

# We Will All Be Changed

REVIEW: We began a series last week about the change we undergo at the end of life. Last week's may have been the heaviest message of this series as we had to begin by speaking about death.

- I. If you remember from last week, we looked at some of the ways that the Bible speaks of death for those that are in Christ.
  - A. For starters, death came into the world because of sin
    1. Death was never the original design
    2. When Adam and Eve sinned, death came with sin
  - B. So death starts to reign in this world, and God, in His infinite love chooses to help us because we could do nothing to get ourselves out of this problem
    1. Jesus comes to take on flesh
    2. To be one of us
    3. To be subject to death
    4. In order that He might face death on our behalf and defeat death
  - C. We looked at three ways the Bible talks of death for us
    1. God is taking back the gift of life He gave us
      - a) The fact that we live and breath is a gift from God - nothing less
      - b) God does not owe you anything - not even the next breath you take
      - c) So when we die the picture in the Bible is that God is taking back what He gifted to us for a time
    2. Second, the Bible speaks of us finishing our labor
      - a) God has a job for us to accomplish and we work at it
        - (1) Its not always easy, but we work for the Lord
        - (2) At the mission He gives us
        - (3) At things like being a good husband or wife, a good parent, a good employee
        - (4) At saying no to the desires that war against our following God
      3. The Bible also calls it surrendering our spirit back to God
    - D. And while we will miss those that have gone to heaven before us, and that is okay - even Jesus cried, we know that they have transitioned into heaven and are with Jesus Himself

INTRO: And that is where we pick up today's message. I want to talk with you about heaven, what it is, and what it is not. We need to better understand this place, and dispel some of the myths that have cropped up around it.

- I. The grandeur of heaven
  - A. Turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 2:9
  - B. To be true to the text, this verse is broader than just heaven
    1. I say that because I refuse to be untrue to the Bible itself

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2. If I said this verse is all about heaven I would be lying to you, and doing damage to the truths of Scripture itself
- C. However, there is also no doubt that this verse includes heaven, and look carefully at what it says
  1. NO HUMAN MIND HAS CONCEIVED of what God has in store for us
  2. Think about that!
  3. The greatest thought we ever had about heaven and according to this, it is blown away!
  4. We have not, even in our wildest dreams come close to what heaven is
  5. That is amazing!
    - a) If that don't get your heart fluttering, check your pulse brother
    - b) God has tricks up His sleeve about heaven that He still has yet to reveal
- II. The reality of heaven
  - A. Something else we need to get straight from the start: heaven is a real place
    1. Too often we think of it as some far away, ethereal spirit world
    2. Some mystical place that is not really a place
  - B. The Bible gives us the imagery of heaven as above the earth
    1. God looks down on mankind from heaven
    2. This may or may not be true in a physical sense
      - a) Meaning, maybe heaven really is up from our location
      - b) But it certainly is true in the positional sense - and here is what I mean
        - (1) God is higher than we are - Can I get an Amen
        - (2) God is more important than we are
        - (3) He is the One in authority, so positionally we refer to Him as above us
        - (4) We, from our vantage point refer to God as reaching up to, or looking up to God
          - (a) Much like we would say about a person we admire greatly
          - (b) "I really look up to him/her"
    3. Let me give you some Scriptures to back this up - they are going to be on the screen, and they will come tight and fast, so if you are taking notes, get that pen ready
      - a) Psalm 80:14 "Return to us, God Almighty! Look down from heaven and see!"
      - b) Psalm 102:19 ""The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high, from heaven he viewed the earth,"

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- c) John 6:38 “For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.”
    - (1) For Jesus to come down implies that He was up
  - d) 2 Kings 2:1 “When the LORD was about to take Elijah up to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah and Elisha were on their way from Gilgal.”
  - e) Our position - Luke 18:13 ““But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.'”
  - f) Acts 1 - Jesus is taken up into heaven
4. This gives us heaven’s location - up - that is as far as we get it
- C. The other idea that Scripture gives us is that heaven is remote from this earth and a far better existence
- 1. So one story that shows us both of these points is the story of the rich man and Lazarus from Luke 16
    - a) If you recall the story, Lazarus was a very poor man in ill health with sores all over
    - b) Both the rich man and Lazarus died - the one went to Hades, the other to Abraham’s side
    - c) Verse 23 is instructive when it tells us that the rich man looked up to heaven to ask for even a drop of water
    - d) But verse 26 is the key, “...between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross from there to us.”
      - (1) There is a chasm fixed
      - (2) It cannot be crossed by anyone on either side
      - (3) So there is a remoteness to heaven
        - (a) We will never travel far enough, or get a telescope strong enough that on the news you will find pictures coming in of heaven
        - (b) Heaven is set apart from this universe in a way that no one can travel from here to there, except by the path God set up
  - 2. Acts 1:9 “After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.”
    - a) The way this verse reads it is saying that the cloud was intentional to block the view of the disciples from seeing Jesus leave this world and enter heaven
  - 3. More than once in Revelation it speaks of heaven being opened, or John being asked to enter by means of a door opened in heaven
  - 4. All of this speaks to a remoteness of heaven that it is not part of this universe, but something altogether different

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5. Beyond that heaven is a far better existence
  - a) Obviously, Lazarus was in a far better place than the rich man, even though they did not go into detail of where he was
  - b) But look at this verse with me as well - 1 Corinthians 13:12
    - (1) Right now, all the great things in life, all the things we think we cherish so much are but a shadow of what is to come
    - (2) When we cross that chasm into heaven, what we see as if a reflection in a mirror will all become clear
      - (a) So if you thought the love of family and friends was great in this life - just wait!
      - (b) If you thought a loving relationship with your spouse was great here - just wait!
      - (c) If you thought cheering for the Lions was great here - get your head examined - just kidding

## III. The Bible gives four different kinds of images of what heaven is like

### A. The first image is the value of heaven

1. Matthew 13:44-46
2. The Bible is clear that heaven is worth far more than you can begin to dream of
  - a) Which takes us back to our opening verse
  - b) No human mind has dreamt up what God has in store
3. However, God has given us some ideas of the value
  - a) In Revelation it is described as having a sea of crystal
  - b) The street are made of pure gold
    - (1) So pure they are transparent
    - (2) The New Jerusalem is described as having some of the greatest jewels we know of
  - c) All of this is describing a world that uses the most precious and costly things of this life as building materials for the next
4. The value of heaven is staggering

### B. Then you have the splendor of heaven

1. The ways in which things are described with light, and lightening and thunder
  - a) I don't know about you, but I am always in awe of storms
  - b) Not the wimpy kind, but the kind that you feel like you should be running for cover or you might die - I love those
  - c) I remember several storms when I was growing up around Chicago and worked at the local pool that fit that bill
  - d) Twice I have been on camping trips where we have had storms so severe in the night

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- (1) I thought my tent would float away
- (2) And we had lighting strikes so close you had no time to react
  - (a) The last one was 2006
  - (b) The lightning struck and next I hear after the deafening thunder was some of the YG kids screaming
- e) The splendor and awe that is described when you read the passages about where God is (heaven) is amazing
2. But there is a different splendor in the purity of heaven too
  - a) The dirtiness of this world will not be with us in the next
    - (1) I don't mean just dust or grass stained, mud covered clothing
    - (2) I mean the nastiness most of us choose not to think of like the sewage and junk that we'd rather forget
    - (3) So the world we will live in is pure, it is clean, it is perfect
  - b) But so too will you be perfect
    - (1) You will be cleansed
    - (2) You will be spotless
    - (3) You will be clothed in white garments - a symbol of purity
  - c) Daniel even tells us in 12:3 that we will be like stars shining forever and ever
  - d) There is a purity and a simplicity to heaven
- C. Another image of heaven is its mystery
  1. Ezekiel 1:4ff
    - a) This is Ezekiel's vision of the Lord in heaven
    - b) And there are several things that we just do not understand
    - c) For instance: The four living creatures
      - (1) How do they look human and have four faces?
      - (2) Who or what are these creatures - we don't know
        - (a) We do know that they sound a lot like the creatures in Revelation
    - d) No matter how good the Bible scholar, no one has definitive answers
      - (1) We know they are heavenly beings of some kind
      - (2) But we don't know exactly who or what they are
    - e) It is a mystery
  2. And mystery in faith is not at all a bad thing
    - a) It absolutely bugs me to the very core of who I am when people think that they are suppose to be able to figure all of who God is, and how it all works out
    - b) Philosophically let me give you a response to this kind of thought process:

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- (1) If you can figure out all of who God is, STOP WORSHIPPING HIM!
- (2) It means that He is not worthy of worship, because you, who the Bible has described as beneath God have somehow raised to the level where you are on par with God
- (3) Does that seem like someone that you should be worshipping?
- c) Biblically, let me show you something about mystery
  - (1) 1 Peter 1:10-12
  - (2) The prophets tried to figure out the grace of God and the sufferings of Christ
    - (a) In the end they accepted it on faith!
  - (3) The angels long to look into this same mystery
  - (4) If the prophets that foretold us about God's grace, and the angels who serve God constantly are able to accept some mystery and take things in faith, I think we are in good company to say that it is okay to have mystery in our understanding of God, as well as our understanding of heaven
- D. Another image of heaven is a place of healing, comfort and protection
  1. Much of this has to do with the fact that the fall of man is cancelled out in its final and complete form
    - a) Sin is eradicated and all of its consequences
    - b) So even creation itself has been liberated and reset to the way God designed it to function at the beginning of time
  2. Look with me at these verses
    - a) Revelation 7:16-17
      - (1) These verse refer specifically to those that went through the tribulation and trusted in God
      - (2) However, these same things will be true of all who are in heaven
      - (3) You will not hunger or thirst again
        - (a) That does not say you will not eat or drink again
        - (b) Lord knows I am looking forward to the best steak EVER at the marriage supper of the Lamb
          - i) If heaven is far more than we can conceive of - imagine that steak for a moment!
        - (c) But there will be no hunger or thirst - that is a form of protection, and comfort
      - (4) There will be no scorching heat
        - (a) That does not mean as much to us up here in the north, in MI
        - (b) However, for those in Christ that struggle in the elements
          - i) Working outside

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- ii) Homeless in hot, arid climates
- iii) Imagine that promise
- (5) The Lamb will lead them to springs of living water
- (6) God will wipe away every tear from their eyes
  - (a) The comfort of that moment cannot be overstated
  - (b) The healing of that moment cannot be overstated
  - (c) I have told you before of the hugs I would get from the Pastor I grew up under
    - i) He was a tall man with long arms that would wrap all the way around you
    - ii) And even as a grown man, when I would get a hug from him, all the cares of the world melted away, and there was a sense of safety, healing, and comfort
  - (d) That is what I imagine that moment to be like - but remember, it will be more, because we cannot conceive of what it really will be like
- b) Revelation 21:4
  - (1) This is a famous verse
  - (2) No more death, mourning, crying or pain because the old order of this is gone!
  - (3) That is amazing news
  - (4) Want to know what is more amazing? There is never a fear they are coming back
    - (a) I have never had to face a health problem where I was worried it might be back
    - (b) Some of you have had to face cancer, or tumors, or other serious health measures
      - i) You know the fear of them coming back
      - ii) You know the fear that when that body part starts to ache again you wonder if its back
    - (c) You never have to worry about that again
- c) Revelation 21:25-27
  - (1) First of all, a famous, former MI pastor wreaked havoc on this verse a few years ago
    - (a) He said that when the gates of heaven remain open, anyone can come in at any time ever
    - (b) Meaning that anyone can still get into heaven after death - which flies in the face of what we looked at with the rich man and Lazarus

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- (2) The verse means that there is security in keeping the gates open because all that might want to do harm are not there
  - (a) There is no one that wants to do shameful or deceitful things
  - (b) Nothing impure will enter because there is nothing impure to enter - Christ has purified the believers and brought them to the kingdom!

IV. So here is the take away in the midst of last week's message on death, and our look at heaven today

A. Go to Philippians 3:20-21

B. Our citizenship is in heaven! Get that in your head and heart - we are citizens of heaven if we have accepted Christ's gift of salvation

- 1. With that citizenship comes responsibilities to the crown
- 2. You are a citizen of the US, of Michigan, of Lapeer, and of Almont
  - a) You have obligations to all of those
- 3. How much more do we have obligations to our heavenly citizenship
- 4. How much more should we desire and promote the kingdom

C. There are hardships in this life - trust me I understand that

- 1. There are hardships in being a citizen of heaven while in the foreign land of this world
  - 2. Life is hard
  - 3. And the honest truth is that if you are really going to be a follower of Christ, life will be even harder
    - a) You will be swimming upstream from the rest of the world
    - b) We see that played out in the news often over various social issues regularly
  - 4. Whether your hardship in life is spiritual or physical or emotional, let me show you the coolest of verses
    - a) 2 Corinthians 4:16-17
    - b) These momentary troubles are so far outweighed by the glory that is to come
    - c) That is why we must fix our eyes on Jesus, His promise of heaven, and the glory to come
- (1) That is when we can say with Paul that these troubles are light and temporary - the glory will be eternal and will be far FAR better