

## Sermon 22, Look for Heaven, Work for Holiness, 2 Peter 3:13-14

Read Isaiah 65-66; sing Am I a Soldier of the Cross?

**Proposition:** Because God will give us the new heavens and new earth, we must work for holiness!

- I. What We're Looking For, v. 13
  - A. A New Heavens and New Earth
  - B. The Home of Righteousness
- II. Where We Direct Our Efforts, v. 14
  - A. Towards Spotless and Blamelessness
  - B. Towards Peace

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in some ways this sermon is just like last week's. There we saw the need for holiness and godliness in light of the coming day when God rips the lid off and takes a good hard look at what's happening on earth. Today, we see what happens next. After judgment day, after the day when the earth and the works done on it are found out, what comes next? What we call Heaven, or the eternal state — essentially, the perfect world that will come about when God purges all sin and the consequences of sin from this world. That's what we're looking for — and again, since we're looking for that, we have to put forth effort to fit into it. We need to strive to be pure offerings to God, and work together for peace. In other words, last week's sermon was “coming judgment means be holy and godly now.” This week's sermon is the positive side of that: “coming heavenly glory means be spotless, blameless, and at peace.”

#### I. What We're Looking For, v. 13

Our passage begins by emphasizing what we're looking for. In brief, we're looking for the fulfillment of God's promise.

Now, where did God promise this? The answer is Isaiah 65 and 66, where God promised to create new heavens and a new earth. That was His promise 700 years before the time of Peter, and now almost three millennia before our own time. God said He would do it. And so we are called to live in anticipation of it.

##### A. A New Heavens and New Earth

Now, what does new heavens and new earth mean? Theologians have debated for a long time whether we are supposed to understand “renovated” or “brand-new.” Will the material of this present universe be totally annihilated, with God starting over? Or will the material of this universe be cleansed and reformed into a remodeled version of its former self? I tend to lean toward the second option, because the point is clearly the continuity with this world in a number of key respects, not least of which is the fact that we will rise again in the same bodies which we

currently have. Our resurrection is in a renewed body, not in a completely new one. And that leads me to believe that the new earth will be renewed, not completely new, created out of nothing. But regardless, in some ways that's not the point. What is the point? Why does this world need remodeling? Because it's all under bondage to sin. We live in a fallen, cursed world. Anyone in here who's ever tried to work knows that work is a cursed activity. Anyone who's grown a garden knows what weeds are. Anyone who's owned a home knows what maintenance is. Anyone who's lived on this earth for any length of time, even in a rich and powerful country like our own, is aware of how messed up and brutal this world is.

So when God remakes the universe, what will happen? What will He do? I can't do better than to read you His own description of it.

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." (Rev 21:1-4 ESV)

The new heavens and the new earth are the same thing as the New Jerusalem. One way in which we can see how glorious the New Jerusalem actually is, and just how far from it we are, is to think about the other usages of the term. For instance: There are plenty of places with "New" in their names, the most famous being New York. We also have New Mexico, New London, New Berlin, and many other "new" versions of old world cities scattered around our United States. But you won't find a New Jerusalem anywhere. Oh, people have tried. Let me read you a few sentences from the Wikipedia article on the New Jerusalem:

Kimbanduism, a Congolese sectarian church founded in 1921 by Simon Kimbangu, refers to Kimbangu's birthplace in Nkamba, Congo (a village near Mbanza-Ngungu), as New Jerusalem, where he reputedly performed miracles. Like Bedward, Kimbangu was imprisoned for life in the year 1921, however his movement continues with many followers to the present.

In 1853, the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom captured Nanjing (Nanking) During the Taiping Rebellion against the Qing dynasty of China and renamed the city "New Jerusalem".

The religious community known collectively as the Society of Universal Friends that gathered around the Quaker evangelist Jemima Wilkinson in the late 18th century was

one of religious righteousness and devotion to Christian ideals. In 1790, Wilkinson founded a community called (New) Jerusalem, planned as a communal society where righteousness would prevail in the wilderness of New York's Finger Lakes region, in what is today the town of Jerusalem, New York. The society faded away after the death of their leader.

In American hip hop culture and the Five-Percent Nation, "New Jerusalem" and "New Jeru" refer to New Jersey.<sup>11</sup>

There is a census-designated place in Pennsylvania called "New Jerusalem," with about 650 people. But as you can see from this list, the current pretenders to the status of "New Jerusalem" are a very far cry from what the real thing will be. Indeed, they only highlight how much we need this earth to be renewed, how much we need the righteousness of God and the deliverance of God rather than the silly efforts of human beings to make the world into some kind of utopia. In other words, I can promise you that in Jerusalem, New York, the streets are not paved with gold.

So we are to be looking for the new heavens and new earth. Again, brothers and sisters, that primarily means, for now, that we need to stop looking for this earth to satisfy our desires. We need to stop thinking that the pleasures of earth are what we need. We need to stop thinking that jobs, houses, bank accounts, salaries, and status symbols are the things we really want out of life. No! As Christians, we are looking not for raises but for the new heavens and new earth. We are not heavily invested in this earth, because we're looking beyond it to the next one.

### **B. The Home of Righteousness**

Peter doesn't highlight the "no more death, sorrow, or crying" part of the new heavens and earth. Instead, he directs our thoughts toward the righteousness of the New Jerusalem. It is a place where righteousness is at home.

Now, again, I want you to think for a moment. What does that statement say about our current world? It says that righteousness is not at home here. Righteousness doesn't fit here. Righteousness is unwanted on earth today. When a perfectly righteous man came to old Jerusalem, what did we do with Him? We killed Him.

Brothers and sisters, this vile world is no friend to grace to help us on to God. Why do we insist on thinking that righteousness dwells here? That this world is basically good and filled with people who are basically good trying to do the right thing? Of course, in one sense that's true — the sense that it was created good and filled with people who have God's law on their hearts and an inner desire to fulfill it. But the fact remains that this planet is home of unrighteousness, of evil, of wicked sin in every direction as far as the eye can see. Yes, there is

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<sup>11</sup> All from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Jerusalem](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Jerusalem).

much good in the world. But it is an embattled good, an attacked good, not a good at rest. We are the church militant here, because to love the world is to be an enemy of God.

Do you long for the world to come, where righteousness dwells? Where what is in accordance with right is perfectly at home, fits right in? Oh, brothers and sisters, as long as we think that this world is good enough and that we personally are good enough, we won't long for the coming world where righteousness is to be found. But God tells us to long for that world, to seek that world. What are you looking for: the most comfortable, conflict-free time on earth you can possibly achieve? Or a wholesale renewal of this planet, such that righteousness is finally at home here?

After all, what would a world where righteousness is at home look like? For one thing, it would be full of the holiness and godliness we talked about last time. It would not have crime, war, pollution, or disease. It would not have sin of any kind, or any of the consequences of sin. We can hardly imagine that. But it does have a clear message for us.

## **II. Where We Direct Our Efforts, v. 14**

That message is this: Since the world will be renewed into a home for righteousness, you and I had better be righteous or else we won't fit in. If you fit perfectly into this present age, you won't fit in the new heavens and earth. You won't be at home there. So what to do?

### **A. Towards Spotless and Blamelessness**

Peter tells us what to do. If you really anticipate a total renovation of the world transforming it into a place where righteousness dwells, then you need to expend every effort to be spotless and blameless. This language, of course, is typical of the sacrificial system, in which a lamb had to be without spot and without blemish. What kind of blemishes is Peter talking about? He's not saying that you need to up your skincare game in order to fit into the New Jerusalem. He's saying that you need to up your moral game. You need to be without moral blemish, without ethical spots. In other words, you need to be good. You need to not be marked by sin, not have your character stained by lust or rage or greed or pride or any of the other sins that cling so closely to us in this life.

How do you make every effort to be spotless and blameless? Well, it's obvious that we can't remove the stains of sin by ourselves. Only God can do that. Specifically, it is the blood of Jesus Christ that cleanses us from all sin. His death is the power that forgives us and makes us righteous. His blood is the fluid that cleanses us and makes us white and clean and spotless in the sight of God. So how do you attack sin? With the blood of Jesus. Just like water won't take tomato juice out of carpet, but the stain-cleaning chemical will, so your good resolutions and turning over of new leaves won't remove the blot of sin from you, but Jesus' blood will.

How? Prayer is our greatest weapon in striving for spotlessness. It's how we access the cleansing blood of Christ for forgiveness and the holy burning of the Holy Spirit for growing in sanctification. You become more like Jesus when the Spirit dwells in you and directs you, growing the fruit of love in your life. Love is the fulfilling of the law. Love is what you need to

be spotless and blameless. And you can't have it without the Spirit, whom Jesus purchased for us by His death.

So pray. Do build boundaries and fences and habits in your life that make it harder for you to sin. Do use willpower and resolutions. Those are necessary. But they are not sufficient. The only that's sufficient to take away the stain of sin is the cleansing blood of Jesus. If you're giving every effort to being found spotless and blameless when God rips the lid off and takes a good hard look at what's happening on earth, then you will be giving all your effort to be cleansed and renewed by Jesus through the power of His death and resurrection as applied by His Spirit.

### **B. Towards Peace**

But don't just strive for moral purity. You also need to be found at peace. What kind of peace? Different commentators give different answers. It seems to me that since Peter doesn't qualify it, we need to recognize that it's all kinds of peace. We need to be found at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We need to be found at peace with one another through the Holy Spirit growing the fruit of peace in our lives. We need to be found at peace with ourselves through the healing and internal unification that the gospel brings us.

If we go to war and burn down our church to smoke out false teachers, then we've missed Peter's point. He's telling us mainly to follow Christ, to grow in His grace and knowledge. Yes false teachers are a threat to that. But ultimately, the false teachers aren't the issue. The issue is whether you know Christ. And if you know Him, then you will, as much as lies in you, live at peace with everyone.

So brothers and sisters, we know that Heaven is coming. We're looking for it. And because we're looking for it, we recognize that we are not ultimately for this world. Our sights are elsewhere. Our thoughts are elsewhere. And so we strive to be cleansed by Christ's blood and live at peace with everyone. Why? Because that's how we'll live on the renewed earth. It was all purchased by Christ; you and I simply need to live it out. Amen.