



Heaven

by Scott Huckaby

key verse: **Revelation 21:1-4**

Note: The Scripture references in these Sermon Notes are taken from the New King James Version.

I heard about a seminary student who was here in the U.S. to study but was originally from Africa who chose to preach on the joys of heaven at his first opportunity. He had been in the U.S. for several months and had observed the wealth that common people enjoy here in comparison with his home country. He saw a correlation between this wealth and the fact that no one preaches about heaven here. Back in his country, heaven was the most popular topic that preachers addressed.

So I'm going to preach on heaven this morning. Knowing the wonderful future God has in store for us helps us to put his life in the proper perspective.

The first thing I'd like to do is to dispel the most common misconceptions about heaven. What most Christians believe about heaven is closer to Greek philosophy than biblical Christianity... Most people think heaven is a spirit world where the saved spend eternity as disembodied spirits, floating around on clouds, playing harps.

Revelation 5:8, 14:2, and 15:2 refers to harps in heaven but these harps are symbolic imagery, a metaphor of creative artistic expression.

The Gnostic Heresy

This wrong view of heaven is derived from what is known as the Gnostic Heresy. When the first Gentiles were converted to the Gospel, their Greek-mind set immediately collided with some of the fundamental teachings of Christianity.

Since the Gnostics viewed the material universe as evil, they could not accept the Bible's teaching that God became incarnate in the flesh. Thus, the Gnostics believed that Jesus had to be a spirit-being or phantom who never took on the flesh and therefore never experienced physical death. The Apostle John addressed the Gnostic Heresy directly in...

1 John 4:1-2 - Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God,

The creation account in Genesis is diametrically opposed to the Greek belief that the material universe, including the human body, is evil. God said the world was created good...

Genesis 1:31 - Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

The Gnostics forgot what the world was originally and that it became corrupted by the sin of man...

Isaiah 24:5-6 - The earth is also defiled under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate.

But not all the goodness of creation has disappeared as a result of man's sin. As Psalms 19:1 says,

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork."

And Romans 1:20 says,

"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead."

Scripture also promises that the creation as it now exists will someday be redeemed by God...

Romans 8:21 - the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

The Gnostic view of heaven that most professing Christians have today was formalized by the Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D. It was the result of a theologian named St. Augustine who attempted to rationalize Greek philosophy with what the Scriptures taught about end time events and life after death.

Revelation 21:1-7 says the saints will spend eternity in glorified bodies on a New Earth. Augustine had reasoned that the material world must cease to exist when the Lord returns. He had to spiritualize what the Bible said by arguing that the "new earth" of Revelation 21 is just symbolic language for heaven.

Certainly, there is a lot of symbolic language used to describe heaven. This is because heaven is a spiritual domain so it is hard for our mortal minds to comprehend it. But Scripture tells us that we are not going to spend eternity in a disembodied condition...

1Thessalonians 5:23 - *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

All people are tri-unity of body, soul, and spirit, and we'll always be body, soul, and spirit.

And since God's creation retains some aspects of its original goodness, every age that the Bible describes has some elements of foreshadowing what heaven will be like...

Garden of Eden – paradise, innocence (which is not knowing the consequence of sin), walking with God;

Law – knowing God and His ways;

Grace – having a personal relationship with our Creator;

Millennial Kingdom – God's direct rule on the earth and the partial redemption of nature.

We can expect the good things of this world to also be present in eternity but much greater than our wildest expectations. Indeed...

James 1:17 - *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights.*

I like what C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*:

“Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water... If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but to only arouse it, to suggest the real thing.”

We can not fully understand what glories that our eternal existence has in store for us because...

1 Corinthians 2:9 - *"Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."*

However, Scripture does reveal enough to us for us to know that God has a wonderful plan for us... let's look at some of what it says...

Our Eternal Bodies

Philippians 3:20-21 gives us some insight into what our eternal bodies will be like...

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Home is where we spend most of our time. In the context of eternity, home is clearly heaven and heaven is where God is.

Since our citizenship is in heaven, those who follow Jesus are aliens in this world, or as Hebrews 11:13 puts it, *"strangers and pilgrims on the earth."*

We *"eagerly wait"* for Jesus to return because when He comes, that is when He will resurrect us... transforming *"our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body."* Our future resurrected bodies will be like the glorious body Jesus was resurrected into. Jesus is the first fruits of the resurrection...

1 Corinthians 15:22-23 - *For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.*

Since we will have the same type of body as Jesus, we will be able to see Him as He is...

1 John 3:2 - *Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*

So we can learn more about our future resurrected bodies if we look at what Jesus revealed to us about His resurrected body... One of the passages that reveals a lot about Jesus' resurrected body is Luke 24:13-43.

This passage describes an encounter two men on the road to Emmaus had with the resurrected Christ. The two men had been talking about the events that had happened in Jerusalem that past week where Jesus was crucified but there were reports that he was resurrected from the dead. There were confused by all this and trying to sort them out when Jesus joined them on the road.

The two men headed to Emmaus didn't know it was Jesus who joined them on the road because God restrained them from recognizing Him.

But the two men were saved when their spiritual eyes were opened by God enabling them to recognize the resurrected Jesus.

As soon as the men recognized Jesus, He vanished. Jesus had accomplished His purpose with the men... to save them and give them a special revelation of Himself. Jesus revealed Himself as a person with a body that looked like any other person in the world and yet He also had supernatural abilities showing He was not confined to this world.

The two men abandoned their plans to stay in Emmaus and went back to Jerusalem to report their experience to Jesus' disciples. But while they were discussing this new information about Jesus, verse 36 says,

Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them and said to them, "Peace to you."

The disciples were terrified and frightened because they thought Jesus was a spirit by the way He appeared... since they are not used to seeing bodies just materialize they assumed they were seeing an apparition which had no substance. This was before the days of Star Trek.

Now we could dismiss His ability to appear and disappear at will by thinking, "of course, He is God and God can do anything." But the Bible says that our resurrected bodies will be like His, recall 1 Corinthians 5:23 and 1 John 3:2.

In Luke 24:39, Jesus invited them to touch Him to verify that He had a physical body and to inspect His crucifixion scars so that they may verify who He is. Jesus retained these scars in His resurrected body as badges of honor to remind us of the price He paid for us.

To reinforce the revelation of His body was flesh and blood, Jesus ate a piece of broiled fish and some honeycomb. A spirit-being could not do such a thing, Jesus had a physical body. Jesus reminded them about the things He had taught them about the resurrection and, as it says in Luke 24:45, *"He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures."*

This encounter with the resurrected Jesus showed us that we can look forward to a physical existence in eternity like we have today. The joys we have today interacting with God's creation will only be enhanced in eternity. Jesus' resurrected body is a super-set of ours in that it can do what we currently do plus has supernatural characteristics such as being able to appear and disappear at will traveling great distances without any mechanical conveyance. And it will not grow old or wear out... The blind will see; the deaf will hear; the lame will walk; and the mentally impaired will have their minds healed. There will no longer be any pain or death...

Revelation 21:4 - And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.

So, our resurrected, glorified bodies will be tangible, recognizable, perfected and immortal. Let's take a look at what we'll be doing in eternity...

Activities

One of the great promises Jesus gave us about where we'll be after we are resurrected is in John 14:2-3...

John 14:2-3 - "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to

prepare a place for you. 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."

When Jesus ascended to heaven after He was resurrected, He went to prepare a place for us. The word translated "mansion" may also be translated "abode" which means a place where one dwells permanently.

Revelation 21 talks about the New Jerusalem that will descend from heaven to be our eternal home on earth. Certainly part of what Jesus was referring to here were these fantastic eternal accommodations. Revelation 21 tells us that the size of New Jerusalem will have a base 1500 miles on a side and 1500 miles high. Scientists have said 70 billion people have lived on earth until now... assuming the shape of New Jerusalem is a pyramid and that a third of all people who ever lived trusted in God for their salvation, that means we'll each have a space equivalent to a cube 70 acres on a side! Quite a mansion!

I'd also like to call your attention to the promise that Jesus would return and receive us to Himself so that we may be where He is. Jesus is currently in heaven but Revelation Chapters 19 and 20 say He will be returning to earth to reign forever.

I believe when the Lord returns to set up his kingdom, the church will be with Him in our resurrected bodies. The Lord used His prophetic Word to save me so I have a special place in my heart for the study of His return. I have thoroughly investigated the arguments for the various views on end time events and I'm convinced that the Lord will remove His church from earth prior to the 7-year tribulation where God pours out His wrath on the earth in judgment.

In John 14:3, Jesus promised that when He returns for us, we will be with Him forever. So in Revelation 19:14 where it describes the Lord returning with the armies in heaven, the church is part of that army...

Rev 19:14 - And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.

Back up a few verses to Revelation 19:7-8 and you can see the church at the marriage supper of the Lamb where we will *"be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright."*

Just as in old westerns were the cavalry comes on horses at a full gallop to rescue people hiding behind wagons under siege by Indians, the resurrected church will be that cavalry following behind the Commander of the heavenly host.

A lot of people dismiss prophecies of future events such as this as being symbolic, that we will not literally return riding white horses. Certainly there is a lot of symbolic language in the book of Revelation and especially there in the descriptions of heaven. But I have learned that the best

policy is to take Scripture literally unless obvious symbolism is being used. If the plain-sense makes sense, seek no other sense or you'll end up with nonsense. You can check this out for yourself, the prophecies of Jesus' first coming were literally fulfilled, so we should certainly expect those dealing with His return to be literally fulfilled as well.

So Jesus returns to set up His kingdom on earth, and we are with Him in our resurrected bodies. Many people consider heaven to be God's eternal retirement plan. But I can tell you we will not be idle, God's plan has us participating with Him in the operation of His kingdom:

Rev 5:9-10 - And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Notice that this is talking about those who are redeemed "out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation." This is talking about the redeemed Gentiles in heaven, this is a reference to the church!

The Lord with the church and the redeemed Old Testament saints will be on earth ruling over the mortal people who survived the Great Tribulation and their descendants. According to the first seven verses of Revelation Chapter 20, the Lord's reign over the survivors of the Tribulation and their descendants will last 1000 years. Then the Lord completely renovates heaven and earth ushering in the eternal state.

Millennial Reign of Christ

Most of Christianity believes that the millennial reign of Christ is merely symbolic of the church age we are in now, that the 1000 years is not a literal 1000 years but just a long time. These amillennialists believe that when the Lord returns, He will usher in the eternal state immediately. But that is not what a literal reading of Scripture tells us.

It is helpful for us to study what the Bible says about this period because we will have a role in it and it foreshadows the eternal state. Isaiah 65:17-25 is a classic passage that will help us see what the world will be like during the millennial reign of Christ...

Despite the fact that Isaiah 65:17 speaks of a new heavens and a new earth, we know this can't refer to the eternal state because Isaiah 65:20 says people will still be subject to death (the curse of sin is not fully removed). Per Revelation 21:4, "there shall be no more death" in the eternal state.

In Isaiah 65:17, notice that "the former shall not be remembered or come to mind." The fallen condition of this

world as we know it today will be forgotten. Since the new heavens and new earth of the millennial reign of Christ foreshadows the eternal state, we can expect that we too will not remember the trials and tribulations of this life.

Isaiah 65:19 tells us that conditions on earth will be more like they were in the Garden of Eden than they are now.

Isaiah 65:22 says that God's people will live as long as a tree. We have redwoods in California that are over 1000 years old so it will be the normal thing for God's mortal elect to live during the entire time of the millennial reign of the Lord.

Notice that in Isaiah 65:21-22, people will enjoy the fruit of their labors. This is proof that much of the curse will be removed, no longer will our work be unproductive due to the "thorns and thistles" of Genesis 3:18.

It is important to note that it was God's plan from the beginning that man should work. Adam had work to do even in the Garden of Eden before the fall. Work is a blessing, even today, the benefits from work may be seen despite the thorns and thistles. God worked in the creation and redemption of mankind, and He continues to work in sustaining His creation. God wants us to participate with Him in bringing order to the world. Work is an outlet for our creativity and we are made in the image of the Creator Himself.

Isaiah 65:23 addresses another of the consequences from the fall of mankind, the pain of child birth that began at Genesis 3:16 will be removed. I expect this will cause the earth to be re-populated very fast.

Isaiah 65:24 says that God's people will have a close relationship with Him during His millennial reign. During this Age of Grace we have the potential to have such a relationship with Him but this passage sounds like and intimate and personal relationship with the Lord will be much more common.

Isaiah 65:25 says that God will redeem His creation so that carnivorous animals will become herbivorous, dangerous animals will cease to be dangerous. There is a parallel passage in Isaiah 11:6-7 which says, "the leopard shall lie down with the young goat... the cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together."

Note: Dave Regan told of his wife correcting him after a sermon where he said there would be no more chiggers during the millennial kingdom. She said Scripture doesn't say there would be no more chiggers, it says that you would lie down with them.

During the millennial kingdom of Christ, creation will be redeemed to the point where it will no longer be characterized by death.

Romans 8:19-21 - *For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.*

Reigning with Christ

During the millennial Kingdom, I believe every person on earth who is in a position of governing authority will be a glorified saint. In the parable of the minas in Luke 19:12-17, Jesus said that those who made good use of the resources He has given us will be rewarded with greater authority when He returns. I take it that during His millennial reign, some of us will be in administrative positions, sharing in Jesus' reign as presidents, governors, mayors, corporate executives.

The parable of the minas tells us that we should make good use of our time and resources in working to expand the Kingdom of the Lord because the day will come when there will be an accounting. How we spend our time and resources will impact what we will be assigned to do during the Millennial Kingdom and during the eternal state that follows.

Scripture also tells us that, along with being administrators, some saints will serve as judges...

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 - *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?*

Saints will judge the world as part of reigning with Christ. While man was created a little lower than the angels, through redemption, man will be lifted into a place of fellowship with God, a position above angels. Those fallen angels who were free to deceive the nations will be rounded up and thrown into prison per Isaiah 24:21-22. Since we will be with the Lord at that time, perhaps we have a role in that.

Isaiah 66:18-21 and Jeremiah 3:14-17 both tell us that during the Millennium, saints will serve as "shepherds," or teachers, working to bring those who are born during the Millennium to faith in Jesus.

Since the millennial reign of Christ foreshows the eternal state, we can conclude that likewise during the eternal state, (1) the curse of sin will be removed, (2) there will be work

to do, (3) we will have a closer relationship with God, and (4) we will live in a tangible physical world where there will be no sorrow.

The Eternal State

The eternal state is ushered in after Jesus puts down the final rebellion of man at the end of His millennial reign, when He re-creates heaven and earth, the dead are resurrected and judged at the great white throne...

Revelation 21:1-22:5 addresses the eternal state and it does use a lot of symbolism because it addresses things that are hard for our mortal minds to comprehend.

We don't have the time to go through this passage in detail but I do want to point out to you some key things that I haven't already mentioned...

In Revelation 21:1, we know we're talking about the eternal state here because the Apostle John says that there will be a new heaven and earth that replaced the first heaven and earth. Also, this is in context of verse 4 which says there will be no more death.

In Revelation 21:2, the holy city, New Jerusalem, which will be our eternal home is described as coming down to earth from heaven. This city is made of precious materials and per Revelation 21:23, the New Jerusalem gets its light from the Son, not the S-U-N but the S-O-N... Jesus Himself will be the New Jerusalem Light & Power company.

Notice in Revelation 21:22 that there will be no temple in the New Jerusalem. Since God the Father and God the Son will be there themselves, no temple is necessary.

The Holy Spirit will also be there because we will be there. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would indwell His children forever...

John 14:16 - *And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever*
Also, see Revelation 22:1, the Holy Spirit is represented by the River of Life.

The New Jerusalem will also have trees of life that bear a new crop of fruit each month, 12 a year. This is symbolic of God's provision for mankind to have a relationship with Him.

Since there will be a new fruit every month, we will be aware of the passage of time in heaven. Just as we will have material bodies and there will be physical space that is similar to our current world, likewise, time will be part of our experience in the eternal state.

Like God, we will be outside the confines of time during the eternal state, but we will be aware of the passage of time. This will help us to be better able to appreciate what God has done for us through-out eternity.

Revelation 22:3 says that we will be providing a meaningful and fulfilling service during the eternal state. I would imagine that, for one thing, our gifts and talents will be magnified and that we will use them to glorify the Lord. Thus, a singer will be able to sing with a perfection never before achieved, and a painter will be able to paint with a glory never imagined. I also expect we will be spending a great deal of time getting to know God better.

We will never exhaust what may be learned about God...

Romans 11:33 - Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out!

And notice the great blessing in Revelation 22:4... we will see God face-to-face...

Revelation 22:5 says that the inhabitants of New Jerusalem will be reigning with the Lord forever and ever. We will not be turning into eternal vegetables in retirement. We will have productive, creative work to do in reigning over God's Creation. This was God's plan for mankind in the Garden of Eden, and it is His plan for us in eternity.

Well, I hope this message has given you a longing for eternity. We are going to have an invitation where you'll be given an opportunity to make a public profession of faith if you have never done this. I'm going to ask our music director to lead us in a song. And while we are singing, if you need to make a public profession of faith, I'd invite you to meet me in front of the podium. Maybe you want to join this church... if so, I'd invite you to come. If there is any decision you want to make public today, I'd invite you to come.