

Puzzled By Paradise

I. Introduction:

A. There was an Elderly Couple that had been married over 65 years: They ate healthy / lived healthy / Exercised→ **But** at the age of 85 they both died in a car wreck... **& So**, Peter meets them & gives them a tour of heaven... He takes them to a beautiful **Mansion**→ **With** an incredible master suite / **&** a swimming pool in the backyard... (& Peter says) “This will be your home”... (& the old man says) “How much is this going to cost?”... (Peter says) “You don’t get it...This is Heaven...It’s Free”... **Then Peter showed them the beautiful Golf Course**→ **That their house bordered:** (& Peter says) “This is where you have playing privileges...This course changes everyday into another beautiful course”... (& the old man said) “How much are the green fees?”... (& Peter says) “You don’t get it...It’s Free...**& by the way**, there’s no Tee-Times either”... **& Then Peter took them to the Club House:** (& says) “This is where you’ll eat”... **& There** laid out before them was this incredible buffet... (& the old man said) “**Yeah**, but I not allowed to eat that→ **So** where’s the low-fat/low-cholesterol table of food?”... (& Peter says) “You still don’t get it...This is Heaven...There’s no cost for the food→ **& There’s** no worry about fat or cholesterol”... **At This, the old man just had a Fit!:** As he threw his hat on the ground→ **&** started Stomping on it-- As his wife tried to calm him down... (& Peter says) “Why are you so upset?”... (& the old man looked at his wife & said) “It’s all your fault-- If it wasn’t for all those blasted Bran-muffins→ **I could have** been here 10 years ago!”

B. Well, Heaven is going to be full of Surprises: **& So**, it can be a bit Confusing... **But it’s** worth trying to figure it out now-- **B/C** the more we know about Heaven→ **The** more we’ll want to go there!... **As some of**

the greatest **Philosophers** have declared: What we think about Death & Life Beyond→ Is the Key to thinking seriously about everything else... **Yet**, according to one **Barna Research Poll**: Although an overwhelming Majority of Americans continue to believe→ That there is life after death / & That heaven & hell exist-- What people actually believe about these things varies significantly... (& Goes on to explain) That what we do today is stitched together our Religious Views from→ Song lyrics / Sacred texts / our college Social Psychology Classes / our Parents / our Bosses & co-workers / The Simpsons..... **The Result?: Popular ideas about the Afterlife are typically→ More Mythical than Biblical... More specifically, evidence reveals that even We Christians: Are** Puzzled about some of the most basic beliefs regarding the Resurrection... You See, although we're committed to a Generic/Undefined belief in "life after death"... **Yet**, we possess little awareness-- **As** to how the more specific notions of Resurrection (Judgment / & the Second Coming of Jesus)→ **Actually** fit together to make any sense...

C. As the saying goes→ It seems we're "all dressed up & no place to go": But Given that God intended our understanding of Heaven be more than just a nice Auxiliary Sentiment→ **But** a Central & Life-Sustaining conviction-- Perhaps it would help us to pause a few minutes to consider what's causing all the confusion... **1st Impoverished view of Heaven** (which leaves us with the lingering/unspoken suspicion that heaven might be Boring): Many contemporary Christian thinkers have noted that the topic of heaven is rarely talked about today-- (ironically) Heaven has fallen off our Radar... **I think you might find it interesting to consider** that if you were to talk with people today who have been to church all their adult lives (especially those under the age of 50)→ **That** they would be hard pressed to recall ever having heard a single sermon specifically on Heaven... Now, it might be occasionally mentioned→ **But** rarely emphasized / & Almost never is it developed as a topic... **& So, we might ask ourselves the question:** How

can we set our hearts on Heaven→ **When** we have such an Incomplete view of heaven?... **2nd Imposition of competing beliefs** (which have muddled up the waters): **Whether** its **Reincarnation** where we are supposedly recycled through life until we get it right / **Or Nihilism** where everything simply just ceases to exist (which is certainly Clean & tidy→ but also very Unsatisfying) **Or New Age** ideas of our being Absorbed into Nature / **Or** the **Hollywood** idea of our roaming around in some ghostly (disembodied) experience for eternity / **Or Perhaps** some form of **Purgatory** where even after death→ We can earn our way back into the graces of God... **You See, In a muddled world like this: We** who claim to Jesus-- **Can unwittingly** trade off sure & certain hope of the resurrection of the dead→ **For** a kind of fuzzy/watered-down Optimism that somehow things are suppose to work out in the end... **3rd The influence of Greek philosophy** (Which has warped out Christian View): **Now** the person that's given the most credit here is **Plato** (I alluded to this in the first sermon)... **You See**, Plato was the Greek Philosopher who believed that Matter (including the Human Body & the Earth) is inherently Evil→ **While** Immaterial things (like the Soul & Heaven) are Good-- **This** view is called **"Platonism"**... (As Plato stated) **"Soma Sema"** (i.e. *"The body is a Tomb"*)... **& So for Plato: The goal** of man was to Escape/Discard these physical bodies→ **In order to** become a Free Disembodied spirit... **& This framework of thinking was pervasive in the ancient world in which Christianity was born: & So**, the Early Church had to deal with the Blending of Christian teaching→ **With** this Dualistic way of looking at life (i.e. Matter is bad / Spirit is good)... **In Fact, we a clear example of this as Christianity** had to face struggles with this influence at the turn of the 1st Century→ **In what** was known as **Gnosticism**... **Translated: If you** believe that Flesh is evil→ **Then** what do you do with God becoming Flesh?-- **Well**, you must deny it... **& So this re-interpretation of Christianity by the Gnostics promoted the view: That** Jesus wasn't actually a physical human being→ **He** just appeared to look like a Human Being-- **While** (in actuality) He was a spirit-being in the appearance of a man... **& So, the Apostle John** (knowing the damaging implications of denying the Physical

Humanity of Jesus)-- **Was compelled** to face-off with this teaching→ **When** he says in **I John 4:1f**

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit. Put the spirits to the test to see if they belong to God. Many false prophets have gone out into the world. How can you recognize the Spirit of God? Every spirit that agrees that Jesus Christ came in a human body belongs to God. But every spirit that doesn't agree with this does not belong to God.

Now, this philosophy continued to have its influence throughout church history: & Even Today, this of reframing Christian teaching through Plato's Dualism→ Still has its lingering effect in our generation... (e.g.) **In one Poll:** Over 2/3 of Americans who claimed to believe in the Resurrection **Said** that at the Resurrection they will NOT have Physical Bodies (i.e. we'll just be Disembodied Spirits)... **The point being** that even we today tend to "Spiritualize" the Resurrection→ **Effectively** denying it... **& So,** **Christianity reject the premise that the Material cannot be Spiritual:** **We should remember** that the very first time the word "**Good**" is used in the Scriptures→ **It's** used to describe God's Physical (Tangible) Creation... **Please grasp: The Bible** doesn't condemn the Material→ **It** condemns Materialism (i.e. Making the created more important than the Creator)... **& So**, something isn't less "Spiritual" to God→ **If** it's Physical...

III. Now as I hope you're beginning to sense: The Christian Hope isn't just a Hope→ **But** a Precise & Specific Hope... **So let's** attempt to put some of the pieces together...

A. #1 We will have a Physical Body: In other words, **We are** **saved not just as Souls→ But as Wholes**... **Gnosticism** had no use for the Body→ But God does... **& As I have cautioned us: I fear** that we have slipped into possessing a hope that believes-- **That** the "Real You" is

simply a disembodied spirit→ **& That** your body is only a Disposable/ Temporary shell to be scrapped (More in keeping with a Hermit Crabs existence)... **I would suggest that we go back & read Genesis:** You'll note that God made the Body First→ **& Then** He breathed the spirit of life into it... **The Point being:** The Essence of our Humanity is not just spirit→ **But** Spirit joined with a Physical Body-- **& That's** why our Bodily resurrection is Indispensable... **Now** (you see), these current bodies of ours are Cursed by sin & subject to Decay-- **& Thus**, they're unable to inherit the Kingdom of God... **But Listen:** Our hope is not simply to be delivered FROM our old bodies→ **Rather** our hope is to be delivered INTO our New Bodies... **Listen to Paul in Romans 8:23f...**

And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.

► You See, we do not yet experience all that God has designed for us: B/C even though our Salvation is Finished→ **It's** not yet fully Enjoyed... **& That moment** will not come until the bodies we now have are Glorified at the Resurrection... **You See, this is what we often overlook in Scriptures:** The Christian Hope involves Two-Stages about life-after-death... When we die→ **Yes**, we go to the present Heaven to be with God-- **But that's** just a Refreshing/Temporary halt on the journey (That's not our final resting place)... **B/C our Ultimate Hope** still anticipates our bodily Resurrection that is yet to follow... In other words, **We believe in a Life After life-after-death...** **As Paul reminded the Corinthians (Who had bought into Platonism):** When we die our earthly/cursed bodies will be planted in the ground (like a seed)-- **& From** this old material God will (in a Stunning & Glorious moment ignited by His Spirit)→ **Raise** each of us up with New a kind of Physical body with

New Properties -- Just like Jesus... **Remember what Paul told the Philippians in Phil. 3?**

But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. He will take our weak mortal bodies and change them into glorious bodies like his own, using the same mighty power that he will use to conquer everything everywhere.

► **Paul is telling us that God is going to Redeem us Body & Soul:** God is going to Redeem everything that we are / Everything that was effected by the Curse→ Is going to be Reconciled to Him... **You See, that's the point of Easter!:** It's not just the celebration of the bodily resurrection of Jesus / It's not simply just some Odd (Absurd / Peculiar) event within the Present World-- It's more than that... **The Resurrection of Jesus is a Signal:** That God's New Creation has already begun / That God has already Broken into this Cursed world→ **To** set in motion the reverse the Curse... **& So, our option are not shut down:** Rather, new things are possible right now / **& That** what happened to Jesus→ **Will** ultimately happen to us as well

B. #2 We will live in a Material Place: **The Real Heaven is a Corporeal heaven**-- "*Corporeal*" meaning that it is material in nature (Physical / Perceptible by the senses)... In other words, the real Heaven is going to be Tangible... **You See**, B/C of this Platonic teaching blending with Christianity→ One of the common tendencies to "Spiritualize" Heaven... **Now this is going to be the focus of my next sermon:** But let me kindle your appetite by taking you to an often glossed over text out of **Romans 8:18f...**

Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when

God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse.

► **Now, pause here & take notice:** The Curse didn't just effect Human Beings→ It also effected ALL CREATION... Paul is here acknowledging that all the Cosmos is out of joint / That something on Earth is terribly wrong... Now keep reading...

But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

► **Now, notice how Paul uses the image of "Child-Birth":** What does this suggest?-- It suggests that despite the radical changes that will occur→ **There's** (nonetheless) a **Continuity** between this life & the next... In other words, when Jesus returns→ All creation isn't Annihilated / Scrapped / & then God starts again from Scratch... Rather "Child- Birth" suggests that there is a Continuity between the world as we know it→ **& the** far better world that will be born out of this one... What Creation is looking forward to is a new future (A glorious new delivery)... **Jesus' Victory** will redeem EVERYTHING effected by the Curse... **& So, here Paul is trying to get us to see:** That what Jesus accomplished on the Cross→ **Is** so much more Comprehensive that we think... **God will not Abandon** (Eliminate) **His creation→ But Transform it**... Out of the Raw Material of this Cursed Creation→ God will REdeem (REnew / Remake / RENovate) every inch of the universe... **Understand what the Prefix "RE" means:** (i.e.) A return to an original condition that was ruined or lost...

III.. & So, what do we do until then?: Well, with new possibilities now having been unleashed into this world of ours through the Resurrection

of Jesus→ We Cope through Hope... **& We Cope in this current age→ By Groaning & Leaning...**

A. Yes, Paul gives us permission to Groan: (It is the language of Christians)... **Now** this isn't griping-- (i.e.) **It's not** giving into a kind of complaining that's rooted in denial of God's power (Remember that at the Resurrection of Jesus→ God announced that a new world has already dawned)... **Rather "Groaning"** is when we see our world in Death (Decay / & Atrophy)→ **& We** naturally (deep down) crave for everything to be Restored to God's original intentions for creation (For all things to be Set Right again / It's the yearning for what we know will be)...

B. & We do this by Leaning on the Holy Spirit that was given to each of God's children: **To** Calm our fears→ **When** things look hopeless / **To** Empower (Rejuvenate) us right now→ **So** we can become actively involved in changing this world we live in right now / **& To** Cement within us an Unshakable Optimism about God's promise for a New Heaven & a New Earth... **Listen to** what Paul says to the Corinthians in **2 Cor.5:4-5:**

While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life. God himself has prepared us for this, and as a guarantee he has given us his Holy Spirit.

► **We must learn to Lean on the Holy Spirit:** **The Spirit** has been given to us by God→ **To** help us manage life on a cursed planet...

IV. I Hope you're beginning to realize just how Cosmic in scope is the work of Jesus on the Cross: **I fear** that we have bought into a very limited & weak theology of God-- **In that** we actually

see God as a Thwarted Inventor whose creation failed... **& Now**, having realized His mistake→ **He** ends up trashing most of what He made... **& His** only Consolation for a failed Earth→ **Is that** He rescues a few of us from the fire... **But that is not the picture Scriptures paint!:** **Christ's Victory** over the Curse will not be Partial / **Death** will not just limp away wounded / **God** will not surrender any of His territory to our Enemy-- **There's** not one molecule of this universe→ **That** will not fulfill the divinely intended purpose for which it was created / **It will ALL be Redeemed** from the Curse-- **There** will not be one atom→ **That** will not submit to the Sovereignty of God / **Satan** will not be able to say that he perverted one square inch of God's good creation / **It will ALL be Reconciled** (as Paul tells the Colossians)→ **The Visible & the Invisible / Heaven & Earth--** **So that** God will be all in all... **This IS OUR Hope!**