



Church Has Left the Building

Bible Study Guide

2018

Heaven Now!

Every week we pray the prayer Jesus taught us- “*Thy kingdom come... on earth as it is in heaven.*” Imagine not just waiting for our trip to heaven at the end of our days, but being a part of God’s kingdom work here and now. Imagine, not just getting a taste of heaven at the end, but enjoying a taste along the journey. Imagine, not just telling people about a heavenly experience that is to come, but being the hands, feet and voice of the kingdom now. When Jesus began His ministry, He told His disciples that “the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.” Jesus’ coming was the inauguration of the greatest building project this world has seen since the creation- the building of the Kingdom of God “*on earth.*”

This fall we will prepare for our mission weekend-

The Church Has Left the Building (CHLB) - October 27-28th

by considering the possibility of ***Heaven Now!*** I invite you look at the blueprints, gather the tools, and prepare to share in the construction project Jesus began at His coming- “the Kingdom of Heaven.”

This Bible Study Guide is designed to companion with the sermon series ***Heaven Now.*** Each week, the material from the sermon will be explored and deepened in this study. Gather together with friends to share the journey, use this guide with your family while you share a family meal, or take time on your own to “be still” with the Lord. However you use these materials, may this exploration of God’s Word prepare you to be assistants to the Carpenter we know as Jesus the Christ.

This invitation to be a part of God’s Kingdom building project offers a live-changing, church building, community-healing opportunity. I look forward to sharing the journey with you this fall.

Blessings!



Anita

Study 1: *Heaven Now- Holy Huddle*

John 20:19-21, Acts 2:42-47

The Gathering

Opening Question- Share a time when you have gathered with others for an event, an occasion, a difficult or joyful moment. Why did you gather? What did you get out of that gathering? Do you like those moments? Do you need those moments?

Opening Prayer- Ask for prayer concerns.
Open in prayer lifting up those concerns.

The Study

Read Acts 2:42-47

The early church is described in this passage. Imagine their reality at that time: the Romans and the religious leaders are all seeking to end this sect that has emerged after the death of Jesus. Those leaders had thought that the crucifixion would end this movement, but instead it is growing every day. Gathering is for fellowship and learning as well as for protection.

What do you notice in these Holy Huddles?

What do you like, dislike?

In what way are our Christian gatherings like this model/ unlike this model?

What would you like to include in our LVC life?

What would you like to include in your small group experience?

Read Hebrews 10:24-25

Psalm 133:1

Romans 1:11-12

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Matthew 18:15-20

Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Acts 1:12-14

Read these passages one at a time.

Consider the reason/benefit for the “holy huddle”.

Do we still enjoy the benefits of fellowship in our busy culture today?

What facets of these ancient holy huddles would you like to continue or reclaim in our fellowship experience at church or in your small group?

Use the remaining time in your small group gathering to share something from your life that is meaningful to you today... an experience, a hope, a concern, a memory, a challenge... Allow your fellowship to take a step in deepening relationship.

Share one prayer concern for the members of your small group to hold in prayer until you meet again.

Closing Prayer

Homework

Read Revelation 21 and 22. Look for modern descriptions of heaven in movies, TV shows, print ads, song...

Study 2: *Heaven Now- The Great By and By- Here and Now*

Revelation 21, 22, John 14:1-7

The Gathering

Opening Prayer- Ask for prayer concerns.
Open in prayer lifting up those concerns.

Opening Question- Describe Heaven. Take some time thinking of all the things that you have heard, seen on TV/movies, descriptions from your childhood, music lyrics that refer to heaven, anything that has created the modern image of what heaven is like.

Feel free to turn this opening exercise into an art project- drawing some of the images. You can also use the internet to show pictures of what people believe heaven will look like. Look beyond just what you think is “biblical”.

What do you hope heaven will be like?

If you could create heaven- what would you include/ not include?

[Barbara Walters did a special on Heaven several years ago. Here are a few links on YouTube, if you would like to catch part of it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Es8bXenttyg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xC6ksYUnZr8>

The Study

Now that you have put on the table our modern American expectation of heaven, take a look at what the Bible says about heaven.

Read Revelation 21

Read this chapter in sections and discuss the imagery. Keep in mind that the Revelation given to John is image rather than literal. Try to use your imagination to step beyond the limits of the words themselves into the depth of their meaning.

Revelation 21:1-5

Note: “the bride” is a reference to the community of believers
Consider the importance of v. 3. *Thoughts?*

Revelation 21:6-8

Note: *What does it mean to “overcome”? Who is welcome in the “new”?*

Revelation 21:9-21

Note: Notice the use of numbers. Seven is a perfect number- indicating completeness. 12 is the number of sons of Jacob- tribes of Israel- disciples- the completeness of the people of God. *Thoughts?*

Think about the importance of the gems- *what does that tell you about this “new”?*

Revelation 21:22-27

Note: Consider the importance of v.22.

Imagine a place/ time when “the glory of the Lord” is the light.
Thoughts?

Revelation 22:1-6

Note: Consider the importance of v.4

List some of the facets of heaven that Revelation reveals.

How does this Revelation description of heaven compare to the American cultural description?

Now read the description that Jesus gives in two different moments.

Read John 14:1-6

How does Jesus describe heaven? List the details.

Most people focus on the “mansion” aspect of the description.

Look at v.3. *What is the promise? “with me... where I am...”*

Look at v.6- “come to the Father... through me.”

Consider the possibility that the most important description of heaven is that it is where we will be **with God**. This echoes Rev. 21:3. *Thoughts?*

Read Luke 23:39-43

What is the promise that Jesus is giving to the criminal?

Does the criminal deserve this promise?

Why does Jesus offer that invitation to a criminal?

Consider the promise of “paradise”. Paradise refers back to Genesis 1,2 with the image of the garden. While we might focus on the physical aspect of that place, the most important part of the garden was the relationship between humanity and the creation, and more importantly between humanity and God. They walked together in the garden and talked with one another. There was not division between God and humanity before the fall. When Jesus refers to paradise that is the image he is giving. He strengthens that understanding of “heaven” when he promises that the criminal will be “with me.” Again this promise echoes John 14 and Rev. 21.
Thoughts?

Application

If heaven is most importantly about relationship with the Father and His Son, is it possible that we can begin to experience “heaven” here and now? How?

Closing Prayer

Homework Read Psalm 23 with heaven in mind.

Study 3: *Heaven Now- Heavenly Valleys*

Psalm 23, Acts 16:16-25

The Gathering

Opening Prayer- Ask for prayer concerns.
Open in prayer lifting up those concerns.

Opening Question- Describe a time in your life when you were sure of God's presence, God's love, God's care of you.

The Study

Start with the premise that God is giving us glimpses of heaven here and now. If that is the case, give an example(s) of moments when you have caught a glimpse of heaven.

If we can glimpse heaven, many would argue that we also catch a glimpse of hell while we are on earth.

Give an example(s) of moments when you have caught a glimpse of hell.

If heaven is most importantly described in terms of relationship with God (study #2) then how would we best describe hell?

Read Psalm 23

Look at the valley moment- *what do you discover in the valley?*

Consider v. 4-6. *What promises are given in these verses?*
The Psalmist seems to be able to find heaven in the midst of hell.

How have you experienced those promises?

What keeps us from experiencing those promises?

Read Acts 16:16-25

*How would you describe the predicament that Paul and Silas are in?
(Consider their situation before v.25)*

v. 25- How/ Why are Paul and Silas singing?

Many of us would find this to be a Psalm 22:1 moment.
(Look up Ps.22:1 to see what this means.)

How are Paul and Silas able to sing?

Have you even been able to sing and praise God in the midst of “hell”?

What do we see in this moment that would help us be like Paul and Silas?

Are they singing because of the strength of their character, or because God shows them heaven in the midst of hell?

Read Habakkuk 3:17-19

How is the prophet about to sing?

Notice v.19 the promise of relationship in the midst of hellish reality.

Consider the modern practice of “flipping houses”. The “flippers” hunt for houses that they think have good potential- but to most eyes are dumps. They pick up those houses for very little investment, they fix up the house, and then they “flip” it for a profit.

Has God ever intentionally “flipped” your hell, to create a glimpse of heaven on earth?

Application

“Faith for my deliverance is not faith in God. Faith means, whether I am visibly delivered or not, I will stick to my belief that God is love. There are some things only learned in a fiery furnace.”— Oswald Chambers

Thoughts?

Closing Prayer

Homework Philippians 3:12-4:1

Study 4: *Heaven Now- Citizens of Heaven*

Philippians 3:20-4:1, Colossians 3:12-17

The Gathering

Opening Prayer- Ask for prayer concerns.
Open in prayer lifting up those concerns.

Opening Question- *Who gets to go to heaven?*

What are the entrance requirements?

What do the people of heaven look like?

The Study

Read Philippians 3:12-4:1

Read the passage as a whole first and then take it apart one piece at a time.

Philippians 3:12-14

v. 12- *What does Paul mean- “press on to take hold”... what is he grasping?*

Notice who is taking hold of Paul. Notice also that Paul is clear he is not “perfect”.
What does all this mean?

v. 13- *What is behind... can we forget it... what should we “strain” toward?*

v. 14- *What would it look like for you to “press on... take hold... of that to which called me heavenward”?*

Philippians 3:15-19

v. 18 *Who is Paul talking about when he says, “enemies of the cross”?*

v. 19 Look at the description of the “enemies” in verse 19.
What is the modern example of “enemies of the cross”?

Notice his heart for those “enemies” (v.18).
What is our response to “enemies of the cross”?

Philippians 3:20-4:1

v.20 Paul is using the image of citizenship with people who understand the privileges and responsibilities of Roman citizenship. As a Roman citizen, people were expected to dress like, talk like, share the morality of Rome, but they were not flocking to live in Rome. They were trying to bring Rome to their location.

They had the protection of Rome and the rights of Rome, but they also had the responsibility to live like Rome where they were.

What would it look like if we lived like citizens of heaven here and now? How would we dress, talk, live... what morality would we have... how would we treat others...

How could we bring heaven here to our location and time?

What would be the protection and rights of citizens of heaven?

Read Colossians 3:12-17

Focus first on the first line of this passage.

What would it mean for you to know yourself as “chosen” by God...

“holy”- set apart by God for a purpose...

“dearly loved”- notice the exclamation point that “dearly” gives to the idea that we are loved.

Notice that we do not earn this distinction of being “chosen... holy... loved”. We just are!

What would it look like to live into that identity?

How might that identity... that relationship... change us?

Consider v. 12-17 as the wardrobe of citizens of heaven.

What garment fits well now?

What garment is hard to fit over your head?

If God is our tailor/ dressmaker... would we allow God to do the work to fit us with new garments? How?

Application

If we lived into Colossians 3:12-17... if we lived like citizens of heaven... we would offer to the world a glimpse of heaven. Abraham and his family were called the chosen people because they were to be a “blessing to the nations.” Jesus called his followers to be “light... salt”.

How can we live in such a way that people see us and notice God and his heaven on earth?

Closing Prayer

Homework Psalm 34:1-8

Study 5: *Heaven Now- Taste and See*

Psalms 34:1-8, Matthew 6:10, Matthew 4:17

The Gathering

Opening Prayer- Ask for prayer concerns.
Open in prayer lifting up those concerns.

Opening Question- *Share a glimpse of heaven that you have seen lately.*

The Study

Read Matthew 4:12-17

What was John the Baptist's job? Why was he arrested?

v. 14 Shows us the job description for Jesus. *What was Jesus called to do? What does it mean "a light has dawned"?*

Consider this translation of Matthew 4:16-17 from the Message:

*People sitting out their lives in the dark
saw a huge light;
Sitting in that dark, dark country of death,
they watched the sun come up.
This Isaiah-prophesied sermon came to life in Galilee
the moment Jesus started preaching. He picked up where
John left off: "Change your life. God's kingdom is here."*

Another translation reads, "*the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*"

Note that the Matthew calls the kingdom- the kingdom of heaven, while Luke and John use the terminology- kingdom of God. They are referring to the same reality.

What does Jesus mean that the kingdom is at hand?

Is Jesus the inauguration of the kingdom?

Is God bringing the kingdom on earth?

N.T. Wright argues in his book Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven that Jesus is teaching that heaven is coming down into our reality, rather than us going up into heaven's reality. Wright argues that Jesus is establishing the beginning of the kingdom on earth, and we are not only invited to be "citizens of heaven" here and now, but also to be instruments through whom Jesus is building the fullness of the kingdom here.

Thoughts?

Read Matthew 6:10

Often when we pray the Lord's Prayer we assign the phrase "*on earth as it is in heaven*" to the petition "*Thy will be done.*" But the Greek grammar shows that "*on earth as it is in heaven*" also applies to the petition "*Thy kingdom come.*"

What does it mean for the Kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven?

Does it look like the kingdom is coming as it is in heaven?

Why doesn't it look like heaven here?

Where do you see the glimpses of heaven?

How can we be/when are we instruments of God's kingdom work on earth?

Read Psalm 34:1-8

The Psalmist is reminding us of God's invitation to taste and see the goodness of God now... not just later.

Describe the taste that you have experienced that convinces you of the goodness of God.

How could we help another to experience that wonderful taste testing experience?

Could we live as citizens of heaven in such a way that others taste the goodness of God through us... that we become a little taste of heaven on earth?

Application

The Hallelujah Chorus declares, “The kingdom of this world has become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.”

Look for opportunities to live more fully into the kingdom of our Lord.

Closing Prayer

Homework Revelation 21

Study 6: *Heaven Now- Heavenly Grammar*

Revelation 21

The Gathering

Opening Prayer- Ask for prayer concerns.
Open in prayer lifting up those concerns.

Opening Question- *Share a glimpse of heaven and a glimpse of hell that you saw this week.*

The Study

Revelation 21:1-3, 22

Ezekiel 38:26-28

Have ½ of the people open their Bibles to the Revelation passage, and the other ½ open their Bibles to the Ezekiel passage.

Read the Ezekiel passage.

What are the promises offered in this passage?

Look at the tense of the verbs- when will this happen?

Read the Revelation passage.

What are the promises offered in this passage?

How do these promises echo Ezekiel?

Look at the tense of the verbs- when will this happen?

Consider this quote from the biblical scholar N.T.Wright in his book Simply Christian:
“Despite what many people think, within the Christian family and outside it, the point of Christianity isn't ‘to go to heaven when you die.’... The New Testament picks up from the Old the theme that God intends, in the end, to put the whole creation to rights. Earth and heaven were made to overlap with one another, not fitfully, mysteriously, and partially as they do at the moment, but completely, gloriously, and utterly. ... The great drama will end, not with ‘saved souls’ being snatched up into heaven, away from the wicked earth and mortal bodies which have dragged them down into sin, but with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth, so that ‘the dwelling of God is with humans.’” (p.217)

his perspective expressed by Wright will feel foreign to many who are used to thinking of heaven as the place we go when we die, rather than the reality that Jesus inaugurated by his coming. *What are your thoughts?*

Read Isaiah 65:17-19, 24-25

Notice again, that the Old Testament prophesy is talking about a future time, a time inaugurated by the coming of Jesus the Christ. Look at the description of that time.

What will the “new heaven, new earth” look like?

What will life be like in the “new”?

Look at the interactions in v.24-25.

What do you see in the relationship between God and humanity in v.24?

How does this echo the Genesis 2 description of God’s interaction with humanity?

What do you see in the relationship found in the creation in v.25?

How does this echo the Genesis 2 description of creation?

From the time of the fall when humanity broke relationship with God and left the garden, God has been working to heal the brokenness of the world, and to bridge the gap in the relationship between God and humanity. Jesus’ coming is the beginning of the healing. The beginning of the bringing of the kingdom to earth.

Where are you seeing the healing in the midst of the brokenness?

Why, if Jesus has already come and won the victory in the cross and resurrection, do we still live in so much brokenness?

Application

Look for the kingdom this week.

Closing Prayer

Homework Hebrews 11:8-10

Study 7: Heaven Now- Carpenter Assistants

Revelation 22, Hebrews 11:8-10, 39-40

The Gathering

Opening Prayer- Ask for prayer concerns.

Open in prayer lifting up those concerns.

Opening Question- *Did you see evidence of God's Kingdom on earth this week?*

The Study

Read Hebrews 11:8-10

Remember the story of Abraham. He and his family were “chosen” to be God’s people on earth through which God would “bless the peoples of the earth.” (Genesis 12:1-3) Abraham was told by God to go to the land God had chosen, a promised land, where his people would dwell. Abraham moved with his family, and they dwelled in the land until Jacob moved his family to Egypt.

This Hebrews’ passage echoes that story, but offers a final comment in v.3. *What does v. 3 mean?*

Read Hebrews 11:39-40

What does this passage mean?

Who does “us” refer to?

When will God begin to fulfill the promise to Abraham- when will the “city” that Abraham was looking forward to begin to emerge?

What would it look like for us to live by faith like the people listed in the “faith chapter” of Hebrews 11?

What actions would God have us do/ what part would God have us play in the building of the Kingdom?

Abraham’s part in God’s plan required him to move without any idea where he was going.

Would you be willing to follow/ have you ever followed God with that kind of blind trust?

Read Revelation 22:17

Who is the Spirit?

Who is the bride?

What is the promise offered?

“The bride” is the biblical reference to the community of believers. Notice here that the Spirit of God and the “bride” are working together to invite people into the kingdom. Those who receive the invitation become part of the team, inviting others. In God’s design, we are not passive observers of God’s work in bringing the Kingdom on earth, we are His instruments in that building project. Look at the promise of “living waters” in the kingdom.

Read Amos 5:24- *notice the water in this verse... echoed in Revelation 22:17.*

Have you heard the call to be a part of the kingdom where the “water of life” is in abundance, where “justice rolls like a river”?

Have you answered the call?

Have you echoed the call?

How is God using you/ how does God want to use you in building the kingdom where “justice rolls on like a river”?

Application

If you have people in your small group who were at worship on October 21st to hear the story of the Haiti Mission Trip 2018, share some of your reflections on their stories.

How did God use the people of LVC to build a little more of the kingdom in Haiti?

How might God use us here in New Britain to build a little more of the kingdom?

Closing Prayer

Homework Be God’s carpenter assistants in His building project on earth!