

## Heaven – A Glimpse at Glory

### A. Clearing the decks

#### 1. Where is your Heart?

- **Prov 4:23** – The heart drives everything.
- **Matt 6:19-21** - “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”
- **Col 3:1-4** - “Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

#### 2. Where is your Hope?

- Biblical hope is unconditional certainty, not wishful thinking.
- It is a fundamental human need.
- It is a fundamental Christian virtue.
- **1 Peter 1:3-5**
  - ⇒ **The Foundation of our hope** - “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”
  - ⇒ **The contents of our hope** – “...and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.”
  - ⇒ **The Security of our hope** – “This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”

#### 3. Where is your Home?

- **John 14:2-3** - Jesus promise to his disciples.

#### Question One: Where is heaven now?

- **2 Cor 12:4** – “The third heaven” is the same as Paradise.
- The “atmospheric heaven” refers to the sky or blanket of air which surrounds the earth.
- The “celestial heavens” lies beyond planet earth and is what we today might refer to as “space”.
- “The third heaven” is the place where God manifests his presence and rules from his throne.
- **Matt 6:9** - God is “our Father in heaven” and we direct our prayers heavenwards.
- At present it is a real place which exists beyond this world.
- It is the place to which Enoch and Elijah were taken.
- It is the place to which Christ ascended (John 14:2; 1 Peter 3:22; Rev 4).

#### Question Two: Do Christians go to heaven when they die?

- **Ecc 12:7** – Physical death is the separation of the body and the soul/spirit.

- **Luke 23:46, 53** – Jesus died when his spirit left him to return to his Father and his body was laid in the tomb
- Since believers are “*with Christ*”, this means that they are there in heaven sharing its blessings and joys.
- **Luke 23:43** - Jesus promised Paradise to the thief.
- **Phil 1:21-23** - The intermediate state is better than our current experience. It is to be with Christ and to be conscious.
- It is not a kind of ghostly half-life.
- But it is still a life of anticipation.
- Our experience is - Good – Better - Best

**Question Three: Where will heaven be in the future?**

- **Isa 66:22** - God promised that the new heavens and the new earth would be eternal
- **Rev 21:1** - John uses the language of Gen 1:1 to describe the new creation. Notice that it is physical and comprehensive.
- Rev 21:2-3 - John describes the descent of the new Jerusalem and the presence of God himself in the new creation.
- In the new creation heaven and earth are now united.
- Earth becomes the place where God has his kingly throne.
- The whole of the new creation becomes the temple of God.

❖ ***It will be this world cleansed and restored***

- **Rev 21:1** - “New” does not mean new in point of time but in quality.
- **Rom 8:19-24** – The whole creation is now longing for liberation.
- **Col 1:20** - Christ, the last Adam, has come to liberate the creation.
- **1 John 3:8** - Satan will be defeated. God will not abandon His universe.
- **2 Peter 3:3-10** – Noah’s flood is a model of the re-creation of the world at the end of the age. God did not destroy the world but “laid it bear” and re-created it. The verb used here has the idea of purification rather than annihilation.
- **John 1:14** - The importance of the physical universe is supported by the incarnation.
- Humans and the universe they were created to rule will be liberated from corruption and radically cleansed.
- *“What happens to our bodies and what happens to the creation go together. And what happens to our bodies is not annihilation but redemption...Our bodies will be redeemed, restored, made new, not thrown away.”<sup>1</sup>*

❖ ***We are going to spend eternity in heaven why do we not spend more time thinking about it now?***

<sup>1</sup> John Piper, *Future Grace* (Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1995) pp. 394-395

## **B. The Big Picture - Revelation 21:1-22:5**

The final vision in the book of Revelation is of the new heavens and the new earth. This section consists of three parts.

### **1) 21:1-8 - A renewed cosmos**

- **21:1 - A New Creation:** John uses the language of Genesis 1:1 to describe the new creation.
- **21:2 - A New City:** This refers to both the church and the final dwelling place of the church.
- **21:3 - A New Communion:** This establishes the fact that the central promises of the covenant are finally realised. God will dwell among His people – the intimate relationship with God that was lost is now restored. The central attraction of heaven is the presence of God (compare 21:22 and 22:3-4)
- **21:4 - A New Condition:** All the effects of death are removed forever. God will wipe all tears from their eyes.
- **21:5-6** - These words are true look at who has uttered them!
- **21:7-8** - There will be a clear division at the end of time. Where do you stand?

### **2) 21:9-27 - A radiant city**

- These verses are full of symbols, many drawn from the Old Testament. However, the symbols point to concrete realities.
- **21:9-11 - Its origin:** The city is the Bride of the Lamb – again confirming that this is a picture of the church. It comes down from heaven - it is God's gift not man's achievement.
- **21:12-14 - Its walls:** The walls reveal the security of the city. They also represent the presence of both Old and New Testament saints.
- **21:15-17 - Its dimensions:** 12,000 stadia are 14,000 miles. This is the distance from London to Athens. It is massive indicating the large number of its inhabitants. It is a perfect cube, reminding us of the Holy of Holies, where God dwelt in the Tabernacle.
- **21:18-21 - Its beauty:** This indicates the glory of the final state. Jewels, pearls, and gold are symbolic of its magnificence.
- **21:22-23 - Its glory:** What is the ultimate the glory of the city? It is that God dwells at its centre. There is no temple because God is its temple.
- **21:24-26 - Its universality:** The glory of all nations come into the city.
- **21:27 - Its purity:** However only those who have been made pure by God's grace and had their names written in the Lamb's book of life will enter in. Heaven is a holy place for holy people.

### **3) 22:1-5 - A restored Paradise**

- The last picture is of a garden of delight – paradise restored (Genesis 2).
- **22:1-2 - Abundant life:** The water of life is a symbol of satisfaction and joy in the Lord (Ezekiel 47:1). It speaks of the healing of all pains and sorrows.
- **22:3 - Constant activity:** The presence of God is again affirmed, and the picture is one of constant activity as God's people serve Him. The curse of judgment on the world is finally removed.
- **22:4-5 - Intimate communion:** This is the climax of the whole revelation. At the present time we cannot survive a close encounter with God. But in heaven we will see God face to face. We will reign with Christ for ever – the task given to Adam is renewed in the last Adam and His people.

### C. It will be a bodily life

#### ❖ **The nature of humans**

- Humans are made up two essential components – the physical body and the non-physical soul/spirit.
- **Gen 2:7** - “*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being*”.
- He is a combination of the physical (“*the dust of the ground*”) and the non-physical (“*the breath of life*”).
- Man was created by an act of special creation and personal intimacy – God kisses him in to existence.

#### ❖ **Jesus is our model**

- **1 Cor 15:20** - “*But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.*”
- **Phil 3:21** - He will “*transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*”
- **Luke 24:37-43** – Jesus appeals to the senses of the disciples to prove the reality of his resurrection.
- His body was a **real** body – they touched him and he ate in front of them.
- His body was the **same** body – he showed them his wounds.
- His body was a **transformed** body – it was not like the body of Lazarus, which came back to life only to die again.

#### ❖ **The nature of the new body**

- “*The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonour, 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. (15:42b-44)*”
- “**Imperishable**” - Our present bodies are marked by corruption. We carry the seeds of decay and death within us from the moment of conception. The resurrection body is incorruptible. It will never perish or feel the ravages of time. It will never again be touched by decay, disease or death. We will have the wisdom of age and the strength of youth.
- “**Glory**” - Our current bodies are marked by sin and unrighteousness. They fail to come close to God’s glory. The new body will be marked by glory as it partakes of the divine nature (John 17:24; 2 Pet 1:4). We will be free from every taint of sin and evil forever.
- “**Power**” - In our present bodies we are aware of our human frailty and limitations. Like Paul we know that we have the treasure of the gospel in earthen vessels (2 Cor 4:7). The resurrection body is characterized by “*power*”. All decay and frustration are gone forever. This body will have new stamina and speed and durability. Will we have new unimagined capacities?
- “**Spiritual**” - We will have a ‘*spiritual body*’. The ‘*spiritual*’ person is one who is guided, animated and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We no longer struggle with temptation and failure or grapple with doubts and fears or wrestle with pain and death.

*"I can hardly believe it. I, with shrivelled, bent fingers, atrophied muscles, gnarled knees, and no feeling from the shoulders down, will one day have a new body, light, bright, and clothed in righteousness - powerful and dazzling. Can you imagine the hope this gives someone spinal-cord injured like me? Or someone who is cerebral palsied, brain injured, or who has multiple sclerosis? Imagine the hope this gives someone who is manic depressive. No other religion, no other philosophy promises new bodies, hearts and minds. Only in the gospel of Christ do hurting people find such incredible hope."*<sup>2</sup> Joni Eareckson Tada

#### **D. It will be a social life**

##### ❖ **Our heavenly experience will be social**

- It is not solitary communion between the soul and Christ.
- It is intensely personal but it is not private.
- **Rev 7:9** - John sees a great crowd that no one can count gathered from all the nations.
- **Rev 19:9** – God's people will rejoice at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb.
- The emphasis is always on the Church, the Bride for which Christ died and for whom he is preparing an eternal home.
- **Matt 26:29-30** - Heaven is the feast or banquet.
- One of the principal attractions of this eternal fellowship is that all divisions and disunity is ended.

##### ❖ **Will we know each other in heaven?**

- **Luke 24:36-39** - Christ's disciples recognized him in the upper room.
- **1 Thess 4:14-18** – Comfort flows from the fact that we will be re-united.
- **1 Thess 2:19-20** – *"For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy."*
- Think of all the most joyful moments you have spent in fellowship with others.
- It is a vast number – we will have eternity to build new relationships.

##### ❖ **Will there be marriage in heaven?**

- **1 Peter 3:7** - Married couples are heirs together of grace.
- However the marriage bond will cease as Jesus affirmed this.
- **Matt 22:30** - *"At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."*
- Marriage points forward to something greater than itself - in God's plan and design marriage on earth is a foretaste of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Heaven. Here Christ is joined with his bride forever
- Although we will be like the angels, but this does not mean that we will be gender-less.
- Jesus' resurrection body continued to be masculine.
- Even angels tend to appear as men (Gen 18:2,16,22; Josh 5:13; Heb 13:2).
- If our gender is fundamental to our body and our body is fundamental to our future existence it stands to reason that this will be a gendered existence.

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<sup>2</sup>Joni Eareckson Tada, *Heaven: Your Real Home Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1995, p.53*

## **E. It will be a life of rest**

### ❖ **Jesus gives rest to his people**

- Ecclesiastes teaches that frustration is our common lot.
- Life is often remorseless, exasperating and wearisome.
- Jesus promises to give us rest now.
- **Matt 11:28-30** - *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

### ❖ **Heaven is a place of rest**

- **Rev 7:15-17** – The weary pilgrimage is over.
- **Rev 21:4** - *“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*
- Everything that currently mars God’s good creation is banished forever.
- There is no more pain, disease or sickness.
- Our bodies will no longer be marked by decay, dishonour and weakness.
- The mourner is comforted, and tears of sorrow will disappear forever.
- It is not simply the return to Eden, but a completion of the unfinished work of God.
- We are aware that simply continuing in our current frail, sinful and mortal bodies in a world still groaning under the curse of God would be far from the bliss which the Bible promises.
- *“Salvation is both restorative (repairing the damage done by sin) and progressive (moving the work of creation on to its completion).”<sup>3</sup>*
- Just as God delights in His Son and in his completed creation, we will eternally delight in Christ and in the glories of the new creation.

### ❖ **Deliverance from warfare**

- **Eph 6:10-12** – *We live in a war zone.*
- **1 Peter 5:8** - *“Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”*
- **Rev 12:3-4** – The great red dragon
- Satan will be crushed and defeated never to rise and attack us again.
- He will never again deceive and tempt mankind into sin
- **Rev 20:10** - *“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”*

### ❖ **Deliverance from sin**

- **Rom 7:21-25** – We are walking civil wars carrying around the *“body of death”*.
- The rest of heaven means that we know an end to this battle with sin.
- *“No flesh to crucify. No pain to face. No malice to fear”<sup>4</sup>*
- **Rev 22:5** - The new creation will last *“forever and forever”*.
- **Rev 21:27** - Nothing impure will be permitted to enter the new creation.
- There will be no possibility of a further Fall in the new creation.
- In the new creation the curse is removed.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Bauckman, “First Steps to a Theology of Nature”, Evangelical Quarterly 58.3 (1986), p. 240

<sup>4</sup> Donald Macleod, A Faith to Live By (Christian Focus, 2010), p.309

## **F. It will be a life of joyful activity**

### ❖ **Heaven is a busy place**

- It will be good to rest, but this is not the rest of immobility.
- Heaven is not a glorified rest home.
- In heaven we will be more awake and more alive than we have ever been.
- **Rev 7:15** - "...they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple."
- It is a life of devoted service and joyful worship.

### ❖ **Worship of lips**

- We are to celebrate and give thanks for God's goodness, love and faithfulness.
- Worship is the total response of all I am to all that God has revealed of Himself to me.
- **1 Peter 2:9** - *"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."*
- **Psalms 66:1-4** – The nations are called to worship God.
- *"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man...The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God."*<sup>5</sup>
- **Rev 7:9-12** – This finds its fulfilment in heaven
- Revelation contains more songs than any other New Testament book (Revelation 4-5; 7; 10; 11:16-18; 15:2-4).

### ❖ **Worship of lives**

- **Rom 12:1-2** - Paul urges us to *"offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."*
- **Rev 22:5** - The ultimate calling of the church, Christ's bride, is to reign with her royal husband for eternity.
- **Gen 1:28** – *"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"*
- The original mission given to Adam is fulfilled by the last Adam and we share with him in this.
- The rest is not the cessation of activities, but the experience of reaching a goal that is crucially important to us.
- It is not static. Perhaps we will develop new skills unknown to us in the present dispensation. This may include musical or artistic or technological or intellectual abilities which are as yet unrealized. The cultural mandate involves reigning over this new creation with Christ and discovering its secrets and its beauties.
- *"Paradise is no mere seminary where Adam and Eve whiled away the hours in theological discussion. I'm sure they did that, and they did it with more relish than any of my students. But Eden offered scope for art, science and technology as well as theology. The same will doubtless be true in the world to come."*

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/the-supremacy-of-god-in-missions-through-worship>

## ❖ **Rewards**

- Salvation is the free gift of God - there are no “*degrees of salvation*” and no first and second class Christians.
- Heaven is a free gift based on a priceless sacrifice.
- **Luke 23:39-43** - The dying thief entered into a full enjoyment of this inheritance.
- But the Bible does not shy away from the idea that we will receive rewards in heaven.
- **Matt 5:3-10** – This is taught in the Beatitudes.
- **1 Cor 3:12-15** – Paul reminds us to build with the right materials.
- **2 Tim 4:7-8** - A desire for rewards motivated Paul’s service.
- There is no sin in heaven, so there can be no envy or jealousy or covetousness.
- The difference in the rewards may lie not in external or objective circumstances, but in the subjective awareness and comprehension of these objective blessings.
- But the central attraction of heaven is not rewards. It is not freedom from pain and sin or restoration of fellowship with those we have loved and lost. The central attraction of heaven is God Himself.

## **G. It will be life of total satisfaction**

### ❖ **We were created to glorify God and enjoy Him forever**

- **Psalms 63:1** – “You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land, where there is no water.”
- “The infinite abyss of the human soul can be filled only with an infinite object, in other words, with God himself.”<sup>6</sup>
- **Exod 33:3-4** – We cannot be satisfied with the gift apart from the giver.
- **John 17:3** - “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”
- **Jer 2:13** – The riddle of the sands.

### ❖ **The vision of God is the central attraction of heaven**

- In the Bible the consummation of our heavenly delight is the vision of God and the worship which flows from this.
- God is not only the cause of our hope – he is its centre and heartbeat.
- **Rev 7:15** - “He who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.”
- This is a wonderfully intimate picture of our relationship with God. He will “spread the corner of your garment” over us.” (Ruth 3:9).
- It is the presence of God which is the supreme attraction of the new creation.
- The city is a perfect cube, reminiscent of the Holy of Holies in Solomon’s temple (Rev 21:16; 1 Kings 6:20).
- Rev 22:1 - The river of life flows from the throne and satisfies God’s people.

### ❖ **We will see God’s face**

- **Psalms 17:15** - “As for me, I shall be vindicated and shall see your face; when I awake, I shall be satisfied with seeing your likeness.”
- **Matt 5:8** - “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.”

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<sup>6</sup> Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. New York: Penguin Books, 1966, p.74

- **Rev 22:4** - *“They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”*
- **Exod 33:20** – Even Moses could not see God’s face.
- In our new resurrection bodies we will be able to behold God as never before.
- This vision is not static. There will be infinite progress in our delight in God. The soul is like a vessel which God fills with an endless supply of his presence. We will discover more and more of the loveliness of God as He eternally communicates more and more of Himself.

❖ **We will see Jesus**

- **1 Tim 6:16** - God is invisible.
- **John 17:24** - We will be with Jesus and see his face.
- **Rev 7:17; 14:4** - The Son is our Shepherd and he actively leads his people in heaven. He will continue to pastor us for eternity, as he leads his people to streams of living water.
- *“You will be eternally embraced in the arms of that love that is from everlasting to everlasting, of that love that brought the Son of God’s love from heaven to earth, from earth to the cross, from the cross to the grave, and from the grave to glory. This is the same love that was weary, hungry tempted, scorned, scourged, buffeted, spit upon, crucified and pierced.”*<sup>7</sup>

❖ **It's bigger than we could ever imagine!**

*“How big is your hope? Is the wingspan of your hope big enough to get you soaring? Is your hope big enough, imaginative enough, with wolves and lambs and lions thrown in for good measure? Hope on this grand scale – this is the gospel. It is big. It offers both the prospect of personal intimacy with God forever and a renewed world of peace and righteousness. It isn’t just one or the other. God has a plan for you and for this whole world. The Lord Jesus Christ died for this, and he will not be denied.”*<sup>8</sup>

❖ **What are the practical implications of the doctrine of heaven?**

❖ **What other questions do you have about heaven?**

<sup>7</sup> *The Saints’ Everlasting Rest – R Baxter – Tim Cooper, p.39*

<sup>8</sup> *Ortlund Jr. Raymond C. Preaching the Word: Isaiah: God Saves Sinners, p. 445*