

Gods Place - New Heaven & New Earth



Revelation 21:1-8

For the next three weeks, we're going to talk about the beautiful end from Revelation 21 and 22. Close your eyes, and let's think about the end. Picture you are in Heaven. What do you see? In your mind's eye, look around. What do you experience? What are you doing? What is happening? Who is there? Who is not there? What is your day like? I decided to see what Google came up with if I Googled Heaven. Here is what it came up with.

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This is probably what most people see. There is a staircase in the clouds, light, somewhere up in the sky. That's pretty much what most of us assume; Heaven is somewhere out there, and we're going to be on a cloud with a harp, and we will sing for eternity. It's like one giant worship service that goes on forever, which sounds great and terrifying at the same time, if we're really honest. I think what happens is that sometimes we think little about Heaven, because we think wrongly about Heaven. Our goal this morning is for you to think rightly about the end so you long for it, so you think deeply about it. In the 'Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,' Ms. Watson tells Huck about Heaven. Huck says, "She went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to around all day long with a harp and sing forever and ever, so I didn't think much of it. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that because I wanted him and me to be together." Here is Ms. Watson telling little Huckleberry Finn about heaven. Here's the good place. It's amazing! You're going to have a harp and you're going to sing forever. To a little boy who liked creeks, rivers, and adventure, climbing, mountains, and trees, that sounded horrible, so he said I'll just take the other place because maybe Tom

Sawyer will be there as well. This is typically our religious view of heaven: a harp, a cloud, up there singing forevermore.

Then we see more of a secular view of heaven. In 2016, NBC created a comedy called 'The Good Place.' There are four people who died and are in the good place, which seems to be a secular version of Heaven. It's a place. There are buildings, homes, books, coffee, ice cream, and it is all the things we love about this world, but they're perfect. Everything is hand-tailored to your experience. It's exactly what you want in every moment, except there is one thing missing...the singing part, the God part. Worship is not in heaven because God is not there. 'Huckleberry Finn' is the religious view, worship, and 'The Good Place' is the secular view, it's just about place. What if I told you that both of those are right, and, both of those are wrong? The Bible tells us is Heaven is about worship, but it's also a place, a real place. It's a place we can actually imagine because it's a place we are familiar with. In Randy Alcorn's book, 'Heaven,' he says what if Ms. Watson would have told Huckleberry the truth. What if she said let me tell you about the good place. It's a place of untold adventure. It's going to be rivers like you've never seen, mountains like you've never climbed, trees like you can't even imagine, with deep friendship like you can't fathom, meaningful work, hobbies, and joy, all the pleasures of this earth times a trillion, and, you're going to be in the presence of God forevermore enjoying the fullness of Him! Imagine if that was her response, not a harp and a cloud, but this world transformed, renewed, resurrected to be in the place you were created for, God's people in God's presence in God's place. That might have gotten a little boy's attention. That might actually get our attention.

We're going to turn to the Bible to look at what the end is going to be like. I want to emphatically make this declaration: Heaven will not be boring. In our minds, we typically think heaven is better than hell, but it's boring, and I really don't want to go there. I mean, some day...but not now because now is life, earth, and the things I love. We are going to see that Heaven is in no way boring. Heaven is earth transformed, renewed, where we live with God forever on this earth forevermore. Let's look at Revelation 21. I want you to picture God showing you this vision.

Scripture

"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.'"

And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' 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. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. 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.'"

Typically, we think about the end when we preach about eschatology. We talk about the when and the how. When is it going to happen? How is it going to happen? We use big words like premillennialism, amillennialism, and postmillennialism. We get charts and graphs out, and those are good things. We need to talk about those, but sometimes we fail to get to the what. For the next three weeks, we're not going to look at the how or the when; we're going to look at the what. What actually happens in the end? What is Heaven? What is eternity with God going to be like? This morning, we will see it's going to be a place, God's place, the new heaven, and the new earth. John says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the

first earth and the first heaven had passed away, and the sea was no more." So, God is giving John a revelation. He is showing him how all things are going to end. Now, he's living in a time where Rome ruled, and he's seeing this vision where God is saying things aren't as they appear. It seems like Rome is going to win the day; that's not true. The kingdom of God is going to win the day. Write this down; tell the people now and tell the people forever that God wins in the end. That's a summary of Revelation. Bro Ricky went through Revelation on Wednesday nights. You can watch all twenty-one chapters on our website for a verse by verse exegesis. We're just going to look at the last two chapters of how it all ends. Here, John gets a vision of the new heaven and new earth. He would have been familiar with this because he heard it as a boy. Isaiah, in chapter 65, prophesied through God that there would be a new heaven and a new earth. God would renew all things and make all things new. All prophecies are going to come true in a new heaven and a new earth. We'll be in God's place, in God's presence, as God's people. John is seeing it.

What I want us to look at first is what it means when John says I saw a new heaven and a new earth, and the former earth and heaven passed away. What does that mean? Typically, there are two different view of what this means. The first one is that God destroys the first heaven and the first earth. There is annihilation. It just blows up, and then God remakes a new heaven and a new earth, *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, so there is no continuity between this earth and the new earth. A second view would say God doesn't destroy the first earth; instead, He renews it by fire. There is a regeneration, a resurrection of the old earth that becomes the new earth. There is restoration and continuity between this earth and the new earth. What I am going to argue for is the latter. When John sees a new earth, it's this earth, remade, refashioned, no more sin, perfect in its original creation, and even better. How do we see that? One of the texts that most people use to say no, there's going to be an explosion and God's going to just blow it all up is 2 Peter 3. We're going to look at a few verses, beginning in verse 10. "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar..." Using the same language, John saw the heavens pass away. "...and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it

will be exposed." There is burning and dissolving, so that can kind of sound like annihilation. At the same time, there is going to be exposing. The works aren't annihilated; there are works that are exposed on the earth. Peter could be saying he blows it up, or he could be saying he burns it with fire so the bad is gone and the good comes forth. Those evils are exposed but the good remains. "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." Both these things are happening. There is burning, dissolving, new heaven, and new earth. What does this mean? Does it mean annihilation, or does it mean restoration. Does it mean doing away with, or restoring into something new? Commenting on these verses, John Piper says, "When Peter says passing away, what he means is not going out of existence, but passing away in its present condition, like a caterpillar passes away and becomes a butterfly."

How do we know that Peter meant this instead of the other? Well, one of the passages that Peter preached in Acts 3:20-21 says, "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." Peter says heaven is going to receive Jesus so that restoring might happen, not obliteration, not annihilation, but restoration. It is the same Peter that talks about the fire which gives evidence that the fire is talking about a fire of refining, not a fire of total destruction.

I think a text that really gives the best argument for a continuity of old earth and new earth is Romans 8 beginning in verse 19, "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God." He says creation, the world, is longing for our redemption, longing for the return of Christ. Does it make sense that the world is really happy because when Christ returns it gets blown up? It makes more sense that it's happy

because something good is going to happen to it. Something good is going to happen to the creation. What good is going to happen? Verse 20-23 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. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." Paul says we groan for redemption. We can't wait for our resurrected bodies. These bodies as they age, they don't get better; they get worse. We long for a resurrected body that is going to be like it was meant to be. Paul said creation is waiting for the same thing. Creation was subjected to corruption, decay, and hardship, but one day, at the resurrection of the saints there will be a resurrection of the planet, a resurrection of the universe where it won't be subject to futility anymore. It will be as it was made to be. I'll quote Piper again, he says, "What happens to our bodies and what happens to the creation go together. What happens to our bodies is not annihilation, but redemption. Our bodies will be redeemed, restored, made new, not thrown away, and so it is with the heavens and the earth." It's not a throwing away of the old earth to make a new earth. No, God doesn't throw away our bodies; instead, He resurrects our bodies to a newness.

The same will be with the earth. There will be a newness. There will be a resurrection that takes place. In fact, that word, new, in the Greek means new in a transformed, fundamental way, not new, meaning ex nihilo, out of nothing. It's not totally new; it's new, remodeled, remade, refashioned. I think it's used in the same way 2 Corinthians 5:17 talks about our newness in Christ. It says, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old is passed away, behold the new is come." That sounds very familiar to what John says, I saw something pass away, and I saw something new. That's what happened to us. When you believed in Christ, you became new. What does that mean? Does that mean you got a whole new body? No, it's still you, but it's a new you. The old you passed away, but it's not a passing away of annihilation or destruction; it's a passing away meaning

something new has happened, something old has gone. That's how John is speaking of the new heaven and new earth. The old is passed away, the sin, the corruption, the futility. There is a newness, a remaking of the old creation that is coming to be. Why does this matter? I think when you grasp that heaven is not a cloud and a harp, not a light in the sky, when you grasp that heaven is going to be a new heaven and a new earth where it's going to be like this existence, but a thousand times better, then you won't believe heaven is boring. You will actually long for it.

That's not how most of us think. Theologian, Joe Diffie says, "Lord, I want to go to heaven, but I don't want to go tonight, so prop me up beside the jukebox when I die." That is sort of our view of heaven, right? I want to go there when I die, but if I'm honest, I don't really want to go to heaven because this world is so great. I just want to do what I'm doing now. I wish I could stay here forever, but heaven is the better alternative than hell. I want you to see from the scriptures that heaven is not just a better alternative than hell, heaven is a thousand times better than this here now. If you're like me, I don't think about heaven a lot. Sometimes I got whole weeks without thinking about what eternity is going to be like. This week was different because I'm preaching on heaven. So, we're in harvest this week, which means I get to drive a combine and a semi in LBL. If you've been in LBL recently, you've seen the most beautiful trees are blooming right now. The fall foliage is just spectacular. I encourage you to drive through LBL today. As I'm doing that, I'm listening to Randy Alcorn's book on heaven where he is reiterating the fact that heaven is not a cloud. Heaven is this earth remade to be even more spectacular than we could ever imagine. I'm just driving, and as I go over the canal and look at all the trees by Kentucky Lake and I can see them reflecting off the water and I can see my heart just begin to explode. I'm thinking what is new creation going to be like? What is the new going to be like? If our trees look like this, what are they going to look like when they're untainted by sin? What are they going to look like in all of their glory when God remakes it perfectly? We're not just going to be on a cloud, we're going to be doing the things that we love to do. We're going to be working. We're going to have hobbies, enjoyment, friendship, pleasure, excitement, rivers, mountains, trees, and all of the things we love times a billion. That's going

to be our experience and it's all going to be with God. I'm so excited about today because I get to go biking with my kids in nature. I love Sundays because we get to do that. I'm thinking about the new kingdom when I get to go on bike rides with my kids in a spectacular new creation that God made! I see the broken world and love it; imagine the resurrected world in all of its glory! It's going to be like nothing that we've ever seen or imagined. That's what the new creation is going to be like, and I promise you that it's not going to be boring. The best pleasure you've had on this world is a shadow, a glimmer of what is to come, untold adventures, and adventures with God.

The text says, "...and the sea was no more." This doesn't mean there is not going to be water, because there's going to be water. There's going to be a river. It's an illusion to in the Jewish mind that in the sea, in these untold places, there was deep evil. John is saying there is no more evil. Evil is removed. Verse 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." We're going to talk a lot about new Jerusalem and this bride next week, and what it look like to be God's people, but now we're focused on God's place.

I just want you to notice one thing the text says. Where did John see the city? If we were to ask you where heaven is, if you ask a little kid where heaven is, they would probably point up. It's up there in the sky; that's where we're going. In fact, we sing "some glad morning when this life is over, I'll fly away to a home on God's celestial shores. I'll fly away." That's what we think about. What's heaven? We're going to fly away to a cloud somewhere up in the sky. We're not really sure where it is, but we're going to be up there, play a harp, sing, and it's going to be really cool and really awesome. If we're really honest, that sounds a little bit frightening. As NT Wright notes, if we sing I'll fly away, we need to add a line that says 'and then when God remakes the world, I'll fly right back down.' That's where heaven is going to be! Notice what John says, "I saw the new Jerusalem," the city, the place where God's people are going to dwell forever, where is it not in heaven; it comes down from heaven, from God, and joins the earth. If you get one thing, get this; heaven is the new earth! We live in

heaven on the new earth. We don't go somewhere; we go home. We live there forever. We sing 'when the roll is called up yonder, when His chosen ones shall gather, in their home beyond the sky.' That's not true! The roll is not going to be called up yonder; the roll is going to be called right here on earth. That's where the city, that's where the dwelling place God is coming to. He's coming to earth. He's uniting heaven to earth and we're going to live in a new heaven and a new earth.

This changes the way we see our eternal existence. You're not going to be some cute chubby little thing with wings flying around with a harp. You're going to be you, more alive than you've ever been before in a planet that you know, that's home, that's earth, yet more alive than ever before, without any sin and only its original glory to the praise of God. That's where we live forever. See, the story of the Bible, Genesis 1 and 2, we get a perfect creation. We get a garden, something that we can't even imagine how good that was. Then, we see paradise lost because of sin, but the Bible ends the last two chapters with paradise found, paradise restore. We, again, are in a garden, but not just a garden, but a garden city where everything is remade to be exactly where God wants us to be, in God's presence as God's people in God's place.

We're going to talk about God's presence in the next two weeks, but we're going to give a little foretaste of it. Verse 3 says, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man." Notice that. It is not man's dwelling is with God; God's dwelling is with man. God comes down to earth and dwells with us. He will dwell with them. They will be His people and God Himself (notice the emphatic, not a substitute, not somebody in God's place) will be with them as their God. John sees the dwelling place of God is now with man. God comes down to earth like it was in Adam and Eve's day when God comes and walks in the cool of the day through the garden. Now, God is making His permanent dwelling with man on the earth because heaven has come down to the earth. I'm always a little skeptical of books written by people who say they've been to heaven and come back. One of the reasons is because when I hear their story, it's usually about light, they saw somebody, and there are bits and pieces of information, but do you know who they rarely

talk about? God. I'm pretty sure if you died, went to heaven, and came back, the only thing you would talk about is God! Yes, the new earth is going to be incredible, but nothing is going to compare to God dwelling among us. One of the greatest promises all throughout the Bible is you will be My people and I will be your God. Israel continues disobeying and God says don't worry, you will be My people and I will be your God. In the New Testament, we disobey, but God says I'll be your God and you will be My people. Now, John is seeing in the vision that it has come true; we are now God's people and God is Himself our God. We live in His very presence forevermore. The greatest delight in heaven is not going to be all of the national parks renewed, though I think they're going to be just spectacular. It's not going to be fall like we've never seen, or spring like we've never seen, though it's going to be unimaginable. It's not going to be the rivers we swam, though they're going to be incredible. It's going to be that we see and behold the face of God. We will spend every adventure, every journey in the very presence of God. There's nowhere you will find God where God is not right there. Imagine climbing Everest with God. What's that going to be like? The best day you've had here is in pale comparison to the worst day you could ever imagine in heaven with God in a new creation.

Not only is God's presence going to be there, but there's going to be some absence of some things there. There are going to be things that aren't in heaven. John said I saw the former things pass away. Verse 4 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." Not only do we have God's place, God's presence, but we have no more curse. That's why Watson wrote about joy to the world, not Christmas, but joy to the world when Christ the King comes back because far as the curse is found, He's undoing it. There will be no more sin. You want to know when joy is coming to the world; it's the second coming of Christ. That's when joy will flow like the rivers. In pastoral ministry, one of the things that you have is a front row seat to pain and suffering, the constant calls of a family in a tragedy. Something has happened. Someone is hurting. There is death, crying, mourning, and pain. I am so thankful that in heaven there will be no need for pastoral ministry because there will be no more death, pain, or tears. Think about

all of the hardships that you've experienced on earth, all those things that cause you misery, mourning, pain, and tears. None of those will be true anymore. It will be like a bad dream that we wake up from. All of the former things, every hard thing, we will not wear a mask in heaven. There will be no viruses. There will be no pandemics. It will be perfection forevermore.

Not only are there former things, there are also new things. Verse 5 says, "And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.' And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." There are new things coming. God, who is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end is the sum total of all things. He is the source and the sum of everything. He is center stage, and He says it is done. What is done? It is the whole story, not just the redemption of man, but the redemption of creation, a new heaven and a new earth. All of history has now been completed. Every single little history all weaves into the tapestry of a perfected history where we will see every turn and crevice to the glory of God. We'll look and behold, and say you were doing this. We'll stand amazed forever in God's presence.

Not only will the former things pass and new things come, we will have a portion in that new Kingdom. Verses 6-7 say, "To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son." Here's a portion. To the thirsty, that's a biblical turn of those who desire and want God. God continually speaks of Himself as a fountain of living water, Old Testament and New Testament. Jesus is talking about Himself, "I am the fountain of living water. Come to Me and you will never thirst again." It's to the thirsty, those who long for God, those who love God, those who want God. In the new Kingdom, they're never going to thirst because they will be satisfied in God. Our joy will be complete. It's a total satisfaction because the One who we were made for; we will finally be with forevermore. Every little pleasure was like drops in the bucket, and God is the ocean, as Jonathan Edwards says. We find our joy in God.

Not only do we get satisfaction forever, we get an inheritance. What is our inheritance as sons of God? What is the inheritance? It is what he has just talked about, the new heavens and the new earth. Adam and Eve were created to live under God's rule and steward over His creation. Guess what is going to happen in new creation. We are restored as God's caretakers of the new creation. God is going to give it to us and say go and rule well. We're not just going to be playing our harp. We're going to be having jobs, activities, hobbies, sports, joy, excitement, and friendship. It's going to be this world, but a trillion times better without any of the negative side effects. We're going to get the inheritance.

Then John talks about their portion. Our portion, those who are in Christ, is satisfaction and inheritance. Their portion, those who are outside of Christ, John says this, "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." Not everyone has a beautiful end. Some will have a very tragic end. How could that be? How could a loving God make a place like that? Well, the loving God doesn't want us to perish. He is longsuffering with us. He put His Son on a cross, but the truth is that God is holy, holy, holy, and heaven is a place of holiness. No detestable thing will be let into heaven, or it won't be heaven; it would be hell. We see this play out and only those who are in Christ, those who have been washed in the blood, and those who have their names in the book of life will be in that first portion. Those who are outside of Christ, those who are now living in all sorts of sinful ways will be away from the presence of the Lord. There are two portions, our portion, who are those who are in Christ, and their portion, who are those who are outside of Christ.

I just ask a real sobering question. What is your portion? If today were the day of reckoning, what would be your portion? Would it be the wages of your life, which is going to be death? Or, would it be the free gift of God, which is eternal life? Which one is your portion? Are you banking on your goodness? Or, have you accepted the free gift of God's goodness on your behalf, through Jesus on a cross, who died and rose on your behalf to give you His righteousness and forgive all of your sins? It's important what you

do with Jesus because Jesus matters now, but He also matters for all of eternity. Which one is your portion? Is it ours, or are you in their portion?

Why does God give John a vision, and why does John feel so compelled to write it down? Why has it preserved to share with us? Why is this important that we have a true vision of what the end is going to be like? I think it's because right now we live in the messy middle. We remember a paradise lost and we long for a paradise restored, and right now, we live in the messy middle where there are tears and is mourning and suffering. All those things are present realities. We can thing right now is the very best so I'm going to hold on to it and live my life for me and get all the me I can get out of it. What the vision says is no. Right now is not it. There is a coming Kingdom that is going to be a trillion times better than your best day here; live for Christ. Live right now in His presence as His people longing for His place because His place is going to be like you can't imagine. There's a scene in the movie, Avatar, where Jake Sully is a paraplegic. He's in a wheelchair and he wheels up to this machine and puts himself into the machine. He hooks in and links up to an avatar. This avatar is this created thing that he's now going to be linked to, and he will wake up in a different plane. He's going to be in Pandora. When Jake Sully links up, all of a sudden, his eyes open and he realizes he has a new body. He looks down, wiggles his toes, and he sees his legs. The first thing Jake does is take off running. He runs, and he runs, and he runs, but he doesn't run on his planet earth; he runs on a place called Pandora, but it's very earthy. There's nothing really new about it; it's just different. It's refashioned. The mountains are floating. The waterfalls are coming out of the sky, seemingly. It's an earthy place, but more than he's ever seen or ever imagined. Now, he lives his life as this avatar and he suddenly longs for that life more than his own. I think in some ways it's a little bitty picture of what it's going to be like when we get into the new heaven and the new earth. But we aren't going to link to some avatar; we are going to be raised. Our actual body we are living in right now will be raised with Christ to a newness that you can't even imagine. Your body, right now, that is withering every single day is going to be alive than it's ever been before, and you're going to wake up on a planet that looks a lot like earth, but a whole lot better. The mountains are going to be bigger. The rivers are

going to be clearer. You're going to go explore and do all the things you love here, but it's going to be a thousand times better. Every single moment is going to be in the presence of God whom you were made for. All of the joy that you have is made for God and you're going to be satisfied forever. I'm telling you heaven is not going to be boring. It's going to be a place that you can't even imagine. Imagine harvesting with no cockleburs, planting with no weeds, gardening where it's only fruit, doing what you love with none of the things that you hate, no curse, no sin, only perfection, only God in a new heaven and a new earth forevermore enjoying it with the people of God forevermore. If you have that vision in your mind, it will propel you to long for that place. It won't make you live for just the right now earth; it will make you want to live for the new earth. Everything you do now for the Kingdom of Christ and the sake of the gospel and to the glory of God is going to make a difference for eternity. That is true like. That is real life. Close your eyes and imagine heaven. Now what do you see?