



BETHEL  
PRESBYTERIAN

# MINISTRY OF THE WORD

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## Heaven is a Physical Place

Personally, I enjoy hearing about the “presents” that await me in eternity. Yet their use to me today seems to be as the assurances I received from my folks when I was a child suffering car sickness, *“We’ll be there in a couple of hours!”*

*“That may be nice”* I used to think, *“but that’s not going to stop me from throwing up in a couple of minutes!”*

As believers we are called to “set our minds on the things above.” (Colossians 3:1-2) What difference will the knowledge of eternity have on me today as I face a variety of struggles and difficulties? The biblical answer is that it will have great impact!

Yet we are getting ahead of ourselves. We began our study looking at the definition of heaven and

saw that the Bible uses “heaven” to denote three different places: the sky, outer space, and the dwelling place of God. The focus of this study is on the latter, the dwelling place of God whether that be now in the intermediate state where the souls of believers enter upon their death or the final state when the Lord returns and establishes His kingdom on the earth.

We have also seen that heaven is physical place. We know this because Christ ascended into heaven as a person in a body in Acts 1, He went to a specific place. Heaven is NOT ethereal, spiritual, or unreal, “a wispy existence in a dreamlike spiritual dimension,” rather it is a place with a definite location! Furthermore, in the final state it will be a physical place. In fact, in this context, we began considering our bodies. What will they be like in heaven? From 1 John 3 and 1 Corinthians 15 we saw that they will be conformed to Christ’s body and so be glorified. As such they will be:

- Imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42b): that is, they will know no sickness, decay, deterioration, or death.
- Glorious (1 Corinthians 15:43a): they will be perfected for pleasing, praising, and enjoying God.
- Powerful (1 Corinthians 15:43b): that is, no longer will they dwell in weakness. Whatever our heavenly spirits determine to do, our heavenly bodies will be able to accomplish.
- Spiritual (1 Corinthians 15:44): that is, they will be fit for a heavenly existence. In the words of Hodge,

...Our new body must be transformed into complete adjustment to the glorified spirit and to the glorified world it is to inhabit, and in which it is to set.<sup>1</sup>

This is what our bodies will be like, which brings us to 2 Peter 3 and the earth.

## The Earth

2 Peter 3:10-13, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”

This text says much by way of the Last Day. However notice what it tells us about the earth in the final state.

2 Peter 3:13, “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth...”

To understand this passage, it is helpful to be familiar with two Greek words: *καινός* (*kainos*) and *νέος* (*neos*). As most of you probably know, *neos* signifies new in respect of time, that which is recent. In this respect, we could translate it as “new of a different sort.” For example, if I sold my car and purchased a different car, the Greek word that I would use to introduce you to my “new” car would

be *neos*, “Look at my *neos* car!” The other term is *kainos*, denotes new as to form or quality- not new in time. In this regard we could translate it as “new of the same sort.” For example, if rather than selling my car I painted it, re-upholstered the seats, tuned it up, etc., the Greek word that I would use to introduce you to my “new” car would be *kainos*, “Look at my *kainos* car!”

The word used in 2 Peter 3<sup>2</sup> is *kainos*, new of the same kind! As we think of what life will be like in glory, we conclude that that the physical world in which we will live will in many ways be similar to our lives on this present earth, YET WITHOUT SIN (Revelation 22:3)! It is a “*kainos* earth!” The curse will be removed and much of the refashioned world will be as it was in the beginning of the world prior to the fall.

- The mountains will be remade- yet without sin.
- The sky will be refashioned- yet without sin.
- The trees and plants will be recreated- yet without sin.

Thomas Boston, speaking of the redemption of this world, wrote this:

Not that [it] shall be annihilated, or reduced to nothing, that is not the operation of fire; but [it] shall be dissolved, and purified by that fire, from all the effects of sin, and of the curse, upon them; and then renewed, and made more glorious and stable. (Boston, 2000, p. 423)

Think of a sunrise or snowcapped mountains, they are gorgeous to behold. Yet if either were compared to what they will be in the New Earth, they would seem as a garbage dump! And that is why we read of creation.

Romans 8:19-22, “For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.”

Truly, all of creation groans for the time of renewal when the filth, turmoil, and misery of sin are removed and creation once again will sing the praises of God! And we will find ourselves in a place prepared by Christ.

## Our Dwelling Place

John 14:2-3, “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you [via the cross]. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

Notice the promise made here:

John 14:2, “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you.”

The word for “dwelling places” means just that, “a place of abode.” And yet, based on the context of this passage and the culture of Christ’s day we can get a little more specific. Notice, that Christ is describing the gigantic house of a king in which dwelling place after dwelling place would be connected one to another to form one household large enough to house the king, his family, his extended family, and so on through the ages.

Heaven will include for the believer not only a re-created universe in which we shall dwell and a redeemed body with which to serve and worship, but also a personal abode in the household of God! Truly, heaven is a physical place, that is the first point.

## Heaven is a Holy Place

Notice secondly, that heaven is a holy place.

2 Peter 3:13, “But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”

This is a rather interesting passage. When the New Heavens and the New Earth are created, the state wherein we will dwell will be characterized by righteousness. In fact, we could translate the last phrase this way:

“in which righteousness has taken up residence” or “a permanent abode.”

Heaven is a holy place, a place without sin and so wholly reflective of the character of God. Now to gain a better understanding of this we go to Hebrews 9:

Hebrews 9:11-12, “But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

There is much that could be said about this verse. However notice the parallelism referenced here.

- Just as the priests in the Old Covenant entered the Temple (the shadow) and sacrificed an animal once yearly- on the Day of Atonement...
- So also Christ entered an Eternal Temple (the substance) and offered Himself for us once for all. Now what is the name we use to refer to this “eternal temple”? Heaven!

From this we conclude that heaven both now and in the age to come is nothing less than a Tabernacle/Temple of God! To understand the significance of this, recall that during the time of the Old Covenant, God prescribed amazingly detailed ordinances regarding the temple. In fact, while God took only thirty-one verses to recount the creation of the world (Genesis 1) He spent a total of 243 verses (7 chapters) to discuss all the standards, measurements, and furnishings that were to be a part of the tabernacle/temple (Exodus 25).

Now in all this description, we learn that the Holy of Holies was the place where God met with His

people. As such, God's people were to treat the temple with great care. In fact, to violate just one of the commandments concerning worship, even slightly, meant sure death because God is holy!

- When Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered incense to God that was not prescribed, God struck them dead, Leviticus 10:1-2.
- When Uzzah a Kohathite, who knew that he was never to touch the ark, nevertheless touched the ark to steady it, God struck him dead, 2 Samuel 6:1-9.
- On the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies, he did so with a rope tied around his waist and bells fastened to his clothes so that if he did something wrong and was struck dead, the bells would stop ringing and the people could pull his body out without risking their lives!

If an earthly tabernacle built by man in a fallen world could become holy on account of the presence of God, what ought we to conclude about the New Heavens and Earth whose architect and builder is God? Could it be anything less than the abode of righteousness? Could it be anything other than Holy?

According to Hebrews 9:11-12 and 2 Peter 3:13, heaven is one large temple, AND AS SUCH IT IS HOLY! Dr. John MacArthur said this about it:

...the glory of God both illuminates heaven and defines it as a temple. One might say all heaven is the temple, and the glory and presence of the Lord permeate it. (MacArthur, 1998, p. 86)

No doubt this is why Peter said this:

2 Peter 3:11-13, "Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells."

Now this starts to address the question we raised at the beginning, for one sees that in Peter's mind, knowledge of the holiness of heaven ought to move the Christian to action today!

## Heaven is a Continuation of our Life on this Earth

Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."-

The significance of this rather simple passage cannot be assessed until we understand what is meant by "eternal life." Every individual that has ever lived has "eternal" life, some will spend it in heaven and most in hell. The promise of eternal life for those in Christ could be rendered loosely as "life pertaining to the age" which beautifully conveys the biblical idea behind this term. While most think of eternal life as an endless existence, it is much, much more. Again, people in hell have an

“endless existence.” Rather we must see that “eternal life” primarily refers to an existence that pertains to THE AGE, which in Scripture refers to that time in the future when the Kingdom of God is manifested in its fullness. In other words, heaven! It is the age and time in which...

- God directly will reign over His people, Revelation 19: 6b.
- Righteousness will dwell, Romans 14:17.
- Sin will be eliminated, Revelation 21:3-4.
- Fellowship will be perfectly enjoyed, Revelation 19:7-10.
- Discord and division will be done away, Revelation 21:3-4.
- Love will abound, 1 Corinthians 13:13.
- Hope will be realized, 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
- Righteousness, peace and joy will be fully enjoyed, Romans 14:17.
- A New Heavens and a New Earth will have been created (2 Peter 3:10) and God’s people will fellowship with their Lord face to face (Revelation 21:1-7)!

This is what is meant by the “age to come.”

And so, when we speak of “eternal life” life pertaining to the age we ultimately are speaking in reference to the life that we will live in the New Heavens and the New Earth. The life we will live in heaven! Now the question that we must answer is this: When does a person begin living this “eternal life”? Look at the text again.

Romans 6:23, “...the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

John 6:40, “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life...”

1 John 5:13, “These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life.”

Eternal life, life pertaining to the age to come begins the moment a person comes to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the person who receives eternal life is one who has begun living the life of the coming Kingdom of God today! And so when we think of our death, the death of a loved one in the Lord, and the Second Coming of Christ and the Last Judgment we must NOT think that these events are the beginning of something entirely new for the individual. RATHER, they are the continuation/consummation of something that God has begun in this life!

Here is the basis for Peter’s exhortation.

2 Peter 3:11-13, “Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”

Sadly the connection between this world and the next is lost on most such that they don't see the correlation between the "holiness of heaven" and the call for holiness in the here and now. Haven't you heard people say:

- *That's later... after I die!*
- *What does that have to do with me today?*

I hope you see it! Because heaven is a continuation of life on this earth what you do today will most certainly impact tomorrow! We see it in Paul.

1 Corinthians 9:25, "...everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then *do it* to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable."

If you knew that in four years you were going to stand before the world and represent your country in an Olympic competition, what do you suppose you would busy yourself with today? Training for that moment! In the blink of an eye we all are going to be in a holy place enjoying the life that was granted us in Christ in this age! Ought this not impact

- The way you think about God's providence today?
- Our value system?
- Those things over which we ought to be burdened?
- Those activities in which we engage?

Paul lived in light of eternity.

1 Corinthians 9:26-27, "Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I buffet my body and make it my slave..."

In fact, after discussing in grave detail the end times and glorious triumph Christ has given us over sin, Paul wrote this:

1 Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord."

Because heaven is a continuation of life on this earth, any and all sacrifice and service in the name of Christ will be remembered in glory! Oh Christian, don't grow wearying in doing well! To choose holiness and integrity today, when no one is watching or even cares, will have great impact upon tomorrow!

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> This is borne out in such passages as 1 Corinthians 15:47-48.

<sup>2</sup> And in Revelation 21:1 which also speaks of the "new heavens and new earth."

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## About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 20, 2011. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church.