

Paradise Regained

I. Introduction:

A. Well, there are some in our church family who are Questionable when it comes to their theology: B/C they continue to argue that cats are going to be in heaven... But I'm starting to give some credence to this possibility-- B/C of the following story (from a person by the name of Dwight Nelson)→ That he passed on (supposedly) about the preacher of his church... **Apparently, found a Kitten that had climbed up a Tree in his backyard→ & it was afraid to come down:** & So, the preacher tried to coax it down with offered warm milk & food→ But the kitten wouldn't come down... **Now the tree was not sturdy enough to climb:** So he decided that if he tied a rope from his car's back-bumper to the tree→ & then drove it slowly away so that the tree bent down-- He could then reach up & pluck the kitten off the branch... **& So, that's what he did (All the while checking his progress in the rear-view mirror):** He finally figured if he went just a little bit further→ **The** tree would be bent sufficiently for him to reach the kitten... But as he inched the car forward→ the Rope broke / & the Tree snapped violently back / & the Kitten instantly went sailing through the air out of sight... **Well, he felt terrible:** & So, he walked all over the neighborhood asking people if they'd seen a little kitten→ **& Nobody** had seen a stray kitten (& so he had to let it go)... **Well, a few days later he was at the grocery store→ Where he met one of his church members:** & He happened to look into her shopping cart-- & Was puzzled to see cat food→ B/C he knew this woman wasn't very fond of cats... (& so he asked her) "Why are you buying cat food→ **When** you hate cats so much?"... (she replied) "You won't believe this...."-- & Then she went on to tell him how her little girl had been begging her for a cat→ **But** how she kept refusing....& How a couple days earlier her daughter was begging once again....(& So she finally told her) "Well, if God gives you a cat, I'll let you keep it....(& Then the mother went on to say)

I watched my child go out in the yard / Get on her knees / & ask God for a cat....(& really, you won't believe this→ But I saw it with my own eyes)....**A kitten** suddenly came flying out of the blue sky with its paws outspread→ Landed right in front of her!"

B. Well, I'm not sure if that proves that cats will be in heaven→ Or if heaven is just getting rid of cats: **Either Way**, I guess there's still some things about heaven→ That I would like to figure out... **Last time as I talked about "Puzzled by Paradise":** **I challenged** our rather vague/generic view of hope-- **& It's** not that the Bible doesn't tell us much about Heaven→ **But Rather**, that (perhaps) we just haven't paid Close Attention to what it tells us... **& I Reminded us that Jesus' Bodily Resurrection marks a Watershed:** **You See**, one of the essential beliefs of Christianity→ **Is that** our ultimate hope lies in the fact that Jesus' bodily Resurrection Promises→ **That** we (too) will one day be raised bodily from the dead... **But not only that-- Jesus' Resurrection also Signaled that God has already set in motion the Redemption of ALL His Creation:** **& As** we noted from **Romans 8**→ **God has tied His Glory to His Creation...** **& So**, He doesn't intend to Surrender/Discard/Scrap any of His Good Creation to the Death/Annihilation→ **But Rather**, He intends to Redeem all of it (just as he will our physical bodies)

II. Well with that, let me pick up there→ As I take you now to Revelation 21 (where John tells us this)

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth,"→ For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away-- And there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City (the new Jerusalem) coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying) "Look! God's dwelling place is now

among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people→ & God himself will be with them / & be their God. '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."

A. Throughout Scriptures The promised Future for God's people-- Is not a Non-Earth→ But a New Earth:

Just as man was made from the earth→ **Man** was made for the earth... The Prophet Isaiah says in **Is.45:18**:

For this is what the LORD says: He who created the heavens→ He is God / He who fashioned and made the earth→ He founded it-- He did not create it to be empty→ But formed it to be inhabited.

God's Purpose was to live in intimate Fellowship with Man→ On a Good (Curse-free) Earth:

The picture Genesis paints is an earth that was Heaven's Backyard→ Where God would actually come to walk with Adam & Eve in the cool of the day... **Now we know that man sinned:**

Theologically, we call it "The Fall"... & ever since→ **Everything** has been out of joint... **But my question is: Did the Fall** cause God to abandon His original purpose?... Again go back to Genesis→ & you'll note that Eden was never Destroyed... What was destroyed was man's ability to live in Eden... & Man has been homesick for Eden ever since-- (As GK Chesterton put it) We're "*Homesick at Home*"... & So, we have this longing for a world where people & God are set Right again...

B. & This is described all through the Prophets: As They tell us of a world that will once again be what God originally purposed-- **In A Way**, the Prophets predict the ultimate Restoration Movement... **What did**

they mean by this?: Well, notice what **Peter** tells us in one of his first sermons recorded in **Acts 3:21**

Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to Restore Everything→ As he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

► **Notice that Peter doesn't say:** *"Jesus must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to Annihilate everything"*... Now that's the impression I had growing up→ But that's not actually what the Holy Spirit says... **You might also remember the encounter Jesus had with the YRR (In Matt.19):** **& How** the YRR walked away from Jesus sad... **& As** the Disciples Witnessing this→ **They** were a bit taken back→ (& said) *"Well, what about us?... We've left everything to follow you"*... **At that Jesus tells them in Matt.19:28:** **"Truly I tell you, at the Renewal Of All Things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel"**... **My Point being this:** **If you** pay attention, you begin to realize that there was some basis for the **Jewish Expectation-- That** when the Messiah came→ He would establish an Earthly Kingdom... **B/C** there were all these prophecies about the world being set right again... (e.g.) A small slice of this can be found in **Isaiah 65:17-19** (Which, by the way, you'll notice is the same exact language John borrows in Revelation 21)...

See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered→ Nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create→ For I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people-- The sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

► & So, as I hope you can see: This doctrine regarding the Restoration (Reclaiming) of the earth→ Doesn't rest simply in Speculation-- But is clearly reinforced in OT Prophecy / & in teachings from both Jesus & the Apostles

III. Let me take you now to 2 Peter 3: Now Here, Peter is addressing the Tension that the Christians there are experiencing-- Over their belief that Jesus will indeed Return / & the Antagonist who are making mockery of the Christians→ (saying) “*Yeah, well then why hasn't He come back yet?*”... Now listen to how Peter deals with this **2 Peter 3:3-13**...

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come→ Scoffing and following their own evil desires. (They will say) “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?...Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word→ The heavens came into being / & the earth was formed out of water and by water. **By these waters also→ The world of that time was deluged and destroyed.** By the same word the **present heavens and earth are reserved for fire**→ Being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years / & a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise→ As some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you-- Not wanting anyone to perish→ But everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief: The heavens will disappear with a roar / The elements will be destroyed by fire / & **the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.** Since everything will be destroyed in this way: What kind of people ought you to be?-- You ought to live holy and godly lives→ As you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire→ & the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise→ we are **looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth**-- The home of righteousness.

► **We're to be Eagerly Anticipating a New Earth:** The Prophets predicted it / John saw a vision of it / & Peter preached it... Now if you ask where this is going to be?-- I would say that there's every indication that you're on it... **As I spoke last time:** I don't believe that God's original plan was a failed experiment... The Scriptures tell us that the next coming of the Lord Jesus→ **Will** bring about the complete Redemption of Everything under the Curse... Read with me again the passage we looked at last time out of **Romans 8** (where Paul says)

For the creation was subjected to frustration: Not by its own choice→ But by the will of the one who subjected it-- In hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay→ & brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation→ Has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

► **Now Two Questions:** **1st** How can creation have hope→ If Annihilation is its future? / & **2nd** Doesn't "*pains of childbirth*"→ Suggest that the present creation has a future?... In other words, did God make the Earth with the intent of Abandoning/Disposing it?... **Well, there's some sharp Bible students here→ & I know what some of you are thinking?:** (i.e.) "But Peter says that everything will be destroyed by fire"... Well, if that wasn't your question→ It was certainly mine... **Now, as I understand this:** The Fire that "destroys" the earth here will not be to Punitive (i.e. to Punish)→ **But** rather it will be Purgative (i.e. to Cleanse / Refine)... **Now allow me to give you some reasons:** **Why** I believe God will use the raw material of this Earth to give birth to a new & Glorious One:

#1 When the Apostles refer to a "New Earth"→ **Understand that the Greek language had two words for "New":** **νέος** which meant new in Time-- (i.e.) **It's** brand new (It never existed before) / **καίνο** which meant new in Quality... Now when reference is made to the "New Earth"→ It always uses **kainos**... & **We use this distinction all the time ourselves:** (e.g.) Say you **Renovate your Kitchen**→ & **You** invite some friends over saying "Come see my new kitchen"... You don't mean a kitchen that didn't

previously exist→ **What** your referring to is a kitchen that has been given a completely new look... **Let me give you another example right out of 2 Cor.5:17** (where it says): **"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a New creation"**... **Guess** which word for "new" is used?-- (again) **καίνοο**... **When** you became a Christian-- **Did** you become a human being that never existed before? / **OR** were you the same person→ **But** a totally new quality of person b/c of the Holy Spirit's work in you?... **So, When we read in the Scriptures "New Earth": It doesn't mean one that never existed before→ But Rather, it means one that has been Renewed.**

#2 Note how Peter compares the New Earth with what happened in the Flood in Noah's day: (he says) **"Don't** you remember, the first time God did this→ (notice the word he used) **When** he "Destroyed the earth by water"... **Now**, when God destroyed the Earth→ **Was** it Annihilated? (No)... **What it** actually meant is that God completely rid the earth of everything evil→ **So** it could be re-populated righteous sons & daughters of God... **& Here peter uses the same word when he tells us God is going to destroy the earth by Fire:** (i.e.) **God** is going to Prepare the earth to be re-inhabited by His sons & daughters / **God will Purge His creation that is polluted by sin→ So that our new environment is fitting for our perfected spirits & bodies**

#3 In Romans 8 Paul compares the redemption of our bodies→ To the Redemption of All creation: (I emphasized this in the last sermon) **God** is going to raise up our bodies-- **It's** going to be us (i.e. our identity is intact)→ **But** it's going to be us Gloriously New... **& Paul clearly tells us: The Same** Groaning we as human beings go through→ **Creation** also goes through / **The Same** Hope we have in Resurrection→ **So** does Creation-- **The Point** being that the fate of Creation is bound up with that of humanity... **You Know, I've often found it interesting how our Hymnology surpass our Theology: Whether** you have realized it or not→ **You** have been singing about this for most all of your lives...  **Like** Isaac Watt's magnificent hymn (1719) – **Joy To The World**-- (where we sing) **"No more let sins and sorrows grow→ Nor thorns infest the ground....He comes to make His blessings flow→ Far as the curse is found"**... **You See, to conceive of**

either the Fall or Christ's deliverance as encompassing less than the whole of creation→ **Is to compromise the biblical teaching of the radical nature of the Fall or the cosmic scope of redemption... If redemption doesn't go as far as the curse→ Then God has failed**

#4 I don't believe that God is going to permit Satan to Win the battle for the Earth: **If God** must completely destroy His original creation-- **Then** at one level it can be said→ **That Satan has had the last word... But Jesus is the Cure for all the Curse: God's redemptive Goal** is far less modest than we have imagined-- (i.e.) **Jesus** didn't die to make the best of a bad situation→ **But** (as we're told in **I Jn.3:8**) Jesus came to **"Destroy the works of the Devil"**-- & Death is the last weapon of the Tyrant... & **So Understand: The** point of the Resurrection (despite a great deal of misunderstanding)→ **Is** that death has been Defeated... **To put this another way**, Resurrection isn't the Re-defining of death→ **Rather** it is it's Overthrow... **You See, God is the ultimate Salvage Artist:** **God** loves to restore things to their original purpose... & **What** He promises to do for you & me→ **He** promises to do for all His Creation... **God** has never surrendered His title-deed to earth... **God will Remove Satan's hold over creation→ As a stunning affirmation of His greatness!**

► & So, Yes, I believe that the heaven that now is→ **Will** (at the 2nd coming of Jesus) **make a dramatic move to earth:** **If you stop to notice**, all through the Bible→ **Heaven & Earth** are two separate entities... **But then** you arrive finally in **Revelation 21**→ **& the** Dualism ends-- **& From** that point on Heaven & Earth are One... & **By the way**, we've been singing that for **years too:** In fact you just sang it moments ago in 🎵 *This Is My Father's World*-- **"The battle is not done....Jesus who died will be satisfied→ And earth & heaven be one"**... **Well, as I read the Scriptures→ That's what I see:** **Now**, is this a Salvation-Issue? -- No / **Do** you have to be right on this to go to heaven? -- No (**Now**, you have to be right on Jesus→ But you don't have to be right on what heaven is going to be like)... & **By the way, when I get to heaven: If it** doesn't turn out like I think-- (I'm not going to react saying) **"Hey, I'm coming here....Not** until you fix it to be like I preached"... **But this is what I**

anticipate: & It's my intent to spend the remainder of this series→ **Telling** you what I think are the exciting implications to all of this!

IV. But before I conclude this morning→ Let me say : I've heard all my life, "Heaven is more wonderful than we could ever imagine"... & Yet, God purposefully invites us to imagine what Heaven will actually be like... & this is crucial b/c **We can only Desire what we can Imagine--** In other words, if you can't envision it→ **You** can't look forward to it... & So, (in Scriptures) God gives us valid reference points to understand heaven: Concepts (clues) like Gardens / Cities / Kingdoms / Resurrected Bodies / New Earth→ **They** all afford us a bridge to fire up our imagination & kindle our desire for heaven... & So, perhaps in our attempt to make Heaven sound "spiritual": Perhaps all we accomplish is making heaven sound Unfamiliar & Unappealing (These description of Heaven→ Should not be so easily dismissed as just vague/unapproachable Analogies)... **I raised the Question last time:** How can we set our hearts on Heaven→ **When** we have such an Impoverished/Incomplete view of it?...

Nevertheless, it's hard to grasp what our world will be like with the Curse Removed: We have no idea how huge a difference that will make... & So, besides the fact that we might wrestle with the idea→ **That** we always thought Heaven would be up in the clouds somewhere... **I Think we still face this obstacle:** (i.e.) This Earth is so Fallen / & We're so conditioned to it / & We're so wearied by it→ **That** we equate Heaven with Escape-- (In Other Words) "I'll finally get away from all of this / I don't want to come back to this→ I want to be rid of it!"... **But I don't think we'll have any objections:** If we had ever experienced Eden-- & One day we will... (As one person put it) *"The best things in this life are Souvenirs of Eden→ & Appetizers of the New Earth"*

Well, when we begin to recognize just how comprehensive Jesus' Victory is→ **The** implications are wonderfully Surprising... I think we have a great deal more to look forward to than we realize!... More to come...