now belonged. There was a time, many years ago when I wanted to return with my family back to Wisconsin. I was drawn to be with family and places that were familiar to me. But we never went, in part, because our community here at Clearcreek had a greater pull than the desire to be with our biological family.


We can often be like Israel, who soon after leaving Egypt, desired to go back to what was familiar. Even if it meant returning to captivity. But the example for us here is stop longing for the things of Egypt; the treasures and pleasures of this world. Together, we turn our desires toward heaven and for the presence and glory of our Lord. We recognize that we are a people that do not belong in this world. We have been reborn as new creatures in Christ. Like Israel's ancestors, we are now foreigners in this world making our way to a new home in heaven.

Revelation 21:1-4




New creation...

New heaven and earth;
a new and holy city; a
beautiful bride




With God...

Physically present with
God; seeing His glory;
forever find joy and
delight in our God



In victory...

No sorrow and pain; no
tears; no more death;
the effects of a fallen
world will be absent

COMMUNITY AND HEAVENSlide 6 

The other passage we will work through tonight is Revelation 21:1 to 4. There is much from Revelation that we can learn about what community in heaven will look like. As we read these verses, listen from a perspective of what heavenly community will be like. Follow along again as I read Revelation 21:1-4. *“1 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. 2 And I saw the holy city, new*

Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 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. 4 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."

We see in verse 1 that our community in heaven will be in a new creation with a new heaven and earth. In this place God has prepared a new city for His people. This is the fulfillment of God's promise to make all things new. There we will dwell in a new city with new and glorified bodies. In verse 2, John continues with a description of the church as a holy city. A beautiful bride prepared for Christ, her husband. We will be a community of people made morally and spiritually pure. In heaven, we will be presented in a newness and glory fit for the splendor of heaven. And we will bring praise and worship to the Lamb of God that is perfect and pure.

In verse 3, John writes that a loud voice came from the throne of God saying that the dwelling place of God is with man in heaven. Think about this. The God who we worshipped here on earth and was spiritually present, will now be physically present in our gathering as the people of God. He who we worshipped with eyes of faith will be visible to us and we will see His glory. What was temporary worship on earth will continue for all eternity as we forever find joy and delight in our God. For God will dwell with the church, together in community with us.

Lastly, in verse 4, we see the completeness of God's victory. **First**, He will take away all sorrow and pain. The fallen nature of the world and the struggles of this life will be no more. Our sin along with every impurity will be left behind. It cannot coexist in the presence of a holy God. There shall be no more tears of pain or of sorrow in heaven. Even more, He has taken away the guilt and reproach of our sin. His victory means that righteousness is ours. We will no longer mourn over our sin. His victory means that heaven will be a place of comfort and peace. His victory has satisfied God's wrath that we may dwell in the presence of a holy God.

Second, we see His victory over death. It shall be no more. Its power to separate us from God was ended at the cross. Nor will it be present in heaven. We shall live in the presence of God in heaven for all eternity; never to be separated from His glory and love. His death has secured new life for us. A life eternal and filled with the glory of His goodness.

Third, we see his victory over the effects of a fallen world. There will be no mourning, no crying, and no pain. These dark shadows from earth will have passed away with the world. All these things will be absent from heaven. Our community together will no longer be marred by grief, loss, and heartache. All we shall know will be the eternal joys and inheritance that are ours in full community with Jesus Christ.

Reflect and Respond



On Earth

Strangers
Hated
Ambassadors
Death Exits



In Heaven

Family
Beloved
Citizens
Death Enters

COMMUNITY AND HEAVEN

Slide 7



As we wrap up, let's look at several contrasts of our community on this earth and our community in heaven. First, our community in this world is that we are together as strangers. As believers, we should always feel out of place in this world; uneasy and uncomfortable. We ought to feel more like pilgrims traveling on a journey to our promised home. But in heaven, we will no longer be strangers. We will be at home living as family; adopted as children of God. Once strangers, we will share in the inheritance and home that is ours in Christ.

Second, our community on this earth we will be opposed and hated. As we noted in last evening's message, the world will hate us because it hates Christ. While we enjoy a large degree of freedom here in the U.S., that is not true for all believers. And someday, it may not be true here. Parents, are you preparing your children to raise their children in a world where they may be persecuted for their faith? Based on our current trajectory, that may be where we are headed. Heaven, of course, will be the opposite. There we will be a community beloved by God. The bride of Christ. All the hostility of the world will have passed away. And we will experience the fullness of that love for all eternity as we delight in the glory of God.

The third contrast is that on earth, we are a community of ambassadors. Our love for one another and the message of the Gospel is proclaimed to a lost and spiritually dying world. For now, we live and interact in the world as representatives of Christ. But while proclaim the Gospel in the world, we are not of the world. As we believers, we are new creatures in Christ and a part of His heavenly kingdom. In heaven, we will fully realize that heavenly citizenship. We will receive the fullness of our inheritance in Christ. We look forward to one day leaving this earth and joining Christ as citizens of a heavenly kingdom.

The last contrast is seen in our transition from community on earth to community in heaven. One my favorite songs that we sing here is titled, "It Is Not Death To Die". You see, we are

assured that our physical death is merely a passage from one realm to the another. Much like a baby that passes from the womb to world at birth, our death completes our journey from earth to our home in heaven. We have no reason to fear death and dying. Christ has conquered death and it has no power over us. Death is the means by which we exit this world and our community as believers in this world. But death is also the means by which we enter the better community of heaven, where we will dwell with Christ and all those who by faith have trusted Him.

Let me close with a several heart-probing questions. Does your heart long for a better country; a better kingdom? Do you see the reflection of heaven as we gather together and praise God for it? Do you desire a dwelling place in the presence of Christ? How often do you pray for God's kingdom to come and for Christ to return? Brothers and sisters, take heart. Our God has prepared for us a place in heaven where we will eternally dwell in the glory of God. Until that time, let our gathering as His people bring us joy as we are reminded of our eternal home.

[Let's pray]

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