

HEAVEN – Part Nine
“What Did John See?” #6
Sermon 6/23/19

Several months ago and for a period of time we studied Heaven to see what it is like. We looked at it from the perspective of Jesus who came down from heaven and from the perspective of John who was given a vision of heaven while in exile on the island of Patmos. Here is what we know from our previous discussions.

- The humble, the poor in spirit, the pure in heart, and those persecuted for Christ will inherit Heaven.
- Heaven is where God’s throne is located. He rules from Heaven. It’s an actual place, not a state where bodiless beings float through the clouds. It is a place where God is and where His name is revered.
- Heaven is expecting us. It a place that has been prepared for us from the foundation of the world.
- Heaven is where Jesus came from and where Jesus ascended to after His resurrection.
- Heaven is where Jesus lives now. He is personally preparing a place for us to dwell in Heaven with Him.
- Heaven is a place where treasures are stored which will never be taken away from us or destroyed. It is a place of joy and reward; a place where faithful followers can be put in charge of many things.
- Heaven is a place where angels dwell. They continually see the face of the Father and respond to the needs and prayers of God’s people as directed.
- There will be individual identities in Heaven. Those who have believed and died retain their identity and will dwell in Heaven with the Father. Even we who were born after them will recognize them.
- There will be no human marriage in Heaven. We will not marry or be given in marriage in heaven. Whether we married once or multiple times, we will be no one’s husband or wife in Heaven. Instead, we will be the bride of Christ. Our unity will be with the Father and all believers. We will be like the angels, in fellowship with one another and with God.
- There is joy in Heaven when sinners repent and believe.
- Not everyone will be allowed to enter Heaven. Only those who believe in Christ, do the will of the Father, and do not deny Christ before men will be allowed entry.
- The only alternative to Heaven is Hell.
- For the believer there is no fear in death. The penalty for our sin has been paid and there is no judgment awaiting us. Our soul goes to Heaven. When our earthly body is resurrected our soul will be reunited with our body to live eternally.
- God does not desire any to be sent to Hell, nor does He take any pleasure in it. He is calling

all men to repent so they may avoid the Day of Judgment that is coming.

The last time we spoke of Heaven we talked about the millennial kingdom when Jesus descends with His saints to rule on the earth for a thousand years. Because of the judgment poured out by God upon the world the earth Jesus returns to is not the same earth He or we have left behind at the Rapture. Jesus rules over an earth that has been devastated by the wrath of the Father. Rivers, trees, mountain, oceans, nations, people, even the stars of heaven have suffered from the wrath of God being poured out on the earth and its inhabitants. Yet we are told that Jesus establishes Himself as King over this same earth for a thousand years.

Other than the establishment of His reign on earth, the Bible does not tell us what Jesus is doing during the Millennium; neither does it tell us what the saints and angels who came out of heaven with Him are doing. Scripture does not give us details about life on earth while Christ reigns. But it does tell us how the reign of Christ on this present earth ends. It ends with one last rebellion of Satan who gathers the nations of the earth together for one final attempt to usurp the authority of Christ over them.

After this rebellion is stamped out and the devil is thrown into the lake of fire, John describes the final judgment occurring at the Great White Throne of God.

REVELATION 20:12-21:1

“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. 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. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away.”

According to these verses, non-believers are judged according to the things written in books which contain a complete list of their deeds while on earth. They are also judged by what was written in the book of life. If their name was not found to be written in the book of life they were thrown into the lake of fire. Once judgment is completed and punishment is handed out, Scripture says that there will be a new heaven and a new earth. This is where I want to pick up our discussion of heaven today.

Immediately upon death all believers in Christ will be ushered into the presence of the Lord. As the Scripture says, “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). So wherever the Lord is there we will also be, whether that be in the existing heaven or on the existing earth during the millennial kingdom. But Scripture is also telling us that there is a new heaven and a new earth coming and that the ones which currently exist will pass away. So let’s examine what Scripture means by the creation of a new heaven and a new earth and the passing away of the old.

When the translators use the term “passed away” it does not mean that the first heaven and

the first earth were exterminated or eliminated or obliterated. While it is true the earth as we know it will be decimated as a result of God's judgment, it will not be obliterated. It will still exist in its fallen state and will show the effects of God's wrath but it will not disappear. The same is true of the first heaven. It will still exist, but it will also be changed into something new.

In the original Greek language from which the New Testament was translated the words "pass away" mean to "go away" and is used of something departing. In the case of the earth what departs or goes away is evil and suffering. Sin, with its influence and consequences, will no longer be present on the new earth. The first earth with its sin infested ground and atmosphere will pass away and no longer exist. In its place will be an earth free of sins contamination and Satan's evil. When these things are removed from the earth, the first earth passes away and the new earth is created.

It could be that God returns the earth to its original state before sin existed; for at the end of creating the heavens and the earth the Scripture says, "*God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good*" (Genesis 1:31). If it was very good when He first created it, then perhaps God will return it to that "very good" state again. Or perhaps He will create something even better. My point is not which earth represents the new earth, but rather that God will make a new earth that will be free from sin and its poisonous influence. It will truly be something new and different from what we are currently experiencing.

What about the new heaven? What needs to pass away from it? The Greek word used for "heaven" can refer to any of the three heavens which we spoke of early in our study. When God created the heavens and the earth, He created the first heaven, which includes the sky directly surrounding the earth, and the second heaven which is called the expanse of the heavens and includes the stars and planets. To put it simply, we use an airplane to fly through the first heaven but we use a space ship to travel through the second heaven.

As I stated earlier, when God finished with His creation, He said it was "very good". This included not just the earth but the surrounding heavens as well. We can understand why God would create a new earth but why would He need to make the first and second heavens pass away and recreate them as well? Paul tells us the reason in Romans chapter 8.

ROMANS 8:19-23

"For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope 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..."

"For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now."

Because this part of creation was also infected with sin, Scripture tells us that it too is subject to the wrath of God during the Tribulation.

REVELATION 6:12-14

"I looked when He (the Lord) broke the seal, and there was a great earthquake... and the stars of

the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were removed out of their places.”

All creation then, including the first and second heavens, has been affected by man’s sin and, like us, eagerly awaits its redemption. It appears that the redemption of the first and second heavens will include ridding them of the old and re-clothing them with the new. What will pass away from these two heavens is the sin which infested and permeated their existence. What remains will be the purity which God originally created in them. Just as this same sin is removed from the earth, so it too will be removed from the first and second heavens.

However, the Heaven which we most think of is not the first or second heaven but rather the dwelling place of God which is referred to as the third heaven. Paul mentions the third heaven in 2 Corinthians.

2 CORINTHIANS 12:2-4

“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know or out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a man was caught up to the third heaven. And I know how such a man – whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows – was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.”

How do we know the third heaven is the place where God dwells? Because on the day Christ died He spoke to the thief on the cross and said he would be with Jesus in Paradise that very day (Luke 23:43). Paradise then is heaven, the place where Christ went to prepare a place for us to dwell. If the third heaven is the place where God dwells it begs the question, does the old or existing Heaven (Capitol H) need to pass away? Does God’s dwelling place need to be made new?

The answer is “no”. This Heaven does not need to be made new for it was never contaminated by sin. It is true that in Satan, one of God’s most beautiful angels, sin was found when he rebelled against God while dwelling in heaven. Sin was also found in a third of the Heavenly host who followed Satan in his rebellion against God. But they were all cast out of heaven. Satan himself was cast down to the earth while his fellow angels may have been cast down to the heavenly places mentioned in Ephesians 6:12. Unlike the earth, God’s dwelling place was not contaminated with sin when Satan and his followers rebelled against God. Instead, the sin was removed and cast out of God’s presence, just as all of mankind was until God made a way to reenter His presence through the blood of Christ.

Remember that the word translated as “passed away” means to “go away” or to have something removed. So how does this apply to the existing Heaven, the place where God dwells? Scripture gives us the answer.

REVELATION 21:2-3

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. 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.’”

John saw the holy city, the place where God dwells, leave its current location and take up residence on the new earth. This was a good thing as attested to by the loud voice coming from the throne of Heaven declaring that God would set up His dwelling place among men. It appears there will be a complete reversal from what happened in the Garden of Eden. After man sinned God removed His presence from the Garden and established a separate residence in which to dwell, uncontaminated by man and his sin. Now, at the culmination of time, instead of man having to go up to the dwelling place of God, God is once again coming down to the dwelling place of man and bringing His home, throne and all, with Him. This is an amazing thought.

In Genesis 1:31 we read that God created the heavens and the earth and that God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. There was no taint of sin on the earth when God created it. It was free of sin and deemed very good by God Himself. Genesis also tells us that the Lord spoke directly to the man He created, so there was fellowship between man and God and there was conversation between the two, as seen by God bringing the animals which He had created to Adam allowing Adam to name each one of them. This intimate conversation continued even as God fashioned Eve out of the rib which He had taken from Adam.

God tasked Adam with tending the garden He created and warned him not to eat of the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Adam, as we know, disobeyed this direct order from God. Even so, God continued to speak to Adam after He sinned, pronouncing a curse upon the ground because of his disobedience, and ultimately banishing him and Eve from the garden of Eden; the very garden which He had created for them and their descendants. From that point on we no longer see any intimacy between God and His creation. Man's sin caused a separation between God and His creation and the earth begins to suffer the consequences of Adam's sin.

[By the way, did you ever wonder why Scripture says that sin came through Adam (Romans 5:12) when it was Eve who first sinned? We get a clue from Numbers chapter 30 where God gives commands concerning vows made by wives. It says that if the husband hears of a vow the wife makes and says nothing - essentially agreeing with what his wife has done - then the wife's vow remains. But if he disagrees with what she has done and speaks against it, she is not obligated to fulfill that vow; the action and the vow she had made would now be null and void. Keeping this in mind, I believe the reason Adam is held responsible for introducing sin into the world is because he stood by and did nothing to negate what Eve had done in the garden. In fact, by his participation he established her action as valid for them both. That is why God holds Adam and not Eve as responsible for allowing sin to enter the world.]

But back to my original point. When God created the earth "in the beginning" He created a perfect earth; and the communication and fellowship between God and man was natural and unstrained. God dwelt with man on the earth and there was a rapport between them. Their visits were frequent and unrestrained.

I mention this because the word "new" (as in a new heaven and new earth) means new in quality, not new as in recent or new in time, though there will be a moment in time when all this is fulfilled. New, as I mentioned before, is a restoration of what God originally made. It is the same earth, but it has been made new because sin and all its effects have been removed. It is new because Satan and his fallen angels have been thrown into the lake of fire where they can no longer hold any

demonic influence over it. And it is a new earth because God's ability to dwell with man on the earth is finally and fully restored.

So we see that the earth as we now know it will suffer the physical effects of the wrath of God during the Tribulation. Christ will descend from the existing heaven along with us, His saints, and rule over the earth for a period of a thousand years. At the end of that time Satan will be released from his prison and will gather together the rebellious of the earth and together they will fight against the Lord and his saints. They are then permanently defeated and all who rebelled against the Lord are judged and thrown into the lake of fire along with Satan and his followers.

This tells us that even as Christ is reigning upon the earth sin still exists in the heart of those dwelling there. Though Satan's activity is restricted by his imprisonment in the abyss, once he is released the sinful heart of man responds and rebellion starts all over again. This is even further proof that when the final judgment is over the earth is still in need of being made new. Until the earth is made new God's dwelling place will remain in the third Heaven. But once the earth is fully made new, God will be free to dwell once again with man on the restored earth. All will be as it was in the beginning. All things will be made new and all will be restored to its former glory. That includes us as well.

We'll look at how John describes the new heaven and the new earth next week, as we have run out of time today. But let's close by acknowledging today that, like all of creation, we groan for all these things to happen. We yearn for the old to pass away and for the new to come. We look forward, as did Abraham, to the city which has foundations, and whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10). We eagerly anticipate the descent of that city from heaven and its coming down to the restored earth when God will make His dwelling place among the sons of men. We also look forward to the return of Jesus who said, "I am coming quickly". And so we say, "Amen. Come Lord Jesus."

*"Heaven is a wonderful place, filled with glory and grace.
I want to see my Savior's face 'cause Heaven is a wonderful place"*

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