

- I enjoy hiking, particularly nature hiking (as opposed to taking a walk in the city). There is something invigorating and soothing about being in nature, taking pictures, simply enjoying the quiet.
 - But what I am not is a random hiker. I like to know there is a path, a destination.
 - I have this great app that not only shows you where all the different walks and hikes are, you can track your movements, your path, see your progress, etc.
 - This has a lot of value.
 - If you do not know what the end is, and what the goal is, you can easily get sidetracked, discouraged, settle for something less, or even quit.
 - We begin a 3 week discussion today on what happens after we die. Where are we headed and because this is such a big topic, more specifically, "Heaven: What are we looking forward to?"
 - What you think about what happens at the end has a huge impact on how you live your life. What is the goal of this life? What happens next?
 - *"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this."* (CS Lewis)
 - This life is not the end.
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- If we are going to talk about heaven, we need to first understand a bit about what it looks like in our culture. What is heaven like?
 - If I asked you to picture heaven, what is it like? What are you like?
 - *"Now she had a good start, and went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it. But I never said so. 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."* (Huckleberry Finn)
 - Let's be honest, almost every movie, cartoon, story depicts heaven as something with gates in the clouds, with halos, harps, wings and if we are honest, what looks like a pretty boring eternity.
 - Praise God it is nothing like that!
 - You and I are created for more than this life.
 - Death is not the end for us but is a new beginning. A gateway.
 - This should impact the way that we live in the here and now.
 - My hope is that you will not only learn a bit more about what heaven is like, but that it would spur you on with hope, joy and determination in your life.
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- The focus of our discussion is going to come from the very end of the bible. The last two chapters as a matter of fact in the book of Revelation.
 - We are going to look at the new heaven and new earth today. Next week we are going to talk about the new city. The final week we are going to look at the new garden. Each picture of heaven is important with significant ramifications for us.
 - So let's dive in.
 - Before we read the specific description in Revelation 21 and 22, we have to understand briefly why these were written.
 - John wrote what we call Revelation. He wrote it as a letter to be sent to seven different churches scattered through Asia minor.
 - The letter is confusing, filled with strange symbols and weird pictures. There are many different views, many of them not really helpful, of what was meant in the book.

- Understand that John was not writing this so that we would know in the 21st century what specific things would happen in governments and world events. It is not so concerned with a chronology of events in detail.
- It was written to a group of Christians who were being persecuted from the outside and struggling with problems on the inside of the faith. It was going to get worse before it got better.
- Revelation is less concerned about God's activity within the history of earth, but more about pointing towards a time when God will end history and bring about the triumph of good and the final judgment of evil. God is in control of history.
- So John writes God's encouragement to them of how he will deal with the world. Some has already happened. Some has yet to happen. But at the end, in these last two chapters, John paints a picture of what it will look like when it is all said and done. What awaits us. He begins this way:

Revelation 21:1 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. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 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, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 '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." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 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 water without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children. 8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

- Remember, the point of what John is writing is not to give us the full picture. God focuses on what is most important and not on what we want to know.
- But there are still certain things we know from what we read about what John saw.

There will be a new heaven and a new earth.

1 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.

- There are two different views regarding a new heaven and a new earth
- The first is that the first one will be completely destroyed. Wiped off the face of existence. Our world, our universe, everything we know, destroyed. Then God will create something new.
- The other is that there will be a "re-creating" of the earth. It will be completely reshaped and remade into what it was always designed to be and more. I believe this second view is more accurate. When Peter was preaching shortly after Jesus went back to heaven, he said:

Acts 3:21 Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

- In fact, when Peter was writing about this, he described it this way.

2 Peter 3:5 But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens came into being and the earth was formed out of water and by water. 6 By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. 7 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. . . 10 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, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

- The earth was not actually “destroyed” by the flood, but much of it was and then restored.
- Original heaven and earth (Genesis 1:1-8:14)
- Current heaven and earth (Genesis 8:15-Revelation 20)
- Future heaven and earth (Revelation 20-21)
- Regardless of which view you hold to, there are some interesting things to notice about the new heaven and new earth.

A. Evil, chaos and their effects will be gone.

- John uses an interested phrase, “there was no longer any sea.”
- The sea for those in ancient times was a symbol of chaos and trouble. It was a marker of separation. To be on it was to invite disaster. The waves were unpredictable. Boats sank often. People died. All the uncertainty and trouble of this world caused by evil will be markedly absent.

4 ‘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.’

- Sorrow will have vanished.
- Everything that is the result of the fall will disappear.
- What is part of God’s original creation will be restored.
- How different would this world be if we knew there would be no more sorrow? That when you woke tomorrow, it would be to joy. You could be cure of it.
- All those things, sickness, death, pain, problems, persecution . . . all gone.

B. It will be beautiful.

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

- In other places, the church is also described as the bride of Christ, but in this case, it is talking about the new city (which we are going to explore in detail next week).
- Consider what Christ will feel about this.

C. We will be together with God himself.

3 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, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

- This was such a big deal that there was a loud voice from the throne of heaven pointing this out. Look! It’s amazing. You cannot believe it.
- It is hard to fathom this. It is like the best family reunion ever.
- There is no separation. We will be together.

D. We will be made new.

5 He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

- It is not just the world around us that is new, but everything. We will have new bodies. We will still be us.

Romans 8:23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

- In another place, John wrote:

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

- We do not become angels when we die. We are still us. After Jesus rose from the dead, he was still recognizable as Jesus. He still had the scars of his crucifixion. But he was not the same. He could appear and disappear at will.
- To be perfect and yet retain our individual self – this is our eternal destiny.
- The aches and pains of our bodies will be gone. We will be us, but so much better. BTW, it doesn't mean we will know everything. Learning will still be going on.

E. We will be fully satisfied.

6 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 water without cost from the spring of the water of life.

- Unlike the cartoons, we will not be bored. We will not wish for "fun" things that are prohibited. We will be fully and completely satisfied.
- All the thirsts and longings of our hearts will be filled. Entirely. With no cost. No striving. No angst.
- Most of us can picture a time when we were just fully contented. Maybe on a beach while on vacation. Maybe when hanging with a grown son or daughter and just bring together. Maybe sharing an amazing view of the mountains with a friend.
- Imagine this as normal! Imagine living a life in which you are fully contented. Completely at peace.
- Amazing.

F. Our full identities will be restored.

7 Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

- Notice the crowning statement. He will be our God and we will be his people. Isn't this already true. Yes, but not in fullness. Then, he will be our God in ways that we can't even imagine. We will see him, touch him, listen to him, know him.
- But more than that, we will be his children the way he designed us to be. What we are here is a marred identity. We become a new creation when we follow Jesus, but when we get to heaven, we get this in it's fullness.
- We will be so accepted and we will know it.
- We will be significant with much to do, and we can do it without worry or competition.
- We will be so secure that nothing can impinge on our minds or hearts.
- We will be released to be all that he designed for us to be.

G. It will not be for everyone.

- This is an amazing picture so far. But then we hear this little side comment which should cause us to pause.

8 But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars – they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

- This does not mean that what we do earns us heaven or hell, eternal separation from God.
- We already know that it is through God's grace alone.
- Remember who John is writing to – people who are being persecuted by those who do not believe and do not follow God.
- This list is a partial list of what it looks like when people turn their backs on God.
- The contrast is stark. "those who are victorious". Those who continue to trust God. Those who are faithful. Those who cling to him in the face of problems. Those who live lives of obedience to him. They get ALL this.

- “But” those who reject Jesus do not and are separated from him.
- My friends, there will be a new heaven and a new earth. A beautiful amazing place where all the evils of this world are gone and where we get to be who we truly are.
- The lie of this age is that we are what we do, look like or achieve.
- The lie of this age is that when this life is over, so are we.
- The lie of this age is that we only live on in the memories of others.
- The lie of this age is that this life is all there is, so get all you can.
- There will be a new heaven and earth. There is no scenario under which this does not play out.
- So let your future inform your present.
- If you are one who is not sure which camp you fall into. Then come and pray with someone. Turn your life over to Jesus and trust him.
- If you are a Jesus follower, then trust him completely because this is your future. Practice being a new creation now. Share with those who currently do not know.
- This life is a preparation for the next one.
- How would the trajectory of your life change if you lived each day with the end in mind?
- How would it change how you share what you believe with others?
- How might you trust God more in the face of trouble?
- How would you use your money and resources differently?
- Would you treat others differently in light of what you know to be true about your end?
- In the movie "Shawshank Redemption," an old prisoner, Brooks Handlin, acts unreasonable and threatens to take another prisoner's life. They find out that the reason Brooks has reacted this way is that he's scared. Scared because his parole has been approved. You see those outside of Shawshank see it as a prison, but Brooks sees as home. Later, in the prison yard Ellis Boyd, "Red" explains why Brooks acts the way he does. "Brooks is just.. institutionalized. The man's been in here 50 years - 50 years! This is all he knows. You know what I'm trying to say? I'm telling you, these walls are funny. First, you hate them, then you get used to them. Enough time passes, you get to depend on them." That's institutionalized."
- I wonder if sometimes we've become institutionalized with regards to this earth. It's what we know. It's what we see. We've gotten so used to this world that we forget that there is another reality that is so much better that we are looking forward to.
- The famous explorer Marco Polo after completing his journeys went back to his home in Venice. When he got back to his home he began to describe some of the things he had seen. But his close friends thought he had gone mad. He told them about black stones that you could actually set on fire and they would provide heat for you. But they could not imagine what he was talking about they had never heard of charcoal. He told them about a piece of cloth that as hard as he tried he could not set it on fire. But they could not imagine what he was talking about ... they had never heard of asbestos. He told them about large animals that were almost 20 feet long. Had jaws large enough to swallow a man but they could not imagine what he was talking about .. they had never seen a crocodile. Then he told them of a substance that came spewing out of the ground that if you lit it, it would catch on fire and actually provide light but they could not imagine because they had never heard of crude oil. Years later when Marco Polo was lying on his death bed one of the few men who actually believed him was there and he said tell me all of those stories again. I want to hear them again. But he refused and simply said it's all true ... every bit of it. In fact, I have not told you half of what I saw.