

**SERIES: Life After Death Wk. 2**

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**Message Title: Is Heaven on Earth? Pt. 2**

**Release Date: Wednesday 03/11/20**

The Bible teaches, not that the Earth is going to be annihilated, not that God's going to scrap it all and start over. It teaches just the opposite, that God is going to redeem all Creation; that in Genesis one and two God said, *This is good. I like this.* The New Heaven and the New Earth will be more similar than dissimilar, much more like Genesis two than what you see in the movies, because that's what God has always wanted.

Think back through the book of Colossians, in that magnificent chapter, chapter one, where the emphasis is on the sufficiency of Christ, the preeminence of Christ, and on the basis of Jesus' death, burial and resurrection, there we're told that God will reconcile all things unto Himself. That God will redeem things, both in Heaven and Earth, back. That will be the ultimate expression of His victory! God's not going to scrap it and start over. God is going to redeem the universe. He is going to redeem the Heaven and Earth back together again.

When we get in our minds that this Earth is so bad, that God's just going to scrap it and that's the end of it, we move into an escapism theology, where we're thinking, you know, what's the use? This world's going to Hell and there's nothing we can do about it, and I got my ticket to Heaven and I just can't wait to go, and we get in this escapism thing. I'm outta' here. And because of that, we don't care about the environment. Because of that, we disconnect from things that matter on this Earth. All we're waiting for is our chance to get out of here. That is much more gnostic in its theology than it is Christian. The reality is, the anticipation of the saints in the New Testament was not so much, *I'm out of here.* It was much more, *He's coming back.* He's coming back and He's going to redeem everything back unto Himself, and that's the ultimate victory and that's what they eagerly anticipated.

There are passages, such as Second Peter Chapter three that use terms like, *this Earth will be **burned**, this Earth will be **destroyed**.* Some of the translations say the Earth will be **burned up**, which is a very unfortunate translation. That's not what the word means. It will be *purged*. It will be *burned*. It will be *judged*. The sin stuff will be burned away and God's going to redeem it back. Second Peter Chapter Three says the Earth will be *destroyed*. But a few verses before that it says, *just as God destroyed the world during the time of Noah.* Now we know God didn't annihilate the world, the Earth, at the time of Noah, so we've got a definition of our term. It doesn't mean annihilation. It means that God is going to clean house and he's going to redeem back what he always intended.

If the Earth is eventually going to be annihilated, then what is *the creation eagerly anticipating* in Romans Chapter Eight? Is the creation eagerly anticipating annihilation? Does that make sense to anybody? It says very clearly in the text, eagerly anticipating being set free to join in the redemption of the saints, and creation too will be brought back to what God always intended. It's God's statement of victory.

Turn back a few more pages to Acts chapter one, verse 11, the angels are speaking and they say,

**They also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.” (NASB, Acts 1:11)**

We're very good at noticing in this passage that Jesus ascended; we tend to be not so good at noticing that He's coming back. It isn't an escapism theology. It's much more of a return theology.

Flip over to Acts chapter three and notice how Peter picks that up in his sermon in Acts three, pick it up in verse 19,

**Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, whom heaven must receive until *the* period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. (Acts 3:19-21)**

It's interesting how much Isaiah the Prophet spoke about the New Heaven and the New Earth. The emphasis is yes, Jesus has ascended. He has gone away, but only for a period of time and then He is going to come back and he's going to restore all things unto Himself. That's the common theology of the New Testament.

Flip over to Philippians Chapter Three, Verse 20. Paul says,

**For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform, (change) the body of our humble state (our earthy body) into conformity with the body of His glory, (we shall be like Him) by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Phil. 3:20-21)**

He's writing to the Philippians who in Philippi were a colony of Rome, and it was understood that as a colony of Rome, as Roman citizens, the challenge was not to move to Rome. The challenge was to bring Rome to Philippi, and he's capitalizing on that terminology saying, right now I am a citizen of Heaven, but I'm living that out in this earthly body. Therefore, I need to live on Earth as a citizen of Heaven. I need to begin now building for the Kingdom of God on Earth. I'm bringing heavenly values to this Earth. And in a sense, we as the church are a glimpse of what is to come. We are a glimpse of a heavenly value system lived out on Earth during this period of time. Therefore, instead of an escapism mindset, rather I understand I need to be diligent about building for the Kingdom because in some mysterious way what I do today, will matter in the New Heaven and the New Earth to come.

The reality is that God is currently building the New Heaven and the New Earth in a sense through His church on Earth today, anticipating the Resurrection, the change, the redemption, and the reconciliation of all creation. We're in a sense kind of a prototype, kind of a picture, kind of a model of what is to come, Heaven and Earth coming together.

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Think with me back to John Chapter 20. John Chapter 20 is the chapter that discusses the Resurrection of Jesus, and two times in that chapter, John makes the point on the first day of the week, Jesus rose. We make a significant mistake in my opinion, in trying to use that to emphasize that Sunday is the new covenant Sabbath. I think that's bad theology. I don't think it is. I think every day is the fulfillment of the Sabbath, because we rest in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. That's not John's point. John's point is this, that on Friday Jesus died on the cross in payment for the sins of the world. On Saturday he rested and on Sunday it was the beginning of the New Creation. Sunday was the beginning of the New Creation that anticipates what will come in the New Heaven and the New Earth.

There is a reason why Jesus was mistaken for the gardener tending the garden. The imagery is to take us all the way back to Genesis chapter two, and remind us that's what this is about. Jesus said so on the cross, *Today you will be with me in Paradise*. God is going to redeem all creation back to what he originally intended, where we would walk with God in the Garden, in relationships with one another with meaningful work tending the Garden just as God had planned. So that Sunday was the first day of the New Creation and from that moment on, Jesus has been busy about building his heavenly Kingdom on Earth. That's why he says in the Lord's Prayer, pray *Thy Kingdom come on Earth, as it is in Heaven* because now through Jesus, Heaven and Earth are coming together again, and we're busy about that now, anticipating the full redemption of that yet to come. The idea of Jesus as the gardener is taking us all the way back to Genesis two to recapture the picture. Therefore, we're not escapists. We're not just holding our ticket and can't wait to get out of here. We've got work to do, we've got building to do. We've got to begin to bring in the Kingdom today. God's building His Kingdom. We work for Him in order to be a preview of what is to come .

One other passage, Revelation 21; notice as we read the first part of Genesis 21, notice familiar imagery as it relates to Heaven and Earth coming together.

**Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer *any* sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." (Rev. 21:1-4)**

Notice that doesn't come until Revelation 21, until the ushering in of the New Heaven and the New Earth. When we are in this intermediate heaven, there is still a cosmic battle going on. Clearly that is the focus of God and the angels, and there is no Biblical evidence to support the idea that sometime that when we die, we're somehow going to be disconnected from everything that's on the heart of God. I think we will be very engaged in the reality of this battle, until it's finally culminated and won. And at that point, God ushers in the New Heaven and the New Earth, which is much more what people then think of today when they think about Heaven. This idea that God will dwell with His people, *He will be their God and they will be His people*.

Revelation 21 and 22 mirrors Genesis one and two very closely. This is the new creation, but it's what God has always wanted that Heaven will come to Earth, and God will walk with His people and He will be their God and we will be His people and we will dwell in relationship together. Those values that God has put in place are not going to go away. God has made us as relational

beings; we have relationships with one another. Those aren't going to go away. Will we know one another? Yes, we will. Will we have meaningful work? Yes, we will. Will we have meaningful recreation? Yes, we will. A world more similar than dissimilar than this world, just perfected. These ideas of a kind of a floating spirit out somewhere is an invent of Hollywood, not of Biblical theology.

I love the imagery here, when John uses the imagery of a bride prepared for the bride groom, because that's familiar imagery to us. It's familiar in the Old Testament, it's familiar in the New Testament. It's always been a picture of Heaven and Earth coming together in marriage and the culmination of that of course, is the New Heaven and the New Earth.

So, let me back it up and see if I can put the whole picture together. We start in Genesis one and two with God creating a place where Heaven came to Earth and God dwelt with His people in a garden in relationship, and God said, *This is good. This is the way I've always wanted, in a place called Paradise*. But when sin entered the picture, there was a separation in essence between Heaven and Earth. There was a separation between God and His people, and of course the Bible is the story of what God was willing to do to put it back together.

Jesus is the first picture of the uniting again of Heaven and Earth. That's why in Ephesians, chapter one, verse 10 it says, summing everything together, bringing everything together, both Heaven and Earth in Christ. Because when God became flesh, it was the beginning, the *first fruit* of Heaven again, coming to Earth, Jesus would be fully God and fully man forever. Jesus then, upon his death, burial, and resurrection ushered in the beginning of the new creation. Now it's possible on the basis of Jesus' death for Heaven and Earth to come together again, seen most specifically in the life of the believer. We trust Christ as Savior, we'd become spiritually alive, but for now still lived out in our earthly body. But there was a promise of a future redemption. That right now we're citizens of Heaven, but we're living that out on this Earth. Therefore, we need to be busy about the Kingdom of God now. Rather than an escapism theology, we need to get to work, because somehow what we do today is going to matter in the New Heaven and the New Earth. And so, there is a coming together of this imagery in the believer as citizens of Heaven still lived out in this earthly body, but what the promise of a change where this mortal body will put on immortality, this decaying body will put on an imperishable body. It will finally then be culminated in this magnificent picture when Jesus returns and the saints are resurrected, where the Earth will be purged, it will be judged, it will be cleaned up. The effects of sin will be gone, and it will become a new creation.

You say, but doesn't this Revelation 21 text say that the *old will pass away*? Yes, that is what it says. And it says it will be replaced with a new, that's familiar language, isn't it? Second Corinthians, Five 17 we have *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he's become a new creation. Old things have passed away. All things have become new*, exact same Greek words. You weren't annihilated. You were just radically changed. You were redeemed. You yourself as a believer, are a picture of the New Heaven and Earth, where Heaven and Earth has come together in you through Christ - made alive through the power of His Spirit with the best yet to come. In the same way, the Heaven and the Earth will come together as a bride adorned for the bridegroom, the picture of Christ and His church, the picture of Israel and her God, the picture that's always been there as Heaven and Earth, through God's redemption, will once again come together, come together as God always intended it to be, the place that God created in Genesis one and two. God said, *This is good. I like this*.

Will we have physical bodies? Yes, we will. Will we recognize one another and have relationships? Yes, we will. Will we have meaningful work and recreation? Yes, we will. A world much more similar than dissimilar, just perfected. Everything everybody's ever dreamed of and wanted will be fulfilled and perfected in the Heaven and Earth to come.

Mitch Albom's written an interesting book called *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*. It's an interesting read. It is very well written, but it couldn't be more false. The reality is when you get to Heaven, it will not be a process of making you feel better about yourself. You will not be the center of attention. The resurrected, glorified Savior of the body will be the focus of attention. And Jesus in all of His glory will walk with us in the Garden and we will be His people and He will be our God for eternity. A future more glorious than we could even begin to describe. A theology of Heaven, wrongly understood, creates an escapism, *got my ticket to Heaven, and I'm outta' here*. But a theology of Heaven rightly understood causes us to get busy about the work of the Kingdom, eagerly anticipating Jesus coming back, the redemption of our bodies, the redemption of all creation for that glorious existence with Him forever in Heaven.

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Cara: Bryan, how can we model today what is to come in the New Heaven and Earth?

Bryan: So I think we've talked about this a little bit yesterday, Cara, but if you think of a value system that seems appropriate, right, in the New Heaven, the New Earth, and then begin to think about what would at least be a glimpse of that now, that's what really helps me. So, you look at poverty, well that isn't a value that would make sense then. So, what can we do to help with that? You think about racism, there'll be no racism there. So, what's our responsibilities as the church to begin to change that now? If you think about all this hate and all this anger and a lot of Christians are jumping on board and they're just contributing to it. It's like, I don't think we'll be doing that in the New Heaven and the New Earth. So how do we stop it? How do we create something different that gives more of a glimpse of the value system of the New Heaven and the New Earth? But I also think of things like beauty, of art. What would that be like then? And that's why it matters now, as people made in the image of God, there's a lot there. Even how can we come together in neighborhoods or communities and create these pockets of flourishing that would at least look a little bit like what we think the New Heaven, the New Earth is. So taking it from real abstract that brings it into things that are pretty practical. Does this behavior seem like it would be appropriate in the New Heaven, the New Earth; if not, then let's change it.

Arnie: So Bryan, can you give us some examples of things we may do today that will actually matter in the New Heaven and Earth?

Bryan: Oh, that's a great question. Arnie. In First Corinthians, Paul talks about the judgment seat of Christ, and he talks about our works going through the fire, and there's those that won't be burned up, and the language he uses is, *those that remain*, so really interesting statement. Like what does he mean by *remain*? That seems to imply to me there are things from this life that make it in to the New Heaven and the New Earth. So then what is that? Is that art? Is it beauty? Is it music? Start to think about what are the things that maybe - are there songs that we're singing now that we'll sing together on the other side? Are there beautiful pieces of art, paintings, sculptures that will make it in and we'll admire them again on the other side? I think part of that is people, and we give our lives to people and won't we know that? Won't that be part of the eternal reward of I invested in these people and now we share this wonderful New Heaven, New

Earth together forever. I can't imagine we won't know that. So that will be part of what remains, what we'll celebrate together.

Bryan: The other one's interesting to think about, is it like values? You think about commandments and values and things we're supposed to be about, but we're kind of trying to figure out; so what does it really look like to love my neighbor as myself? So we're trying to figure that out, but we're not completely sure. So I liken it to Patti and I have kind of gotten into this great British baking show that's on TV. It's on Netflix. So I don't cook, I'm like a frozen pizza guy. But Patti is a great cook and she's really a baker. And so every episode, one contestant is weeded out and there's three parts to each episode. And one part is the technical challenge. The technical challenge means they get a vague recipe, typically it's something they've never heard of, and then they have to create it. And then at the end the judges bring out, this is what it should have been. And some of them look similar and some of them aren't similar at all. I kind of imagine someday when we get to the New Heaven, the New Earth, we're going to see these values displayed and it'll be like, so that's the way that was supposed to look. And so I think that's a part of what we're going to work at here, but not be completely sure what it's supposed to look like, until we get to the other side, and it'll finally be like, okay, that's what it was. Some of those were probably close and some were probably really far off, but that kind of creates this, from this world to the next thinking.