

FUTUREWORLD pt.16 1- 25-15

“Eternal Glory” pt.1

Revelation 20:**11-15** *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.* Revelation 21:**1-8** *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” 5 And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” 6 Then He said to me, “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. 7 He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. 8 But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.”*

I read this last month a quote from the earliest extant sermon manuscript that we have from Jonathan Edwards, the great 18th century American theologian, written at 18 years of age and entitled, “Christian Happiness.” In it he has three points, that for Christians – their bad things will work for good (Romans 8:28), their good things (adoption, justification, union) cannot be taken away, and their best things (heaven) are yet to come. Yes, they are an after three Sundays of considering the doctrine of eternal punishment, I am delighted to move on in our series on

the future to the best things, to the sweeter subject of eternal bliss, which we commonly call “heaven.” I have begun with the passage before us in Revelation because it offers us a glimpse both at the fate of the blessed and the fate of the damned. This is one of the few places in Scripture that presents the glories of heaven and the agonies of hell side by side; so I thought it would serve well as a transitional Scripture, as we change focus from one to another. And my transitional point, as we go from hell to heaven is this: What a colossal difference there is between the two! Here we see the eternal bliss of the redeemed in the new heavens and the new earth where the Lord Himself shall wipe away every tear, where sadness is no more and where the church is joined forever with its Savior as a bride to her groom. And here as well we see the fate of the wicked who are cast into the lake of fire. The contrast between these two cannot be overstated. It cannot be exaggerated! One is eternal bliss, the other eternal agony. There is an eternal difference between heaven and hell and between the Christian and the non-Christian. This is something I think God means for us to see; and I believe it is something many fail to appreciate. About fifteen months ago we were looking together at Exodus chapter 11 which is the chapter recounting how God sent the angel of death into Egypt and wiped out the first born child of every single Egyptian family. 11:**4-6** *Moses said, “Thus says the Lord, ‘About midnight I am going out into the midst of Egypt, 5 and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of the Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the millstones; all the firstborn of the cattle as well. 6 Moreover, there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as there has not been before and such as shall never be again. Now look at this. 7 But against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not even bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.’ Do you find that interesting? Not even a dog barks at the people of God, why? That you may understand how the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel. Don’t let anyone tell you that every person is the same in God’s eyes. Ain’t so. God makes distinctions. There are sheep and goats, clean and unclean, children of God and children of the devil. There are two races occupying this planet and God makes a major distinction between them - most notably He sends one group to hell and He receives the other into His glorious home. Big difference!*

Having noted that let’s talk about heaven. First, I want to help us get our language straight. The term “heaven” means many things in Scripture. First of all, it may refer to space or the

atmosphere, or anything that exists in the physical world “up there” such as the stars in the heavens. This is what it means when it says God created the heavens and the earth. Secondly, the term “heaven” may refer to the spiritual dwelling place of God. When we say “Our Father who art in heaven” this is how we are using the term. And, as the Lord’s prayer continues, we ask that God’s will be done on earth like it is where? In heaven, not a physical place but a spiritual realm where God and the angels are considered to live. The third way the word “heaven” is used is as a substitute for the name of God. You may remember how the Jews were so careful not to take God’s name in vain that they just quit using His name. Oftentimes they would substitute the word “heaven” when they actually meant God. For example, Matthew’s gospel does this by speaking of the kingdom of heaven rather than the kingdom of God. What’s more, the prodigal son says that he sinned against heaven, meaning, of course, that he sinned against God. A fourth possible use of the term “heaven” is to refer to the eternal dwelling of the righteous. However, the term is almost never used in that way in Scripture. The eternal home of the redeemed is called the kingdom of the Father, the new earth, the new Jerusalem or just plain “glory”. To call it heaven is not best since heaven refers to the spiritual dwelling of God and that is not the vision of Scripture.

The most frequent title for the destiny of the redeemed in Scripture is just “eternal life.” Those who believe have eternal life. That is the greatest emphasis of Scripture - that what awaits believers is not death but a quality of life that is without end. The preponderance of teaching on this is found in the New Testament but the Old Testament is hardly without this hope for eternal joy. Job bore witness to his confidence of living forever in the presence of the Lord. David says in Psalm 16:**10-11** *For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. 11 You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.* There David expresses confidence that God will not let death defeat him and that pleasures forever, eternal blessings come from the hand of the Lord. He repeats that hope in Psalm 23 when he says **6** *Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.* In Daniel, as we have seen, 12:**2-3** *Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt. 3 Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and*

ever. So, the redeemed will have eternal life. That is said so often in the New Testament that no one could miss it. But what will that eternal life be like? Where will it be lived? Who will be in it? What will we do? Those are the questions we'll study over the next three weeks as we examine the subject of eternal glory.

What then will it be like? What will glory be? There are many conceptions of this, from the happy hunting ground to the great golf course in the sky. Islam, the world's second largest religion, conceives heaven in a very materialistic way. In fact, heaven to a Muslim is very much like a forever weekend at Hugh Hefner's Playboy mansion. In speaking of paradise the Koran says (p.177) "*Together with their wives* (note the plural here)" "*Together with their wives they shall recline in shady groves upon soft couches. They shall have fruits and all that they desire.*" Now that doesn't sound too bad does it? But we Christians hear that and think, "How crass, how materialistic." But we go on and make errors in the other extreme. Christians are likely to think that eternal glory means we float around as angels in the sky, playing harps and flying from cloud to cloud. We speak of the immortality of the soul and forget what the Bible says about the resurrection of the body. We talk about spending eternity in heaven and forget that God promises a new earth. In short, our conceptions of glory are too spiritual. That is why we will look first at the new earth. And I should say up front that much of what I understand about this I learned from Anthony Hoekema in his fine book on the Bible and the Future.

The doctrine of the new earth is important for a proper grasp of the full dimensions of God's redemptive program. In Genesis you will recall we read of how the fall of man into sin disrupted the natural order. A curse was pronounced over all creation. And when Jesus came to redeem the world it was not just to save certain individuals from their bondage to sin, it was to redeem the entire creation from the effects of sin. That purpose will not be fully accomplished until God has ushered in the new earth, until Paradise lost is Paradise regained. And the paradise to come is just as physical, or earthy as the paradise which was lost.

Another reason the doctrine of the new earth is important is for the proper understanding of Old Testament prophecy. There are numerous prophecies which speak of a glorious future for the earth. These prophecies tell us that, at some time in the future, the earth will become far more productive than it is now, the desert shall blossom as a rose, and the mountains will drip sweet wine. They tell us that the sound of weeping will be heard no more, that the wolf and the lamb will feed together. Since many Christians regard these images as "too earthy" to be

fulfilled in heaven they assign them instead to an imagined millennial period. But a proper understanding of these passages assigns their fulfillment to the eternal kingdom, to the new earth which is described in images and figures in the book of Revelation just as it is in Isaiah.

The Old Testament contains numerous promises that the people of God will inherit the land of Canaan, the promised land. This is a promise that later is extended to include the entire earth. When you trace out this promise you begin in Genesis 17:**8** *I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.* Let's note a couple of things in that verse. First, notice that God promised to give the land of Canaan not just to Abraham's descendants but also to Abraham himself. Yet the only land Abraham owned in Canaan was a burial cave. This promise was not fulfilled in his lifetime. If we look at Hebrews 11 we get a glimpse at Abe's attitude toward this promise. **9-10** *By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; 10 for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.* Now that sounds to me an awful lot like the new Jerusalem or the new earth. And you'll notice something else about the promise in Genesis 17. How long does it say Abraham and his descendants will possess the land? For 1000 years? "It shall be for you an everlasting possession." And, by the way, Christian, this promise is for you. Did you know that? As believers in Christ, we are called in the New Testament, the children of Abraham. Galatians 3:**29** *if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.* And that promise must include the promised land. But, it includes more than that. The occupation of Canaan by the natural descendants of Abraham, in its ultimate design, was a type of the occupation by a redeemed church of her destined inheritance in glory, which is not simply a new land but a new earth. When we properly understand what Scripture says about the new earth many other Scriptures begin to make sense to us. From Genesis 17:8 we learn that God promised to give Abe and his seed all the land of Canaan for an eternal possession but in Romans 4:**13** *For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.* Note that the land of Canaan in Gen. has become the world in Romans. We see the same thing in Psalm 37:**11a** *the humble will inherit the land.* How does Jesus paraphrase this passage? The meek shall inherit what? The earth. Now, for those who can only think of the late, great planet earth and don't know about the coming greater restored earth

that verse must be quite perplexing. Why would anybody be interested in getting the earth? And why do the meek get stuck with the earth while the poor in spirit get the kingdom of heaven? That doesn't seem fair does it? The answer to that is found in the doctrine of the new earth. In the eternal economy of God there is no distinction between heaven and earth. The separation between the two is no more because as Revelation 21 says God will live on the earth with His people and where God is, that is heaven.

I take you to a couple of other New Testament passages that point to the renewal of the earth as the dwelling place of the redeemed. Acts 3. Here Peter is speaking to the Jews gathered in Solomon's porch and says **19-21a** *Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; 20 and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, 21 whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time.* That phrase "the restoration of all things" points to the renewal of all God's creation to its original perfection at the return of Jesus. In Roman's 8 Paul is even more explicit about this cosmic renewal. **18** *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.* And where is that glory to be found? Up somewhere in heaven? Oh no! Read on **19-21** *For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.* The restoration of all things is coming, even the natural order. Read on. **22-23** *For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. 23 And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.* I hope you know that the Christian hope goes beyond the immortality of the soul and includes the resurrection or redemption of the body. Our eternal existence is bodily. We'll talk more on this next week, but where do you suppose we will live with our new bodies? In a spirit realm? No, No. We will live on the new earth.

Now all this speaks to the question of what we will do in glory. That is something people are interested in. We will live forever. That sounds good, but what are we going to do? We'll answer that question over the three weeks of our study. For now, please notice that one thing

the Bible says we will do is reign. We will be rulers. II Timothy 2:**12a** *If we endure, we will also reign with Him.* And the book of Revelation speaks this way repeatedly 2:**26** *He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations.* 3:**21a** *He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne.* Revelation 22:5 speaking of the servants of Christ in the new earth it says **5** *There will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.* But this raises a question. If we are all kings who will be around to reign over? To answer that we have to go back, way back to that time before the earth was cursed. We go back to paradise before it was lost, to the original king and queen and to the original design of God who said in Genesis 1:**26** *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."* Man was intended to rule the earth, and when God restores all things he will. How do I know for sure? Revelation 5:**9-10** *And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth."* The children of Abraham are heirs of the world, the meek shall inherit the earth and the servants of the Lamb will reign on the earth. Where are you going to spend your eternity? I'm gonna be right here, and its gonna be good. There won't be any more mosquitoes or blisters or dropped calls. More importantly, there will be no sin, no sickness and no death. As the Lord says in Revelation 21:**5** *"Behold I am making all things new."* So, what happens to the old things? What happens to the old earth? II Peter 3:**10** *the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.* Now exactly how this is going to happen I can't say. The indication is that God is going to eliminate sin with a fiery judgment. The curse will be burned away so to speak and God will redeem the earth, not replace it so much as transform it into what it was meant to be. So, verse **13** *But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.*

I think you can see from all this that eternal glory will be much more physical, more earthy than most Christians have perceived. It may not seem as heavenly to you as it once did. But I

should note in closing that the major difference between this present age and the eternal one is not to be found in the quality of our crops or the perfection of the created order. The major difference is noted in Revelation 21:3 *I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them.* What was lost in the garden was more than just a nice place to live and the ability to enjoy work, what was lost was the presence of God. Oh yes, we say that God is everywhere. That is definitely true. God is here on planet earth in that sense, but the presence of His glory and the manifestation of his holiness and power— they are gone. Sin has made a separation between us and God and between the earth and the blessings of God. What we need as people, what the earth needs as a planet is not simply this blessing and that blessing and the other. We need God Himself. Without Him all is lost no matter how rich we are. With Him we have all we need. The Scriptures tell us that God has planned to give His children a restored earth as their inheritance. What it will be like is very much a matter of conjecture, but the most outstanding fact about it is this: the Lord will set up His throne on the earth. The kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign among us forever and ever. Hallelujah!

One quick story as we wrap up. There was a Christian lady who was diagnosed with a terminal illness and had been given three months to live. So as she was getting her things "in order," she contacted her pastor and had him come to her house to discuss certain aspects of her final wishes. She told him which songs she wanted sung at the service, what scriptures she would like read, and what outfit she wanted to be buried in. The woman also requested to be buried with her favorite Bible. Everything was in order and the pastor was preparing to leave when the woman suddenly remembered something very important to her. "There's one more thing," she said excitedly. "This is very important, I want to be buried with a fork in my right hand." The pastor stood looking at the woman, not knowing quite what to say. "That surprises you, doesn't it?", the woman asked. "Well, I'm puzzled by the request," said the pastor. The woman explained, "In all my years of attending church socials and potluck dinners, I always remember that when the dishes of the main courses were being cleared, someone would lean over and say, "Keep your fork." It was my favorite part because I knew that something better was coming...like velvety chocolate cake or deep-dish apple pie. So, I just want people to see me there in that casket with a fork in my hand and I want them to wonder, "What's with the

fork?" Then I want you to tell them: "Keep your fork. The best is yet to come." Good reminder. What we know of the new earth is limited, but this much is very clear. For those who know Jesus the King, the best is yet to come. So keep your fork.