

**Introduction:** What is religion all about ultimately? What is the great story of redemption that is told in the Bible? How does it start? How does it end?

- Read Gen. 2:8-17 then read Rev. 22:1-5,14, 19
- Note then the perspective of Ps. 39:4-6
- See also then the perspective of Heb. 11:13
- Notice also the emphasis upon “eternal life” in the gospel of John (3:3, 15-16; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:50; 17:2)

What in all these passages is the story of redemption ultimately about? How does this contrast with what makes “news” about religion in the world and media? How would this perspective change the way we live life now?

1. Read Section 32.1: What happens to us when we die in the Lord? E.g. The Assembly affirmed that our souls, temporarily separated by death from our bodies, continue to live and do immediately enter into the presence of God, the holy angels and saints in glory. They affirmed this on the basis of passages such as these:

2Cor. 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. . . . 4 For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. . . . 8 We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.

Phil. 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.

2. Read 32.2: The Assembly wished to distinguish itself from certain forms of Eastern or Greek philosophy, as per ancient Gnosticism, that views the body in a negative way. In the Gnostic context for instance, salvation is related to being rid of the body and all the bodily passions. This is not the spirituality of the Bible.

1Cor. 15:51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed – 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

1Th. 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

I.e. The Assembly understood the scriptures to teach that salvation is not *from* the body but *including* the body such that the ultimate form of salvation is when the soul and body are reunited after the return of Christ. Thus the doctrine of "resurrection!" And by "resurrection" it is meant the *same* body restored, not a different body. In other words, the key thing to observe here is the continuity between our body in this world and the next, even as this is very significant in terms of the way we think about salvation and the cosmos!

Continuity:

Section 1--"waiting the *full* redemption of their bodies"

Section 2-- "last day... shall not die... raised up in the *selfsame* bodies"

Discontinuity:

Section 2--"shall not die, but be changed"

1Cor. 15:42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

3. This theme of continuity as per the meaning of "resurrection" is very significant, as it also has implication for the what we believe to be meaning of heaven. Is heaven an entirely new place, or a restored place after the type of the resurrected body? Does heaven require the destruction of this world cosmologically, or the destruction of sin and death that is presently cursing this world?

Read then **Isaiah 65:17** and then **Romans 8:21**. What is "new" according to Paul in Romans, and how is this consistent with the principle of continuity in the resurrection of the body?

Excursus: A Brief Review of Heaven in some kind of Continuity with Present Cosmos!

1. The Created heavens and earth called "good" in and of themselves according to scripture:

Genesis 1:12, 31 – *And God saw that it was good . . .*

1 Timothy 4:4 – *For everything created of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving . . .*

Note: In Genesis 3:17, the curse was upon the earth, not the earth itself that is the curse, but that sin has corrupted what is inherently created good – very much like our now being corrupted by original sin. The promise of 3:15 was to restore what sin had corrupted.

2. "Land" in Redemptive history

Genesis 17:8, Promise to Abraham regarding land

Hebrews 11:9-10, 13-16, Abraham's "promised land" is the "better country, that is, a heavenly one..."

Heb 4, Earthy "Canaan" was a type of the eternal Sabbath rest which still remains.

Gal 3:29, Christ's people are heirs according to the promise given to Abraham

3. Prophetic Expectations – Old and New

Isaiah 65:17 (above, see also 66:22-23)

Revelation 21:1, Then I saw a *new* heaven and a *new* earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away . . .

Here, the word is "new" as in *kainos*, not "new" as in *neos* – note the difference

*neos*

1. New vs. aged old (wine)

2. young

3. novice

Here, in the sense of what a thing actually is?

*kainos*

1. "unused" (as in wineskins)

2. as in previously not present (unknown, strange, remarkable). (Mk.1:27, Acts 17:19, Rev. 2:17)

3. In contrast to something old or obsolete as in "revived." (Eph. 2:15, 1 Cor. 11:25, 2 Cor. 3:6)

Examples:

Matt. 9:17 Neither is new (*neos*) wine put into old wineskins; otherwise, the skins burst, and the wine is spilled, and the skins are destroyed; but new (*neos*) wine is put into fresh (*kainos*) or unused) wineskins, and so both are preserved."

John 19:41 Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new (unused) tomb in which no one had ever been laid.

Note also from John 13:31-35, John's point was not to give a literally "new" commandment since it was in fact not "new" in this sense of the word.

Lev. 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

Lev. 19:34 The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

Rather "new" is used as to mean "revived" in its use and importance. Something unused is "new" although it could have been around for a long time.

Therefore, a "restored" earth and heaven is John's point in Rev. 21:1

See also:

Roman 4:13,

Canaan in Genesis has become the "world" in Romans.

Acts 3:17-21, "the restoration of all things"

Ephesians 1:13-14

What constitutes the "inheritance"?

Is it merely a new heaven, or also a new earth with all its treasures, beauties and glories?

Revelations 14:13,

What is done on earth will be remembered in life to come indicating a continuity.

Further Excerpts From Meredith Kline in *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos*

*The Bible tells us of the existence of a realm our mortal eyes cannot see. In the biblical vocabulary, this invisible celestial realm is called by the same name as the visible region of the star-studded sky ("heaven")*

*In theological reflections heaven is sometimes considered to be a place outside of the cosmos, out beyond our universe . . . there are biblical indications, however, that suggest otherwise. For instance:*

- *Isaiah 6 the heaven-temple (vs. 1-4) is identified with the whole earth (vs. 3)*
- *There are episodes in scripture when the eyes of earthlings have been supernaturally opened to perceive heavenly phenomena and they discover that the very spot where they are is the gate of heaven (Gen. 28:16-17) or that it is filled with heavenly beings (2Kgs 6:17)*
- *Prophecies of the coming kingdom in Isa 11:6-9 and 65:25 would indicate that the future world will contain fauna and flora recognizably like varieties found on the present earth, even if with some remarkable changes like carnivore turned herbivorous . . .*

*Heaven it would seem is not remote from us but present right here, even through unseen.*

- *By way of analogy with respect to the synthesis of invisible and the visible worlds—we may point to the proposal of current cosmologist that so-called dark matter is present throughout the universe, in quantities apparently far surpassing visible matter, yet unseen.*
- *Or analogous to a heaven that is perceptible only to heavenly beings but impervious to ordinary human vision is the familiar fact that sectors of the electro-magnetic spectrum, though detectable by the sensory organs of some earthly creatures, are beyond the perception of others*
- *Color Spectrum—human eyes with their 3 cones can see only a portion of the spectrum, as compared with birds, which have 5 cones in their eyes . . . e.g. might there be a kind of "cone" that is sensitive to the spiritual realm?*

*And yet, such examples are only analogous, as they do not really explain what it is about heaven that distinguishes it from the visible cosmos and renders it invisible to us (a 4<sup>th</sup> dimension—real, but unseen)*

*And yet to help us envisage the better country God has prepared for those who love him, (1Cor. 2:9, Heb 11:10), God has provided some visual aids.*

- *Before the coming of Christ, the people of God were given earthly buildings, a tabernacle and a temple, as miniaturized models of his holy heaven, and an earthly land flowing with milk and honey as a suggestive image of the paradise character of their heavenly inheritance . . . I.e. replications of the heavenly archetypes in earthly symbolic copies, visible shadows here below of the invisible world above, and foreshadowings of the world to come*
- *Secondly, from time to time the Lord favored his prophets with visionary experiences of heaven. Accounts of these visions have been included in the Scriptures so that we might all be able to see heaven as it was described through the prophets supernaturally opened eyes. Of course even when unveiled in such revelations of the Spirit, heaven remains cloaked in symbolism. (therefore) Typology is the idiom of apocalyptic vision. What is seen in these visions still bears the shape of the earthly models. Heaven (as such) appears to the prophets as a glorified version of the temple on Mount Zion. Because of our inability to apprehend the heavenly reality itself, it was necessary that these prophetic disclosures be cast in such symbolic forms.*

*Totally dominating the scene in biblical revelations of heaven is the presence of God, the God of Glory . . . The glory of the heavenly Presence is a royal glory, the glory of a king with myriads of servants in attendance about his throne*

- *So it was in Isaiah's vision of heaven, the prophet says "the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up" in the midst of the seraphim (Is. 6:1-2) and he exclaimed "my eyes have seen the king, Yahweh of hosts" (vs. 5)*
- *When heaven was opened to Ezekiel and he saw "visions of God" (Ezek. 1:1) a wondrous cherubim-chariot appeared to him, a chariot throne with a bright radiance suffusing it (v. 4ff) and investing the enthroned Deity (vs. 26-28. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the Glory of Yahweh")*
- *For the apostle John (Rev. 4:2) again there as a throne set in heaven and one sitting on the throne arched with emerald glory (v.3b) and one acclaimed by the heavenly retinue as the Creator-Lord worthy to receive the glory honor and power (vs. 11)*

4. Read Section 3: The Assembly denied that the wicked simply disappear after their earthly lives; it affirmed, by contrast, that they too have an existence beyond this life; yet an existence under condemnation.

Read for instance:

John 5:28 "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice 29 and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

Acts 24:15 I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

2Pet. 2:4 For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; 5 and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; 6 and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; 7 and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked 8 (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)—9 then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, 10 and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority.

*I.e. The reality is that there are two destinies—two resurrections—not one as pertaining to eternal life!!!*

5. What is the pivotal issue then as to which resurrection we experience? Notice in John!
- Who is authorized to judge? Jn. 5:22-24, 27; 17: 2 (Is this good news or bad—consider who Christ is and what he has done?)
    - cf. Acts 17:31, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.
    - John 5:22, For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son,
  - What is the decisive issue or criteria that we will be judged by? I.e. what exactly does John 5:29 mean in context? (In the Old Testament, to “hear” and to “believe” is to “act” — what is the “good action” that John is referring to in vs. 29 in context? — cf. Jn. 5:24! Also Jn. 3:15, 16, 36; 6:40, 47; 17:2)
  - While we could hope for no better of a judge than Christ, one who suffered our life and can sympathize with our infirmities, one who suffered and knows first hand the experience of judgment, one whose interest is for us and not against us. The reality that some will be judged to eternal condemnation is a difficult thing! What is the Bible’s response to this? (Two levels)
    - Level one—Romans 1:18ff. We all deserve hell for the offence of rejecting the author and perfecter of life itself. I.e. The Bible teaches that we are "without excuse" in that God has made it plain to us who he is and what are the consequences of rejecting him, so that one could argue that we ought never pray for "justice" if by this we mean what we, based on our own merits and actions, deserve? It is a wonder that anyone is save from hell!
    - Level two—Romans 9:14ff. Like no other issue, this one reminds us that our purpose in life is not unto ourselves, but unto the glory of God. Our very existence is as those made in the image of God, not gods! The ultimate, however difficult, answer to the problem of eternal condemnation is that we are made not for ourselves but for God; and in so far as He is ultimately glorified by some “vessels of wrath”, who are we to say otherwise? In short, and we should say this very sensitively, this whole thing puts us in our place. We cannot, and ought not, “go there” in so far as who is a vessel of wrath.

6. What impact does this teaching have on life now?

**John 12:25** Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

Clearly, a test of true spirituality is the degree to which our spirituality is focused on eternal life, as to then change the way we perceive and act on present life!!

I.e. to the degree that we don’t take the next life seriously enough, we take this life, and thus ourselves too seriously.

- What makes us anxious? Is it not taking this life too seriously, and the next life not seriously enough?
- What makes us fearful to be a witness? Is it not that we value too much this life and not enough the life that is to come?
- What makes us to commit sin—sins of adultery, sins of materialism, sins of workaholism, sins of vanity and living for prestige, etc.? Is it not that we take this life, too seriously and not seriously enough the life that is to come?
- Or what makes us think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, relative to the impact of our work, etc.? Is it not that we forget that we, our institutions, our work, etc. don’t hold the keys to everlasting life?

- Note two wrong responses:
    - Hedonistic Nihilism—throw up our hands in despair and “eat, drink and be merry” before its too late
    - Isolationist/protectionist Nihilism—throw up our hands in despair and isolate ourselves from the world until He comes
- Right Response: In the world, not of the world, for the world, e.g. The Missional Church

7. Why do believers look forward to the final judgment?

Matt. 25:45, Then He will answer them, saying, “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.” 46 And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

2 Th. 1:7, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8 in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.

Read WCF 33

8. Can we know when Christ will return for judgment?

Mark 13:32, But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

9. Why should believers be persuaded of the final judgment according to the confession?

10. Read Mt. 24:1-21. What will be characteristic of the "last days?" (Cf. 1 Peter 4:7ff)

Note: Now/Not Yet or “Tribulation along with Millennialism”

- compare then 1 Tim. 3:1-9 with Acts 2:17, or Satan on a chain AND expansion of kingdom

11. What is our response to the last days according to 1 Peter 4:7ff

- Discipline in prayer
- Discipline in Love by showing hospitality = community formation of a counter-cultural kind of community that is evident by its love one for another!
- E.g. love covers a multitude of sin = love defeats tribulation in the world! (John 13:34, 17:23, Acts 2:43ff)

12. Read Mt. 24:23-31. What will be characteristic of the return of Christ?

1. One return, not two such that the final day will come without warning!

2. He will come unexpectedly:

3. He will come DURING a period of distress for the remnant due to the popularity of apostasy among those who profess to be Christian--

2 Cor. 11:13, For such boasters are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. 14 And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 So it is not strange if his ministers also disguise themselves as ministers of righteousness. Their end will match their deeds.

2 Tim. 3:1, You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come. 2 For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant . . . swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure

rather than lovers of God, 5 holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!

Matt. 24:10, Then many will fall away, and they will betray one another and hate one another. 11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. 12 And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold.

Matt. 24:24, For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.

I.e. The "anti-Christ" is really an "alternative Christ" in comparison to the true gospel, and dwells among us as the "in Christ"

I.e. The "anti-Christ" is already here in spirit, which is the embodiment of the "lawless one" who is Satan  
a. Presently among us!

1John 2:18, They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us.

1John 4:2, By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world.

b. Embodiment of the Lawless one (note name – one who may talk like a Christian, and be within Christian ranks, but who does not obey Christ's commands)

2 Th. 2:3 Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction.

*I.e. We may therefore assume that the apostasy will occur within the ranks of the members of the visible church... many who have made an outward profession of the faith will do so . . . at least outwardly associated with the people of God. (Hoekema)*

Therefore, conditions today are the conditions spoken of!

#### 4. Personal and visible coming:

Acts 1:11, They said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

#### 5. Cataclysmic Coming:

2Pet. 3:10, But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

#### 6. A Glorious Coming:

Matt. 24:30, Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

2 Th. 1:10, when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Rev. 19:16, On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, "King of kings and Lord of lords."

#### 7. Read Mt. 24:37-25:46. What ought to characterize those who await Christ's return?

See also

2 Cor. 5:9ff, So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or bad.

## Addendum: Related Issues in Eschatology

### A. The doctrine of annihilationism refuted

Arguments for annihilation of present cosmos and therefore a complete discontinuity between the old earth and the new earth. (Lutheran)

Matthew 24:29 "sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light . . ."

2 Peter 3:10-12, "the heavens will be kindled and dissolved and the elements will melt with fire"

Four Reasons to reject annihilation in favor of renewal:

#### 1. 2 Peter 3:13 and Rev. 21:1

Greek word used to designate the newness of the new cosmos is not *neos* (new in time and origin but *kainon* (new in nature or quality.) Therefore, the expression "new heaven and earth" in Rev. 21:1 means not the emergence of a cosmos totally other than the present order, but the creation of a universe which though it has been gloriously renewed, stands in continuity with the present time.

#### 2. Romans 8:20-21,

All creation groans to be renewed

#### 3. I Thes. 4:16-17, I Cor. 15:50-57

Analogy in Scripture between the new earth and the resurrection of the bodies of believers. The differences between our glorified states and present states are not to minimize the continuity, it is we who shall be raised and it is we who shall always be with the Lord.

#### 4. Implicit: If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, Satan would have scored a great victory.

### B. Resurrection of the Body (Summary of Doctrine)

#### 1. The Bible represents the resurrection of believers and unbelievers as occurring together.

John 5:25-29; Acts 24:14-15

#### 2. The Bible teaches that believers will be raised at the time of Christ's Second Coming, which is called the "last day."

I Thess. 4:16; Phil. 3:20-21; I Cor. 15:20-23

#### 3. The Bible speaks of an "intermediate state" for those who die prior to the final resurrection.

a. Unity of body and soul in humanity: (Matt. 10:28; I Cor. 7:34; Jas. 2:26)

b. Death brings a temporary separation between body and soul whereby the soul is immediately in the presence of God and heavenly joy in Christ.

Luke 23:24-43,

Phil. 1:21-23

2 Cor. 5:6-8

Romans 14:8

#### 4. The Bible speaks of a physical resurrection of the "glorified body" or "spiritual" body", one that is perfected in Christ.

I Cor. 1 - 5:35-38, 50-57

"And so the pick-axe and the shovel threw aside the earth which for many years (nineteen) had pressed upon the bosom of the infant. Only a few bones and the little skull. No, wait a second; and with trembling hand the father clipped one little curl from which the lustre had faded, but twining still around the hollow temple. He placed it on the palm of his hand, without a word, before the eye of the mother. With a smothered cry she fell upon his neck-- "It is our boy's; I see it as long ago, the soft lock that curled upon his temple." Take it mother; it is to us the prophecy of the Resurrection; the grave has not the power to destroy." The old tears were wept again; but through them God made the rainbow to shine.

B.M. Palmer, *Lessons of Sorrow* p.23

### C. Lessons of Hope:

#### I. The Sorrow of Death Acknowledged:

"The Lesson taught in this second sorrow (speaking of the death of his second child) is the special grace reserved for a dying hour; which will subdue the fears of the most timid and enable them to depart in peace, if not in triumph. Many reasons can be assigned for this dread of death, styled by the Apostle "the last enemy." There is the natural instinct of life, which we

share with the beasts of the field; a wholesome protection against the madness of despair which so often rushes its victim on to the guilt of suicide. There is, again, the awfulness of death as the penalty of the broken law. How unnatural the separation of the soul and body, is shown when the spirit lingers in its tenement of clay and escapes reluctantly at last with the gurgling breath. It is possible, again, to shake off the ties of life from which the soul has through the years been drawing the sweetness of earthly bliss, and not feel the pain? . . . Aggregate all these terrors in one single conception, and the wonder will be, not that death is an object of dread, but that Christian hope should be strong enough to overcome it at the last. The history just recited (his daughters death) is only one of many, going to show that with the most sensitive and shrinking of mortals this fear is quelled at the moment of passing into the presence of our King. It is a grace reserved for this precise moment guaranteed only then as the experience which is needed; and is possibly connected with the last acts of the Holy Ghost in completing the believer's sanctification.

B.M. Palmer, *Lessons of Sorrow* p.49-50

Gen. 23:2 And Sarah died at Kiriath-arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan; and Abraham went in to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.

Gen. 37:34 Then Jacob tore his garments, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days.

Jer. 16:7 No one shall break bread for the mourner, to offer comfort for the dead; nor shall anyone give them the cup of consolation to drink for their fathers or their mothers.

## 2. The Lessons of Hope:

*O what a serious thing is it to die! It is a passage out of the swift river of time, into the boundless and bottomless ocean of eternity. They that did see the continual revolutions of days and nights, passing away one after another, will then be fixed in the perpetual NOW... Then how surprisingly glorious will heaven be to believers! For a soul to be now here in the body, conversing with people, living among sensible objects, and within a few moments to be with the Lord – this hour on earth, the next in heaven, this moment viewing this world, the next among an innumerable company of angels and beloved ones now made perfect! O what a change is this. What, but wink and see God! To be lifted from a bed of sickness to a throne of glory! To leave a sinful, troublesome world, a sick and pained body, and be in a moment perfectly cured, and feel yourself perfectly well, and free from all troubles and despair!* John Flavel

### a. There is no guarantee for tomorrow.

Live today for the Lord, can't wait for "retirement"

Is. 40:7-8, The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

### b. Value what can be taken with you.

The vanities of life are revealed as such in death.

Ps. 89:47, Remember how short my time is – for what vanity you have created all mortals!

Eccl. 1:2, Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

Eccl. 1:14, I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

Eccl. 2:1, I said to myself, "Come now, I will make a test of pleasure; enjoy yourself." But again, this also was vanity.

Eccl. 2:17, So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me; for all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

Eccl. 2:19, and who knows whether they will be wise or foolish? Yet they will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.

Eccl. 2:21, because sometimes one who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave all to be enjoyed by another who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.

c. The righteous humility which comes from our limited sovereignty such that our ONLY hope is in Jesus Christ-- the guarantor of the New Covenant unto life! Only God holds the keys to life  
" Say, are they lost or saved?

If Death's by sin, they sinned for they lie here:  
If heaven's by works, in heaven they can't appear  
Ah Reason , how depraved!

Revere the sacred page, the knot's untied:  
They died, for Adam sinned—they live, for Jesus died."

Epitaph from an infant's grave, B.M. Palmer, *Lessons of Sorrow*

d. The deeper appreciation for the precious and eternal bonds of Christian relationships.  
1Th. 4:13, But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

#### D. The Return of Christ—Review of Three major views

##### 1. Post-millennialism:

1. Kingdom of God is primarily a present reality.
2. Expect conversion of all nations prior to Christ's return.
3. Expect a long period (not necessarily a literal 1,000 yr. period) of earthly peace and Christian goodness to come gradually.
4. Gradual growth of the Kingdom by the continuing spread of the gospel.
5. At the end of the millennium there will be a time of apostasy and flare-up of evil in connection with the coming of the antichrist.
6. The millennium will end with the personal, bodily return of Christ.

##### 2. Historical Pre-millennialism and Dispensational Pre-millennialism:

###### In common:

1. Earthly reign of Christ initiated by Christ's return. (Pre-mil.)
2. Earthly millennium will be dramatically and cataclysmically inaugurated by the second coming. (rather than gradual or an extension and perfection of trends already present on earth)
3. Great tribulation will immediately precede the millennium, which will heighten the effects of the millennium.
4. Two resurrections in Rev. 20:4-6 are distinguished by the participants (believers in first and non-believers in second) but both are physical or bodily. This over against the Post-mil. and a-mil. that only the second resurrection is bodily whereas the first is spiritual, i.e. intermediate soul separate from the body until rapture)

###### In disagreement:

1. Different Hermeneutic: Historical Pre-mil. are more willing to understand scripture less literally and more figuratively when there is Biblical reason from context. Dispensational Pre-mil. almost always reads Bible literalistically. (Rise of Dispensationalism paralleled that of the fundamentalist movement over against the modernist such that "non-literal" falsely came to be equated with "liberal") Example: Dispensationalists hold to an exclusively futurist and literalist view of the book of Revelation whereas like other groups, the historical pre-millennialists view Revelation as more figurative and symbolic, both futuristic and as representing the present age of John.
2. Different understanding of present age: Unlike Historical Pre-mil, the Dis. Pre-mil believe that there is no OT prophecies fulfilled within the "church age" (time between Christ's ascension and Christ's return). Historical Pre-millennialists are more willing to understand tribulation and millennium as less literal and in part being accomplished now.
3. Different understanding of Israel: Unlike the Historical Pre-mil, the Dispensationalists hold that there will be a virtual restoration of the Old Testament Israel during the Millennium, some Historical Pre-millennialists only hold that there will be some special status of Israel (non-political/geographical). Therefore, the Dis. look for a political millennial. Unlike Historical Pre-millennialists, the Dispensational Pre-millennialists see a sharp contrast between Israel and the church.
4. Very different view of tribulation:
  - a. Dis. Pre-millennialism holds to a two stage return of Christ with a seven year tribulation in

- between whereby the church will be raptured prior to tribulation.
- b. Historical Pre-millennialism holds to a one stage return of Christ whereby the church will remain in the world during the tribulation.
5. Different view of Kingdom: Dispensationalism distinguishes between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of heaven, the latter being Jewish, messianic and Davidic, the former being universal and all things subject to God's will.

Dispensational view: Two phase return

Phase 1: "Rapture"- resurrection of believers before the "tribulation" (period of distress)

7 Year interval: Followed by a 7 year tribulation and coming of "THE" anti-christ...

Phase 2: "Return" of Christ with the church for the great battle of Armageddon and the beginning of Christ's millennial reign

Note: if you hold to this,

1. Present "distress" is not scrutinized as being relevant to present life in relation to Christ's return
2. The end will be such that Christians don't need to be prepared – since we will be spared . . .

Reasons to reject 2 phase view of Christ's return:

1. Same words are used in scripture to describe what Dispensationalism divides into 2 events. (*parousia*, 2 Thess.2:8, *apokalypsis* 1 Cor. 1:7 and *epiphaneia* 1 Tim. 6:14)
2. When the NT describes the "tribulation" (period of distress), it does not indicate that the church will be removed from the earth before the distress! (note Mt.24 – warning would not even be applicable)
3. All other passages in NT speak of only one coming. Only Rev. 20 can be interpreted to be a 2 phase coming, yet in context that is highly figurative. Therefore, when Christ returns, THAT'S IT.

3. A-millennialism (compare Christ's words in Mt. 5:17 with 10:34ff regarding Micah 7:6)

1. Like both Post-mil. and Hist. Pre-mil., A-mil. holds that a faithful reading of scripture isn't necessarily a literalistic reading of scripture. The "liberal"/"evangelical" distinctive pertains more to our understanding of God within time and space (supernaturalism vs. anti-supernaturalism) than it does a necessary reading of scripture literally vs. figuratively.
2. Like both Post-mil. and some Hist. Pre-mil., the millennium and tribulation are understood to be symbolical but not necessarily a literal 1,000 year period.
3. The present age consists both of the millennial reign of Christ and the tribulation simultaneously. The kingdom of God has come partially now but is not yet fully consummated. I.e. the binding of Satan already is taking place for the gospel to have any progress at all but Satan still is the "prince of this world."
4. The second coming of Christ will inaugurate the final age and state for both believers and non believers such that the general resurrection, judgment and consignment of all to their ultimate future states will happen immediately and with no intervening period of time.
5. Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled both within the history of the church and in the New Heaven and Earth.
6. The Lord could return virtually at any time.

Note for instance the following two teachings of Christ and how they teach a present kingdom and tribulation...

Mt. 4:17, *From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near.*

Mt.10:34ff, *Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace but a sword... and whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* (note Christ's use of Micah 7:4; see also John 16:33)

I.e. The Kingdom of God has come, but Christ has also ushered in an era of tribulation, which is concurrent with the Kingdom of God in this present age.

George Ladd:

"The central thesis of this book (*The Presence of the Future*) is that the kingdom of God is the redemptive reign of God dynamically active to establish his rule among men, and that this Kingdom, which will appear

as an apocalyptic act at the end of the age, has already come into human history in the person and mission of Jesus to overcome evil, to deliver men from its power and to bring them into the blessings of God's reign. The Kingdom of God involves two great moments: fulfillment within history and the consummation at the end of history."

Hoekema:

"One who is a believer in Jesus Christ, therefore, is in the kingdom of God at the present time, enjoying its blessings and sharing its responsibilities. At the same time, he realizes that the kingdom is present now only in a provisional and incomplete state, and therefore he looks forward to its final consummation at the end of the age. Because the kingdom is both present and future, we may say that the kingdom is now hidden to all except those who have faith in Christ, but that some day it shall be totally revealed so that even its enemies will finally have to recognize its presence and bow before its rule. (Lk.13:20-21)"

#### 4. Why does it matter which view you hold?

1. Dispensational/fundamentalists: Tend to see the kingdom of God as totally or mainly future. May lead to pessimism about social and personal change. Leads to a "fortress mentality" of pulling out of the world.

- a. Low view of culture: Rather than being agents through which God can exercise his rule in culture (vs. state) we must isolate ourselves from culture, praying and waiting for the return of Christ.
- b. Tends to be fatalistic (regarding this world) and triumphant regarding the world to come.
- c. Radical discontinuity between present and future.
- d. Therefore, low view of education, low view of getting involved, etc.

2. Post-Millennialism/Pentecostal: Tends to see the kingdom exclusively as "already" present. Leads to an optimism about the kingdom to breakdown strongholds of corporate or individual evil and forgetting the incompleteness of the kingdom of God.

- a. leading to a naiveté regarding the sin in the heart, leading them to trust too quickly in the divine origin of their own impulses.
  1. Naiveté regarding church power
  2. Naiveté regarding personal impulses
- b. expecting "quick and simplistic fixes" for complex problems, leading to a undeveloped view of suffering. Faith as the catch-all solution

3. Mainline/liberal (both Pre-mil., Post-mil. and a-mil.):

- a. Tend to negate that the "kingdom" is "from God" rather than from "man"
- b. Confuses "gradual" with "anti supernatural"
- c. This together with an optimism about the Kingdom being exclusively present, Leads to a strong trust in education or politics to usher in the kingdom.

#### 5. What are some of the implications of the "a-mil" tension concerning the present and not yet kingdom of God – the present tribulation and reign of Christ in the present age?

1. The tension characterizes what we commonly call the "signs of the times"  
*Have you ever wondered after a certain catastrophe (wars, earthquakes, etc.), "Why has the world come to an end, it seems like the last days?"*  
I.e. Those events that must take place before Christ's second return are happening now and will continue
2. The people of God are involved in this tension.  
*Have you ever been tempted to see an angel in someone one moment and something less than an angel the next?*  
The people of God are not to be addressed as those who are still totally depraved, wholly incapable of any good and inclined to all evil, but are to be treated and addressed as new creatures in Christ, yet still imperfect.
3. The tension should be an incentive for responsible Christian living.  
The struggle is explained in terms of ultimate victory. (not in a guessing game)  
The relationship between the already and the not yet is not one of absolute antithesis but rather one of continuity" (continuity between the already kingdom in our lives and the culmination of that kingdom in fullness)
4. Our self image should reflect this tension.  
To lay the emphasis upon the imperfect or perfect is to turn the New testament upside down either way.
5. This tension helps us to understand the role of suffering in the lives of believers.

The kingdom of God now includes the use of suffering as a means towards bringing in the future kingdom. (suffering in the lives of believers is a concrete manifestation of the not yet. Suffering still occurs in the lives of Christians because all the results of sin have not yet been eliminated. )

Acts 14:22, through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God

6. Our attitude toward culture is related to this tension:

We mustn't equate the kingdom of God with culture, nor should we say that what we do in culture is unrelated to the Kingdom.

There is continuity as well as discontinuity between this world and the next. Grace does not destroy nature but restores it.

7. Present or future Kingdom of God is not one of invisible or visible, but impartiality and completeness.

Now: Enjoy the rights and privileges of Christ's Laws, government, sacraments and mission as in the visible Church. (albeit imperfect and fallible)

Not yet: Consist of "land" and "all peoples" (heaven)