

ReGroup 2/12/23

Eternity: A New Heaven

In our first study on Heaven we covered:

- *The Hope of Heaven* that belongs exclusively to Christians
- *The Home in Heaven* awaiting every believer
- *The Heartbeat of Heaven* which is worship

We discussed at length why Heaven is accessible *only through* Jesus and how He *uniquely described* Heaven. We also gave thought to how the design and detail of Heaven will surpass everything we've ever witnessed here on earth and will draw us into a kind of living that we've yet to experience here on earth. Heaven isn't going to be a lesser version of Earth, but rather a *more realized* version of the reality and life that we've known so far.

Before moving into the second part of this study, take a few minutes to **recap** and **reflect** on **these points**, and **discuss any questions** that you may have brought with you from last week's lesson.

Creation's Longing

All things considered, we only looked at a handful of the *dozens* of passages of Scripture that are often pointed to as descriptions of Heaven. This lesson will feature many of the most familiar texts that, *as it turns out*, actually point to a reality that has not yet come into being. Yes, most of the Biblical passages that talk about Heaven speak of a *New Heaven* that will one day replace the first.

You'll recall that in our first lesson on Eternity we discussed the divide between Eternity and Time and how the Fall resulted in our universe's separation between **God's Eternal realm**. The result was a **temporary realm** that is awaiting restoration and reconnection with God and an absorption into Eternity. **Romans 8:19-23** captures this wait perfectly.

God's redemption plan is focused on **erasing this disconnect and divide** between our temporary existence and His Eternal state. The work of Jesus and the ministry of the Church will ultimately lead into the next phase of Creation, where a fundamental and forever change will take place. **Talk about this longing within our world and our own hearts and give your thoughts about what this next phase may be like.**

Raptured

We now live in what is often referred to as ***The Church Age***, simply called this because it speaks of the central work of redemption that God is accomplishing through the Church. This age will end with the Church of Jesus Christ being **saved from the wrath** that is due all those who reject Jesus. As God's mercy and grace increase against the sin of the world, His wrath also builds towards those who resist and reject. The Bible is full of events that foreshadow this removal, or *rapture*, of God's people from judgment.

A couple examples include:

- Noah and the Flood - **Genesis 6:9-14, 17-19**
- Lot and the Judgement of Sodom - **Genesis 19:23-29**

1 Thessalonians 1:10 promises the Church that we will be saved from the wrath to come on this world. This doesn't mean we won't face trials and tribulations, which Jesus Himself talked about in **John 16:33** - It just makes a distinction between trials that result from our world's fallenness to wrath that comes upon the world as judgment from God. We should not mix these two things up. Our world faces much trouble because of its fallen nature, but this is *not* to be confused with wrath that God will bring upon it one day. However, this wrath will not come **until the Church is removed**, like Noah and Lot's stories foreshadow.

Does this make sense to you? Do you understand the difference between the world's brokenness and God's judgment? Why is it important that the Church not conflate these two things when speaking of the sorrows of our day, while also looking forward to the troubles to come.

Check out **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** and **1 Corinthians 15:50-54** for the promise of God's sparing the Church from wrath, which also includes the resurrection of bodies of believers who have already died and gone to Heaven.

This corresponds with **Revelation 19:6-10** which speaks of the Church being taken to Heaven *just as* God is about to pour out His wrath upon the world. Up until this point, the book of Revelation talks about the people of God facing the hardships and persecution from Satan as he works against God's redemption plan. Throughout the book we see many enter into Heaven, whether they be martyrs or those who die after serving God faithfully, but chapter 19 looks forward to that day when Jesus says, "**See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.**" (Matthew 22:4).

Armageddon

Now, according to the text, after the Church is taken to Heaven for the Marriage Supper, a great war breaks out on earth. Satan will have so stirred up the nations against one another, deceiving many into following him, that it will lead to a climactic battle, often called *Armageddon*. This has been taken in so many directions and to many extremes over the years. Some believe there is lengthy gap between the Rapture and this battle, while some believe no gap at all. At some point in these last years of the earth, Satan will be given complete control over the nations. Whether this is seven years before the end, three years, or mere months - **the Church will be raptured before Satan takes over and he is used to bring wrath on the earth.** However, those who are *not* removed, and not previously given a chance to turn to Jesus (***particularly the Jewish people***), may yet be saved if they refuse to worship and serve the devil's regime. In fact, **Revelation 14:1-5** tells us that 144,000 Jewish believers will turn to Christ during this time. Having previously rejected Jesus, they realize that He was their Messiah all along.

When the battle of Armageddon comes, what's left of the nations will tear each other asunder, and Jesus will intervene and bring an end to Satan's terror and bring judgment against the deceived world. Read **Revelation 19:11-21** to see how this all wraps up.

At this point, the world that is left a shell of its former self, torn apart by years of conflict and chaos. Having banished the devil and toppled his kingdom, and having brought judgment against those who rejected God, Jesus will then enact **an Earthly Kingdom**. This is often called the **Millennial Reign**, see **Revelation 20:1-6** for more details.

We don't know for certain if all who were raptured or who were already in Heaven will come to earth for this Millennial Reign. The Earthly Kingdom is more about **fulfilling God's promise to Abraham** and finally **realizing the Kingdom of Israel**. This make sense given that many saved during the previous era will be mostly, if not only, *Jews*.

During this thousand year period, the world as we know will persist on and things will progress, all with Jesus ruling from an Earthly Throne. Even if we're in Heaven, God will still be with us seeing that He is omnipresent, and we will enjoy Heaven *as we discussed* it last week.

Does all of this make sense so far? What questions do you have at this point?

The Thousand Year Reign

There is a lot in the Old Testament about this Millennial Reign. This was the goal for the Jews all along, to see Israel as the focal point of the earth and all the nations in awe of its glory. Solomon's kingdom previewed this, but will truly be nothing in comparison. Almost all of the prophets' last chapters are dedicated to this future Millennial Kingdom. **Check out these for just a taste of what's to come: Zechariah 14:9-11, Amos 9:11-15, and Zephaniah 3:14-20.**

As you can tell this is mostly focused on God's promise to Israel. **Does this help make sense of how Israel is so important to the story of the Bible? How does this fulfill God's promise to Abraham and David?** It's very possible that we return to earth for this, but the most likely case is that the Church remains in Heaven for this time period. Whether it will feel like a thousand years for us, we can take solace in Peter's promise from **2 Peter 3:8**.

Revelation tells us that at the end of that thousand years, Satan will be loosed from his chains for *one last temptation* of the earth. All that come to life and live on earth during the Millennial Reign, will have to accept Jesus just like we have, and so when Satan is unleashed to tempt the nations, it will be his last stand. Once and for all he will be cast into the Lake of Fire, a new eternal place of torment. After this is the Great White Throne Judgment, where all that have ever rejected Jesus will finally face Him. All of Hell will give up its captives, and they too will be cast into this new *Lake of Fire*. We'll go into detail about this next week, but our focus now shifts to the final state of all creation...

The New Heaven and the New Earth

Read **Revelation 21:1-7** speaks of a merging of the Earth that is with Heaven descending from the sky. This is a picture of our current Heaven and Earth passing away and a New Reality being born. With sin finally gone forever and Satan banished forever, there is **no longer any separation** between realms and a new Eternal State takes center stage. This is in line with Peter's prophecy that our current Earth will be purged with fire and merge with Heaven to create a singular dwelling place for God and His people, see **2 Peter 3:11-13**.

We can only assume, but its safe to say that, Heaven on Earth will essentially be **a refined, restored version of the Earth we live on**. Read **Revelation 21:19-27** and **discuss** the massive Heavenly city that seems to fill up the whole planet, with **a single golden street connecting every nation**. We read about "kings" and "nations" which suggest **a functioning world as we know it today**, only without the fallen nature that we have to accept.

In this new Heavenly Earth, we read about a return of **the Garden of Eden**, which makes us think this was how things were in the very beginning, see **Revelation 22:1-5**. It's this New Heaven and New Earth that the Bible actually has the most to say about, in comparison to our current Heaven or even the Millennial Reign. Passages like **Isaiah 11:1-9** speak to a harmonious world that could only be this Heavenly Earth because it's a post-sin, completely restored creation. *Our minds can hardly imagine a world so perfect, yet this is God's promise to us!*

Isaiah has more to say about this New Heaven and New Earth in passages like chapter **35:8-10** and **65:17-25**. Isaiah 65 is a remarkable passage that talks about how **nothing will be remembered** that took place before this New Day, and speaks of how we will find **purpose** and have **jobs** in Heaven where we will live out our days as on earth, only with glorifying Jesus as *our complete goal*. Verse 20b should not be taken literally when it speaks of dying, but as Randy Alcorn puts it in his book about Heaven, this language is figurative and should be thought of as saying: "If someone died at 100 they would be thought a mere youth, and if they failed to reach a 100 they would be considered accursed." In other words it's not saying they actually will die, but **life is so long, eternally long now, that death at any age would be unthinkable**.

With access to **the Tree of Life** and our eyes set on Jesus, life in the New Heaven and New Earth will be **beyond anything we've ever imagined** or dreamed up. We need not worry about getting bored or get lost in chasing questions which our wandering minds may produce - We need only to look forward to **life as it was always meant to be**. Revelation 21 and 22 contain so many nuggets and previews of this coming age, so be sure to pour over those texts and these others so as to not miss all that God is trying to show us.

Rest assured, Jesus is coming soon and this New Heaven and New Earth will be our home sooner than we think.

In closing, read Revelation 22:17, 20-21 and share your thoughts on tonight's lesson.