

May 6th, 2018
 —THE GOSPEL CHANGES EVERYTHING—
 OUR VOCATION IN GLORY

Psalm 126:1-3; Revelation 21:1-5

Re-cap

This morning we are finishing up our mini-series on vocation. If you've missed any of this series, I would strongly encourage you to listen to it. You can either find it on our youtube channel or at thewellboise.com. Vocation is what God calls us to do, or who God calls us to be in this world. How does your work connect to God's work? We looked at this question through the lens of creation, fall and redemption. Today we are looking at our work in glory—in Heaven. What will heaven be like? Will it be physical? What will we be doing? What does Jesus Christ have planned for us in the next age?

Satan blasphemes Heaven

These questions are *not* for speculative purposes. Our aim is *not* to imagine what Heaven might be like so that we can feed some curiosity. No, dear congregation, the worship of Jesus Christ is on the line when it comes to this subject of Heaven. One of Satan's greatest strategies is to whisper to our hearts that Heaven is the disappointment of the ages. **Revelation 13:6** says that He opens his "...mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and *his dwelling place* and those who live in heaven."¹ Satan blasphemes God's dwelling place—Heaven. What does that mean? It means He speaks lies into the world about Heaven, so that humanity will dread going there.

Certainly you've experienced this before. I know I have. I remember being 12 years old in my bedroom one evening thinking to myself "I hope that I can get married, and have a family, and have a career before God takes me to Heaven." Why did I think that way? Because I heard Satan's blasphemies against God's dwelling place. Heaven will be disappointing, so I better find my fulfillment down here. This is seen in popular culture as well. Science-fiction

¹ NIV

writer Isaac Asimov the genius behind the film *I, Robot*, he said “I don’t believe in an afterlife, so I don’t have to spend my whole life fearing hell, or fearing heaven even more. For whatever the tortures of hell, I think the boredom of heaven would be even worse.”²

Why such a negative view about Heaven? We understand why an unbelieving heart would not desire Heaven. But *why* do many believers share this negative view? Because we often succumb to Satan’s blasphemes. When he blasphemes Heaven, it means that he speaks evil against it, or lies about it. What are his lies? That Heaven is not a physical place, but some sort of spiritual cloud hopping existence. That in Heaven, you will be a completely different person—with no free will, no memory, no passion, no ability to grow or learn or explore. That in Heaven you will be subjected to an eternity of sitting in a pew listening to someone speak. Heaven is that one place where all the good pleasures of this life disappear, where you are forced to suck down the medicine of what it means to be holy. Sound familiar? Where do these ideas come from? Satan. He blasphemes the dwelling place of God. This is a universal experience. Author John Dixon has said this

“In the years after I came to believe in Christ, it always troubled me, that I was now meant to enjoy the thought of escaping the physical world and entering a spiritual one called Heaven. I loved the taste, smell, sight, sound and touch of this world. And here I was being told to look forward to losing those five senses and having them replaced by a spiritual sixth sense. I was not terribly excited about it. Then someone challenged me to point to Biblical texts that describe the after life as a disembodied nirvana-like bliss. I couldn’t. It turns that the Biblical Kingdom come is not an ethereal place of clouds and ghosts, but a tangible place of real existence. It is a new creation. This is a future I can get excited about. It is life in the fullest sense of the word. A reality in

² Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 409

“In an episode of *Star Trek: Voyager*...a member of the undying “Q continuum” longs for and end to his existence. Why? Because, he complains everything that could be said and done has *already* been said and done, and now there’s only repetition and utter boredom. He says, “For, us, the disease is immortality.” Finally he’s allowed to end his existence.” *ibid*

which the moral and physical tensions of our current world will be resolved through an extraordinary act of Divine *recreation*.”³

Heaven is an extraordinary act of Divine *recreation*. The true Heaven is the true home of the saints, because it’s where we find the answers to all our deepest longings. This is what C.S. Lewis tried to capture in the last chapter of his last book in his Narnia series.

“The thing that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”⁴

This sounds very much like what the Psalmist said in our opening passage “When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.” **Psalm 126:1**. May God help us to be like those who dream this morning as we consider the glory God has prepared for those who love Him.

- ☆ Heaven is a World of Location
- ☆ Heaven is a World of Labor
- ☆ Heaven is a World of Love

The Big Idea...

When Christ re-creates the universe and calls us to dwell with Him and serve Him, we will be like those who dream

³ Source: <https://www.truthforlife.org/broadcasts/2018/04/13/peace-panic-proof-part-2-of-2/>
Accessed May 4, 2018

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, The Chronicles of Narnia, Book 7, (New York, NY.: HarperCollins, 2000), pg. 210-211

I. Heaven is a World of Location

“A city coming down out of heaven”

Let’s look **Revelation 21:1-2** “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. [2] And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” Look at what God brings down to the new earth—a new city.⁵ Ten times in Revelation 21, we are told our future home—the New Jerusalem—is a city. The new city of God.⁶ Cities have a location. Cities are filled with physical things. What do we find in cities? Buildings, bridges, parks, streets, businesses, fountains, restaurants, art museums, zoos, skyscrapers, athletic arenas, concert halls. If those realities aren’t in the New Jerusalem, in what sense could it be called it a city? John our author repeatedly stresses the physical nature of this city by speaking of its gates (v.12, 13, 15, 21, 25; 22:14); streets (v.21; 22:2); rivers (22:1-2); walls (v. 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19)⁷; precious stones (v.19, 20, 21); trees (22:2) fruit (22:2).

Against Christoplatonism

There is a great difficulty in accepting the fact that the new heavens and the new earth will be physical. Randy Alcorn in his book *Heaven* called this phenomenon Christoplatonism. Christoplatonism is the “...unbiblical belief that the spirit realm is good and the material world is bad.”⁸ He continues:

⁵ “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Matthew 5:5

⁶ But let us not restrict the New Earth to one city. To be sure the New Jerusalem is the capital city, but notice in 21:24-25, kings are coming from other parts of the earth through the open gates. Jesus tells us in the parable of the ten minas in Luke 19:17, that the faithful servant received authority over ten cities. “Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.” The New Jerusalem will be surrounded by other cities

⁷ foundations (v.14, 19); measurements (v.15, 16, 17); mountains (v.10); nations (v. 24, 26; 22:2); kings (v.24)

⁸ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 52

“this philosophy has blended the elements of Platonism with Christianity, and in so doing has poisoned Christianity and blunted its distinct differences from Eastern religions. Because appeals to Christoplatonism appear to take the spiritual high ground, attempts to refute this false philosophy often appear to be materialistic, hedonistic, or worldly. Because of Christoplatonism’s pervasive influence, we resist the biblical picture of bodily resurrection of the dead and life on the New Earth; of eating and drinking in Heaven, of walking and talking, living in dwelling places, traveling and going down streets, and going through gates from one place to another; and of ruling, working, playing, and engaging in earthly culture.”⁹

And so we approach the book of Revelation with a presupposition that when John our author is speaking about this city and these physical things in the New Earth, he’s somehow using allegorical language. Even some Reformed teachers get this wrong. One commentator¹⁰ writes in his commentary on Revelation:

“When John speaks of streets paved with gold, a city whose gates are made of single pearls and the like, we must not understand that the heavenly city will be as *material* as present earthly cities.”¹¹

Why? Why should we not understand the heavenly city as being material, as physical? Where does that assumption come from? Not from the Bible. But from anti-Biblical philosophies that teach the physical world is somehow dirty, and the spiritual world alone is what we should be concerned with. A whole book in the Bible was written against this dualistic philosophy—the book of 1 John. Who invented the physical world? God did. And He said it is “very good” (Genesis 1:31). Where in the Bible do we read that God has changed His mind about that? We don’t.

Somebody may say here: “but look, in v.4, we read that “the former things have passed away. Doesn’t that mean the physical world?” No. The former things are those things which sin introduced into the universe. All of v.4 makes

⁹ *ibid*, pg. 475-476

¹⁰ Leon Morris

¹¹ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 456

this clear “He [God] will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, *for* the former things have passed away.” Physicality is does not pass away, it is perfected by the removing of all sin, and death, and decay, and mourning, and pain from the universe.

Jesus is the firstfruits

When Jesus Christ performed His work in the gospel, we read that this was *only* the firstfruits. **1 Corinthians 15:20** says “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the *firstfruits* of those who have fallen asleep.”¹² “First fruits means first installment. First fruits was the beginning of the harvest, the very first gathered sheaves or fruit from the harvest. So first fruits were the first installment.”¹³ In other words, Jesus is called the first installment. The first installment of what? Of the New Heavens and the New Earth—of what we read here in Revelation 21.¹⁴

Jesus’ resurrection is the first payment, of what is to come. He rose physically. He repeatedly proved to His disciples. “Look,” He says in **Luke 24:39** “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost

¹² “Significantly, if Jesus was killed at Passover, then His resurrection on the third day would have fallen on Nissan 16—the Feast of Firstfruits.” Source: <https://www.gotquestions.org/firstfruits-offering.html> accessed May 5, 2018

¹³ Tim Keller, The New Heaven and New Earth, Revelation 21:1-7, Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qQ5h_HB5rbQ accessed May 5, 2018

¹⁴ “Peter describes this transformation in Acts 3:19-21 “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.” Do you see what Peter is saying? He says, “If you read your Old Testament, you will clearly see that the prophets have been saying since the world began that there is going to be a consummation and restoration of all things.” Peter’s message is that at the end of time, when Jesus comes again, God is going to restore this world to what He intended it to be. This world is not going to be obliterated or destroyed altogether, but it will be regenerated. It will be renewed. Since the world began, prophets have been predicting that a day will come when everything that has been marred by sin will be restored to what God intended it to be. God will burn “this old world with flame to cleanse it” (Belgic Confession, Art. 37).” Joel Beeke, *Revelation*, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), pg. 546

does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”¹⁵ Jesus rose in a physical body. He ate physical food—He ate a broiled fish right in from of them (**Luke 24:42-43**). And right now, at this moment, Jesus is physically in glory. Not floating around in the clouds. But building a city. Preparing a place for us—**John 14:1-2** “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. [2] In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to *prepare* a place for you?” Look at **v.2** of our passage “And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, *prepared* as a bride adorned for her husband.” Just like God prepared earth for Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 for them to dwell in, so now Jesus Christ is preparing a place for us to live even now.¹⁶ We will be raised in physical bodies, not to live in the clouds, but to live in a city. Where we can walk in parks, give hugs, swim in rivers, laugh, eat and drink and go to parties.

The Doctrine of Continuity

Part of our misunderstanding of Heaven comes because we don't understand what's called redemptive continuity. When a person is born again, they become a new creation (**2 Cor. 5:17**), but they don't become different people. As Randy Alcorn says here “Conversion does not mean eliminating the old but transforming it. Despite the radical changes that occur through salvation, death, and resurrection, we remain who we are. We have the same history, appearance, memory, interests, and skills. This is the principle of redemptive continuity...If we don't grasp redemptive continuity, we cannot understand the nature of our resurrection.”¹⁷

¹⁵ NIV

¹⁶ “And not only the kingdom is prepared from the foundation of the world in creating *heaven*, and in what has been don *there* from that time; but the creation of the *whole universe* was made to prepare a kingdom for them, to lay a foundation for their kingdom and dominion, and *all that has been done in providence*, ever since, has been to prepare a kingdom for them.” Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 636

¹⁷ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.,: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 114-115

Anthony Hoekema says “There must be continuity, for otherwise there would be little point in speaking about a resurrection at all. The calling into existence of a completely new set of people totally different from the present inhabitants of the earth would not be a resurrection.”¹⁸

Likewise when we read in v.1 of the New Earth it will still be the Earth. Full of fragrant flowers, jagged mountains, delicious foods, and melodic music. It will be Earth, but only it will be renewed and restored to the way that God had originally intended it. That’s our first point. “We won’t find ourselves in a world that is totally and absolutely different from the world in which we now live.”¹⁹ What we call “Heaven” is a the New Earth.

II. Heaven is a World of Labor

Will our work continue in glory?

When Victor Hugo, the French author who wrote *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*²⁰ started to contemplate his death near the end of the 19th century, he introduced a thought that I’m convinced is foreign to so many of us contemporary Christians. He spoke of his work continuing into eternity:

“I feel within me that future life. I am like a forest that has been [leveled; but] the new shoots are stronger and brighter. I shall most certainly rise toward the heavens the nearer my approach to the end...For half a century I have been translating my thoughts into prose and verse: history, drama, philosophy, romance, tradition, satire, ode, and song; all of these I have tried. But I feel I haven’t even given utterance to the thousandth part of what lies within me. When I go to the grave I can say, as others have said, “My days’ work is done.” But I cannot say, “My life is done.” My work will recommence the next

¹⁸ *ibid*, pg. 115

¹⁹ Joel Beeke, *Revelation*, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), pg. 545

²⁰ and *Les Misérables*

morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes upon the twilight, but opens upon the dawn."²¹

Hugo believed he would continue his life's calling on the New Earth. Was this a pipedream? No. Hugo understood the grand Biblical teaching found in **Romans 11:29** "For the gifts and the calling²² of God are irrevocable." Hugo had a calling from God to create, to write, to express, and he knew that he had only just begun to fulfill that calling.²³

Jesus is "*making all things new*"

Look with me at v.5 in our passage. "And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'" This is curious, Jesus—the one on the throne—is saying "I am making all things new" *after* the new heavens and the new earth was already created. Jesus is still creating *after* the holy city came down out of heaven from God. The verb tense in the Greek and the English are the same. Jesus says "I am making"—present tense. It's not "'I have made' or 'I will make' but 'I am making.'"²⁴ In future glory, *after* the new heavens and the new earth have been created, Jesus is *still* creating.

Why is Jesus *still* creating? Didn't He get the memo? Doesn't Jesus know that Heaven is supposed to be a static, dreadfully boring, place? Apparently not. No. Jesus is creating, working, laboring because it is His pleasure to do so. **John 4:34** "My *food* is to do the will [*the work*] of him who sent me and to accomplish his work."

²¹ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.,: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 413

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For a more illustrative picture of this work continuing on in glory, see Tim Keller's penetrating analysis of J.R.R. Tolkien's "Leaf by Niggle"— Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*, (New York, NY.,: Penguin Group, 2012), pg. 24-30

²² This is comes from the same Greek root word καλέω kaleō found in 1 Cor. 7:17

²³ Charles Spurgeon once told his congregation: "Do you know, dear friends, the deliciousness of work?" Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.,: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 333

²⁴ *ibid*, pg. 320

We will work in Heaven

And we will also work and create on the New Earth. This is not something we are guessing, or speculating, it's right in the Scripture.

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Did God only prepare good works for us this side of the New Earth? Surely He has good works prepared for us for the longer part of our existence?

In **Matthew 25:23** we read of the faithful servant who is rewarded by his master “His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’” This is not retirement. It's more work “I will set you over much.”

Look with me, at just the next chapter in Revelation. In **Revelation 22:3**,²⁵ we read “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.” What do we find here? Sinless work. Look at the end of the verse, it says “His *servants* will worship him.” Other translations read “his servants will *serve* him.”²⁶ What does it mean to serve? To work. That's what servants do. But this type of work is work minus the curse. Look at the beginning of the verse, it says “No longer will there be anything accursed.” To work without the curse. This type of work is pure pleasure, which is why the ESV calls it worship. No longer will there be design and distortion. It will only be design. It will only be worshipful work.

What will our work look like?

What will this worshipful work look like on the New Earth? Will this work be only for our hands, or will we find work for our heads and hearts as well? I was driving in East Boise a number of years ago, listening to a preacher

²⁵ Also see Revelation 7:15

²⁶ NIV, NASB, KJV

on the radio, and he was explaining **1 Cor. 13:12**, which says “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” And this preacher said “There will be no more learning in Heaven.”²⁷ God was protecting me from getting in a wreck because I started yelling at the radio. That’s not what Paul means. When he says “then I shall know fully,” he doesn’t mean that we shall be all-knowing. That is an incommunicable attribute of God, meaning like the attribute of infinite or immutable, only God can be all-knowing. It takes an infinite mind to be all-knowing, and we will always be finite. Paul simply means that our knowledge will be morally perfect—without sin, without error of that kind. We won’t see through the mirror dimly at Jesus, our sinful distortions and misconceptions of Him will be cleared up.

We will work with our heads, hearts and hands

We will always be learning on the New Earth. Apparently this is a shock to many in our time. A recent Gallup poll revealed that “only 18 percent thought people would grow intellectually in Heaven.”²⁸ **Ephesians 2:6-7** says “[God] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages [*the new heavens and new earth*] he might show [*or reveal, or teach*] the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” There are immeasurable riches of God’s grace that is waiting for us to learn. Jonathan Edwards says here that the “number of [our] ideas shall increase to eternity.”²⁹ Learning is part of the joy of Heaven. Martin Luther once said “If God had all the answers in his right hand, and the struggle to reach those answers in his left, I would choose God’s left hand.” What did Luther mean? He understood that the pursuit of learning, the discovery involved in it is

²⁷ I wonder if Randy Alcorn heard this same preacher, because he quotes it in his book. *Ibid*, pg. 318

²⁸ *ibid*, pg. 318

²⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 618

itself part of the pleasure. Can you imagine the universities that will be on the New Earth?³⁰ We will get to learn from theologians like Augustine and Calvin; or from philosophers like Francis Schaeffer and C.S. Lewis; or from poets like William Cowper and George Herbert; or from scientists like Isaac Newton; or from musicians like Bach.

But not only will we be learning, we will be creating and building. When the prophet Isaiah speaks about our eternal dwelling place, he says in **Isaiah 65:21** “They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.” Part of the work of the New Earth will include building and farming.

Our work will also include ruling and reigning. The city that comes down from Heaven in **Revelation 21:2** is not the only city in the New Earth. There are a multitude of cities in the New Earth in which Jesus places His people over. In **Luke 19:17**, Jesus speaks through a parable saying: “Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over *ten cities*” (v.17). There will be cities in the New Earth, and Jesus places many of his people to have authority over these cities. Ruling and reigning will be part of our work. (cf. **Rev. 5:10**)

Our work will also include judging the universe. **1 Corinthians 6:2** says “...do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”³¹

³⁰ Alcorn makes the argument for the continuation of teachers in Heaven. Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 322

³¹ Jesus told the disciples in **Luke 22:29-30** “I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, [30] that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Judging will be part of our work.

And these things are only scratching the surface. In the New Earth, we will finally be fulfilling the cultural mandate³² as God intended it. With the absence of sin in the universe, the full potential of human flourishing will be felt, and the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas (**Hab. 2:14**). The New Earth will be a place of glorious labor. As Alcorn says “The Bible’s picture of resurrected people at work in a vibrant society on a resurrected Earth couldn’t be more compelling. We’re going to help God run the universe.”³³

Objection: Doesn’t the Bible say that Heaven is a world of rest?

Somebody at this point might argue that Heaven is a world of rest, not a world of labor. **Revelation 14:13** says “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” (also cf. Hebrews 4) So which is it, are we going to rest or labor? Well it’s both, just like here. The difference is, that our work on the New Earth will itself be restful. We can catch a glimpse of this in what’s called a runner’s high. Seasoned runners experience this when after a certain distance of hard laborious running, a euphoric high kicks in where you

³² It’s also important to look at Revelation 21:24-26. “By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, [25] and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. [26] They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.” What does John mean here? Certainly it includes song and shouts and proclamations to Jesus’ great glory, but is that all it means? Wouldn’t it include also their cultural developments? God made men to be creators, and artists, and engineers and adventurers, and explorers, businessmen, and His gifts and callings are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). Is it not possible that they are bringing their creative treasures into the city of the great King as tribute? To show Jesus how they have stewarded His New Earth, so they can hear “Well done, good and faithful servant?”

³³ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 412

feel like you could easily run the rest of your life. It's a restful, invigorating, exhilarating labor.³⁴

The New Earth is where all our work is worship

The reason why all our work will be so exhilarating in the New Earth, is because all our work will be finally be worship. Pastor Joel Beeke reminds us “sometimes at work, you forget about God, and that grieves you. But there will be no activity in the new age in which God will not be manifestly present to you.”³⁵ Dear congregation, to work in the New Earth *is* to work in the cool of the garden with the Master Worker. In the New Earth, when you study and labor in the field of science you are opening the pandora's box of His unspeakable genius. In the New Earth, when you study and labor in the culinary arts, your heart will better feel the truth of tasting and seeing that He is good. In the New Earth, when you study music theory and labor to compose a new masterpiece, your soul will soar on the heights of His breathless ineffable beauty.³⁶ (Psalm 111:2) Every visible work in the New Earth makes more of the invisible glory of God visible. That's our second point, Heaven is a world of labor.

³⁴ We have a restaurant chain here in the U.S. called TGI Fridays— *Thank God It's Friday*. Work down here is often seen to be a drudgery, the thorns are thick, so we thank God when the week is over. And we name restaurants after this phenomenon. But in the New Earth, our work will be so thrilling, so satisfying, the we will anticipate Mondays with great joy. Maybe there will be a restaurant on the New Earth called TGI Mondays.

³⁵ Joel Beeke, *Revelation*, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), pg. 546

³⁶ “At other times” Alcorn says “...we'll worship him when we build a cabinet, paint a picture, cook a meal, talk with an old friend, take a walk, or throw a ball.” Whenever man's creative activity is on display in Heaven, Christ is pleased because He is on display. And that is what will make all of our activity ultimately meaningful. Because we will be imaging forth the glory of Jesus Christ in activity under the sun. Randy Alcorn, *Heaven*, (Carol Stream, IL.: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), pg. 197 “God's intention for humans was that we would occupy the whole Earth and reign over it. This dominion would produce God-exalting societies in which we would exercise the creativity, imagination, intellect, and skills befitting beings created in God's image, thereby manifesting his attributes. To be made in God's image involves a communicative mandate: that through our creative industry as God's subcreators, we should together make the invisible God visible, thus glorifying him in the sight of all creation.” *ibid*, pg. 226

III. Heaven is a World of Love

We need something more

Everything that we've seen is enough to dispel the foolish lies that we have heard about Heaven. But it's not enough to fulfill our deepest longings. We need something more than everlasting physicality. We need something more than fulfilling work. Look with me again at **Revelation 21:3** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is *with man*. He will dwell *with them*, and they will be his people, and God himself will be *with them* as their God." Three times here God says that on the New Earth He will be *with man*, He dwell *with them*, and God himself will be *with them*. The emphasis is that God is with us. He's with us.

An infinitely greater "with us" that "with Adam"

But we can't miss that this "with us" is an infinitely greater "with us" than what Adam and Eve experienced before they fell.³⁷ You see, they experienced a most sweet and intimate fellowship with God in that perfect sinless garden. They experienced Him in the cool of the garden. They heard his voice. They had direct revelation. We look at that and think, oh how special that must have been. But dear congregation, God planned to give us a sweeter and more intimate fellowship with Him, more than if Adam and Eve never sinned at all. If sin never entered the world, it's true that fellowship with God would have never been broken. Yet, there would have remained a great distance between us and God nonetheless. How do creatures truly fellowship with the Infinite God who

³⁷ "Hence we may learn something how vastly greater glory and happiness the elect are brought to by Christ than that which was lost by the fall, or even than that which man would have attained to if he had not fallen; for then man would never have had such an advantage for an intimate union and converse with the Father or Son, Christ remaining at an infinite distance from man in the divine nature, and man remaining at an infinite distance from the Father, without being brought nigh by an union to a divine person." Jonathan Edwards, *Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 624

stands outside of time? The Apostle John captured this great distance³⁸ in his gospel. He said in **John 1:18** “No one has ever seen God;” In the sinless garden, Adam and Eve did not see God.

God provided something better for us. He planned all of human history in order to send us Jesus Christ His Son. If man had not fallen you would never experience the God-man. If man had not fallen you would not know Jesus Christ. If man had not fallen you could not be in Christ (Col. 3:3), you could not be united to Christ (1 Cor. 6:17), you could not part of His body (1 Cor. 12:27), you would not know His touch His smile, His embrace. That is our true inheritance. **1 John 1:3** “Indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ”

It is Jesus Christ who is speaking here in Revelation 21. Look at **v.6** “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” That’s how Jesus identified Himself earlier in the book (**Rev. 1:8**). This is climax of this passage. Jesus is saying that He is going to dwell with us forever.

You are either a conquerer or are conquered

But Jesus lays out this incredible contrast that is simply startling. I was tempted to end the exposition of today’s passage at **v.7**, and not touch **v.8**. Because **v.8** talks about hell. And this sermon is about Heaven. But oh we would miss the grace of this passage if I were to do such a thing. Look at **v.8** “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” You are either and conquerer (**v.7**) and you will inherit the New Earth; or you are conquered by sin (**v.8**) and you will burn in the lake of fire.

But look closely at this list in **v.8**. Which of us could say that we are not on this list? Which of you could say that you have never been a coward? Which of you could say that you have never been faithless? Which of you could

³⁸ Adam and Eve were physical beings. God is a pure Spirit (John 4:24). Adam and Eve were visible. The Godhead is completely invisible, and lives in unapproachable light (1 Tim. 6:16). This distance is what caused Moses to cry out “Please show me your glory” (Exodus 33:18).

say you have never murdered? Jesus said He considers you a murderer if you've been sinfully angry with your brother (**Matt. 5:22**). The surprising thing about this list is that it doesn't allow you to divide sin up into self-congratulating categories. Whatever sin you think that you could never do, whatever line you think you would never cross is completely inconsequential. Being a coward is on the same level as homosexuality. Being a liar is on the same level as drug dealing (that's what the word sorcery³⁹ points to). Being an idolater perhaps a workaholic, or obsessed with money or looks, is on the same level as homicide. All of these things deserve the same dreadful end—the second death in the lake of fire.

“To the thirsty, I will give”

How then can anyone avoid this second death? Jesus says at the end of v. 7 “To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.” To the thirsty, Jesus gives life. A thirsty person is a needy person, a desperate person. I was looking at Terri Schiavo's biography this week. Recall that she was the woman who in 2005 was died from dehydration when her husband got a court order to remove her feeding tubes though it was very clear that although unable to speak like a fully functional person she wanted to live.⁴⁰ After thirteen days, she literally died of thirst. The medial examiner who performed the autopsy said that “Terri represented the most severe case of dehydration he'd ever seen...since [about 80] percent of the brain is normally composed of water, shrinkage from such sever dehydration should be expected...Terri's brain weight was approximately half of the expected

³⁹ “Apparently, the Greek word translated as “sorcerer” literally means “dispenser of drugs.” I suppose one of the lowest of the low in our society is a drug pusher. You can't get much lower than that. God puts your fearful unbelief on a par with drug dealing.” Joel Beeke, *Revelation*, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), pg. 549-550

⁴⁰ David Gibbs, *Fighting for Dear Life: The Untold Story Of Terri Schiavo And What It Means For All Of Us*, Minneapolis, MN.,: Bethany House Publishers, 2006), pg. 122-126

weight.”⁴¹ Terri was among most helpless people in America in 2005. She died simply because she was unable to drink water for herself.

Jesus is saying this is who you are. You are needy. You are desperate. You are thirsty. But He offers life giving water for free. How can Jesus do this? Because at the end of His life He hung on a cross and became thirsty for you. One of the last things Jesus said was “I thirst” (**John 19:28**). And this wasn’t just physical thirst. It was the cosmic thirst of being forsaken by God. It was the cosmic thirst of the second death. Jesus tasted hell on the cross. He tasted v.8. Jesus became the embodiment of all those despicable things in v.8.

- ☉ Jesus was treated as a faithless man (Matthew 26:65), so that you could be treated as a good and faithful servant (Matthew 25:23).
- ☉ Jesus was counted as detestable (John 8:48), so that you could be counted among the blessed (Matthew 5:3)
- ☉ Jesus was treated worst than a murderer (Luke 23:25), so that you could be treated better than a son, better than a daughter (Luke 11:13).

This is called substitution. Jesus died so you can live. And here in Revelation 21, He shows us that He conquered death. He rose from the dead. He is the one sitting on the throne offering a drink of this conquering life for anyone that would receive it. Dear unbelieving friend, this is the greatest drink that you could ever taste. It is the drink of everlasting life. It is the drink that will quench your deepest longings for love, because in drinking you gain a Person. You gain the only Person who will never disappoint you, never leave you, never forsake you. Drink deeply of Christ.

Dear congregation, what great assurance we are reminded of as Jesus speaks to us from the throne. He doesn’t *merely* offer us a New Earth in which we will labor, and experience joy, and everlasting learning, and the love and fellowship of the saints. He offers us Himself. I will be your God, you will be my son, my daughter. And this offer is without payment. Because He already paid it.

⁴¹ *ibid*, pg. 192

Application

One point of application. **How you live now, is determined by what you believe about your future.** For some, no doubt this whole idea of Heaven, of future glory may seem a little impractical. But this is actually the most practical type of truth. **How you live now, is determined by what you believe about your future.**

There was a book written several years ago called “The Rise of Christianity” by Rodney Stark.⁴² Stark was trying to answer the question: Why did Christianity succeed in the Roman Empire? During about a 100 year period, Christianity went from about 8% of the empire to 50%. He’s asking the question, why did it grow? Historically he points to the fact that there were two great plagues that ravished the Roman empire, in the first two centuries. The first one was approximately 165 a.d., and last two years, and the second one came at 251 a.d., and lasted fifteen years. These plagues were devastating. During the second plague, 5,000 people/day were dying in the cities. But this was at a time when only about a million people lived in Rome. 35,000 people died a week.

They did not have the medical advances that we have today, so they didn’t know how to cure these diseases, but they did know that the plague was spread through contact. Because of that, the rich and even the doctors would flee from the cities. Even family members would abandon family member who had the plague. They left the city in masses. Do you know who stayed? The Christians. They stayed in the cities. They cared not only for their own, but even for many of the unbelieving pagans. And of course many Christians died because they stayed. The question is: why did the pagans leave and the Christians stay? What each believed about their future is what determined their course of action. For one thing, the pagans held to that platonic dualism, that we’ve been speaking about which holds that physical things—including our bodies—were dirty and not truly valuable. Christians, on the other hand, held

⁴² Source: <https://gospelinlife.com/downloads/heaven-5931/> accessed May 6, 2018

to the goodness of God's creation, and especially the image of God in humanity. Secondly, the pagans had no assurance of salvation. No hope of eternal life. But Christians knew that this world, is just the pre-show to something much better. The worst death could do is bring was to usher them in to glory. And this author Rodney Stark points out that because of this worldview difference, it was rational for Christians to stay and rational for the pagans to leave.

What was the result of this? Even though many Christians died, their death rate was actually far less than the pagans. Many of those infected with the plague died simply because they had no food or water or care while they were sick. But Christians didn't abandon their sick. And they didn't just take care of their own, they cared for many of the pagans as well. Many of the survivors had Christians to thank. What happened? There was a time of tremendous conversion to the gospel. Now remember the book was called "The Rise of Christianity." The plague, ironically, caused the church to grow.

But Christians didn't stay because they had a church growth strategy. Christians stayed because they had a sight of glory. They stayed because the gospel of Jesus Christ. They stayed because death was already defeated. "Death is swallow up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55)

The living hope of Heaven is what causes human flourishing and God's glory to fill the earth as the waters cover the seas.