

IF I DIE BEFORE I WAKE. . .

The Goal We Were Meant to Pursue (Pt. 1)

Small Group Questions

Introduction: If someone were to ask you what heaven is like how would you describe it?

- 1. Read 2 Peter 3:1-13. What is Peter's purpose in writing to his audience?**

Peter's mentions events in history and ties them to the end of the world as we know it. How do these two events relate to one another?

- 2. Read Ephesians 6 and 2 Corinthians 10. What other scriptures can you find that teach about spiritual warfare? What can we learn from these passages?**

- 3. John describes the new Jerusalem in Revelation 21 & 22. How do you envision heaven using John's description?**

Do you believe John's description is literal or figurative? Why?

- 4. Heaven is for those who thirst. What does it mean to thirst after God?**

- 5. Heaven is for those who trust. Read 1 John 4:1-6 & 1 John 5:1-5. What does John mean that faith makes us victorious?**

- 6. In what ways does the "hope of heaven" affect our lives today?**

Revelation 21:1-8

¹Then I saw^(A) a new heaven and a new earth, for^(B) the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw^(C) the holy city,^(D) new Jerusalem,^(E) coming down out of heaven from God,^(F) prepared^(G) as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold,^(H) the dwelling place^(I) of God is with man. He will^(J) dwell with them, and they will be his people,^(K) and God himself will be with them as their God.^(L) ⁴^(J) He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and^(K) death shall be no more,^(L) neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

⁵And^(M) he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I^(N) am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for^(O) these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶And he said to me,^(P) "It is done!^(Q) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.^(R) To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ⁷^(S) The one who conquers will have this heritage, and^(T) I will be his God and^(U) he will be my son. ⁸^(V) But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars,^(W) their portion will be in^(X) the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is^(Y) the second death."

Everything attached to our eternal destiny is in heaven. Jesus said, our treasure is in heaven. Paul said our citizenship is in heaven. Peter said our inheritance is in heaven. Everything of eternal worth is in heaven; our God, our Savior, our friends, our reward. Our home is in heaven. All through Revelation John has been giving us a picture of the end times, culminating with the vision of a new heaven and a new earth. Everything written in Revelation, up to chapter 21 is leading us to our final destination. Only the last two chapters of Revelation talk about what our final home will be like. In this series we've talked a lot about our existence in heaven, what life will be like, what we'll do. But only in these chapters does someone paint a visual picture of heaven. The Bible says we cannot conceive of what God has prepared for us, and yet He was given us revelation. We have information to know and understand but only to the point that God allows; we don't know it all, and even what we do know, by way of revelation much of it is hard to understand. Some scholars interpret and understand these passages to be figurative believing that John was using physical objects that we could understand to describe something that was indescribable. Some scholars believe that what John recorded in these passages should be taken literally. And that's why this series has been based on questions. John says in Revelation 21:1 that he saw a new heaven and a new earth. From the man of the street to the person in the pew, if you were to ask them where you go when you die they would most likely answer: heaven. Most Christians would assert that if you believe in Jesus you will go to heaven when you die. That's what this series has been all about, understanding heaven – your final destination. So, why does John say, a new heaven and a new earth? What will happen to the earth that now exists when Jesus returns? What will happen to the present heaven that exists when Jesus returns? Why a new heaven? And what's up with the new earth?

Where Is Our Final Home and What Will It Be Like?

The New Earth

2 Peter 3:10-13

¹⁰But^(A) the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then^(B) the heavens will pass away with a roar, and^(C) the heavenly bodies^[a] will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.^[b]

¹¹Since all these things are thus to be dissolved,^(D) what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness,^{12(E)} waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and^(E) the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³But according to his promise we are waiting for^(G) new heavens and a new earth^(H) in which righteousness dwells.

There are two general views about the future of planet earth and those views are influenced largely but their interpretation of this passage. Some scholars believe that the earth will disintegrate into oblivion and that God will create an entirely new earth. Others believe that God will transform the existing earth purifying, as it were, with fire. So, which is it? Will the earth be renewed or will the earth be replaced? And, as with a lot of these types of questions, my response is: It doesn't matter to me. The fact is: When the end comes, and if you'll check chapter 20 of Revelation – the thousand year reign has been completed, Satan has finally and forever been defeated, he and all his demons and every human being who rejected Jesus in this life has been thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20, verse 15) Then, Revelation 21:1 we have a new heaven AND a new earth upon which man, meaning everyone who belongs to Christ will dwell.

Isaiah 65:17 (NIV)

**"Behold, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.**

**The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.**

There are two words in the Greek language that are interpreted 'new' in the English language. The word, *enos*, which is new with respect to time. It's new because it's never existed before. I don't know why we ever say, "Oh, you have a new baby." Why don't we just say, "Oh, you have a baby." Isn't every baby new? I mean, you didn't take a sixteen year old and change it back to an infant. That's the word *enos*, new in time, never having existed before. The word, *kainos*, is the Greek word for 'new' with respect to quality. Someone will say, "Come see my new kitchen." Now, I think everyone would agree, having a 'new' kitchen would imply that you, at one time had an 'old' kitchen. That's the word *kainos*. Paul said in 2 Corinthians that everyone in Christ becomes a 'new' creation. You're still the same human being in time but you are a totally different person in quality. Every time the New Testament speaks about the new earth it uses the word *kainos*, with respect to quality.

Psalm 78 says the earth that he established forever. Psalm 93 says the world cannot be moved. And early in the 2 Peter passage that we just looked at, Peter uses the flood as an illustration and said that in the days of Noah the earth perished in the flood.

Well, it certainly didn't perish in terms of existence. But it did perish in terms of anything that man was familiar with. The earth was changed because of the flood. But this issue goes even further back than the flood.

¹⁹For the creation waits with eager longing for^(A) the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation^(B) was subjected to futility, not willingly, but^(C) because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that^(D) the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²For we know that^(E) the whole creation^(E) has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have^(G) the first fruits of the Spirit,^(H) groan inwardly as^(I) we wait eagerly for adoption as sons,^(J) the redemption of our bodies.

Because of sin, all that God has created has been defiled. Verse 19, verse 21, and verse 23 – When Jesus returns, we are going to receive our glorified bodies – identifiable but incomprehensible. And when we are transformed, that's when the earth as we know it will be transformed as well. Everything will be transformed.

The New Heaven

We all understand that earth was defiled by sin. When Adam and Eve gave in to the temptation of Satan sin entered the world. But where did sin originate? Where was the first sin committed? The prophet Isaiah is speaking primarily to the King of Babylon in chapter 14 and at the same time revealing to us the character of our archenemy.

Isaiah 14:12-15 (NIV)

How you have fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn!

You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations!

[13] You said in your heart, "I will ascend to heaven;

I will raise my throne above the stars of God;

I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly,

on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain.

[14] I will ascend above the tops of the clouds;

I will make myself like the Most High."

[15] But you are brought down to the grave, to the depths of the pit.

Satan attempted to usurp the throne of God which landed him in hell eventually. But initially when he sinned he went to earth. He became the prince of this world. He took the paradise of Eden and turned it into a kingdom of darkness. Then, with his angels that we call demons, he constantly resisted God.

Ephes. 6:12 (NIV) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

Our struggle on earth is a reflection of a greater conflict that is being waged in heaven.

Rev. 12:7 (NIV)

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.

Here's how I understand this: At the conclusion of the great battle recorded in Revelation 20, the chapter right before John sees a new heaven and a new earth – Jesus not only throws Satan and his followers into the lake of fire where there is eternal torment. The book of Hebrews says that God will shake both the heavens and the earth. Both will be transformed, both will be cleansed and glorified. Just as you and me receive our transformed and glorified bodies, earth will be transformed and glorified, heaven will be transformed and glorified.

Ephes. 1:9, 10 (ESV)

. . . according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. God's eternal plan is to bring all things, including heaven and earth, bring them together under the lordship of Jesus Christ. How does that happen?

The New City

Starting with verse 9 through verse 5 of chapter 21 we have a pretty detailed description of the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city. I mentioned the physical description a few weeks ago. I do believe that heaven is a physical place, we are going to have identifiable bodies and be fully aware of our existence. But whether you take it literally or figuratively the new Jerusalem is going to be spectacular and beyond comprehension in this life. What I want to look at this morning is what John talks about in the early verses of chapter 21. Revelation 21:2,3

²And I saw^(C) the holy city,^(D) new Jerusalem,^(E) coming down out of heaven from God,^(F) prepared^(G) as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold,^(H) the dwelling place^(a) of God is with man. He will^(I) dwell with them, and they will be his people,^(b) and God himself will be with them as their God.^(c)

It's important to understand that the Bible describes Heaven as both a country and a city. Hebrews 11 talks about the Old Testament saints looking for a better country as well as looking for a city whose designer and builder is God.

Hebrews 11:16 (NIV)

Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.

John sees in Revelation a new heaven. And then he sees a new city coming 'down out of' heaven. Here's my understanding of this: Heaven is the dwelling place of God. Earth is the dwelling place of man. When all is said and done – those two locations will still exist. God's dwelling will be in a restored heaven. Man will live on a renewed or restored earth. With this one distinction – heaven and earth will be united by a city that houses the throne of God. Rev. 22:3 – it tells us as the throne of God will be in the city. Jesus quoted Isaiah 66 when he said heaven is my throne and earth is my footstool. So, as John says in chapter twenty one – the dwelling place of God will be with us. We will be His people. He will be our God. God will reign in the new city. We will have access to God in the new city. Heaven and earth become one in the new city. Today

there's a great divide between heaven and earth. But the Ephesians 1 passage tells us that God is going to bring all things together; heaven and earth, joined by the new Jerusalem under the lordship of Jesus Christ. And one other distinction, verse 22. In the new city there is no temple. John sees the new Jerusalem but he sees no temple within the city. Why? Because in the Bible the temple was an exclusive place to go meet with God. But in heaven, the whole city offers access to God. In the temple you sacrificed offerings to worship but in Jesus redemption is complete. In heaven your whole existence is worship. God is dwelling among us – personal and intimate fellowship. God's presence will abide forever in a heaven made new with full access to an earth restored, united by a city who designed and builder is God.

One Question to Ask: Is My Hope in Heaven?

Revelation 21:6,7

⁶And he said to me, ^(P) "It is done!" ^(Q) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. ^(R) To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. ^{7(S)} The one who conquers will have this heritage, and ^(T) I will be his God and ^(U) he will be my son.

In this passage John tells us who's going to heaven.

Heaven is for those who THIRST

In the Psalms David described a deer panting for water as one who longs for God. Jesus said that those who hunger and thirst after righteousness will be filled. In this passage it says that the spring of the water of life is yours, delight yourself in abundance. Heaven is a place where hunger is filled and thirst is quenched. But it belongs to those who want it. Remember, heaven is all about Jesus. The question is: how much do you want him?

¹⁷The Spirit and ^(AR) the Bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And ^(AS) let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the ^(AT) water of life without price.

Heaven belongs to people who recognize their need.

Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

Are you thirsty? And second, Heaven belongs to those who trust.

Heaven is for those who Trust

82% of Americans believe in heaven and 63% of them expect to go there when they die. But the qualifier is this,

1 John 5:4 (NIV)

for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.

The gospel message is pretty basic – repentance and faith. Those who recognize their spiritual need, those who are thirsty and those who find the satisfaction for that thirst in the one who called himself the living water. One day this world will be gone and a new

one will appear, with the city of God coming down out of heaven, joining us so that God will one day and forever dwell among those who thirst and trust. You have a connection card that will help you make a decision that will make heaven your home. Would you do us a favor and let us know what step you're willing to take or a step you need to take. We're here to answer your questions, to pray for you and to help you confirm your reservation in heaven.