

**SERIES: Life After Death - Week 3**

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**Message Title: Why Heaven Matters Today Pt. 2**

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We go all the way back to Genesis One and Two and God brought Heaven to Earth in his Creation and God said, *This is good*. Sin once again divided Heaven and Earth. It was brought back together in a magnificent way in the person of Jesus, God in the flesh, Heaven together with Earth again. Jesus died for the sins of the world, which is what separated Heaven from Earth, was buried and rose again. And on that first Easter morning, there in the Garden, Jesus was the beginning of the new Creation. Jesus had made it possible for Heaven and Earth to come together again. And every person that trusts Jesus as Savior becomes a citizen of Heaven. Our sins are forgiven and once again, Heaven and Earth come together, so now, we as citizens of Heaven, begin to live out that life on Earth. Therefore, we are busy about the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, bringing the future into the present, as a promise or a pledge, or a glimpse of the reality of what is to come.

In order to understand this a little bit better, I invite you to go back to First Corinthians Chapter Three:

Pick it up in verse 10.

**According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is *to be* revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.** (NASB, 1Cor.3:10-15)

Now, the challenge is always, what does the Bible mean by reward? In this particular text, it's very clear that the reward is something other than our Salvation. There may be some texts where that is in focus, but here clearly he says that some will suffer loss but still will be saved, so obviously the loss is something other than Salvation. Therefore, the reward is something other than Salvation, so we try to figure out what does that mean? If you go back up, what he's saying is the foundation for this New Heaven and Earth, this foundation for the new Creation, was laid in the person of Jesus Christ, obviously referring to His death, burial and Resurrection. Therefore, that foundation cannot be laid again. It's a one-time unique foundation.

We are called to be part of serving God, building for His Kingdom, and we build upon the foundation that's already been laid. Therefore, he says those people who in this life build with wood and hay and straw, will see that consumed by the fire, but those who build with gold and silver and precious stones, will see those remain.

Now it's interesting to think about what he's saying here. Is it possible, and I would suggest to you that this is correct, that when he's talking about the fire, what he's talking about is the fire that Peter talks about in Second Peter 3 - the fire at the end of this age that is the final purging, preceding the redemption of this Earth into the New Heaven and the New Earth. That's the imagery of God's judgment, the very final thing before the transition into the New Heaven and New Earth. Therefore, those things that were done today, in the power and the name of Jesus, go through the fire, and emerge as gold, silver, and precious stones. Those things that were done purely for the sake of this world are consumed and gone forever.

One has to note the similarity between what Paul says here, gold, silver, precious stones, with John's description of the New Jerusalem and the walls of the city as gold and precious stones. Is it possible that what Paul is saying here, and I would suggest to you that it is, that what you do today in the power and name of Jesus in some mysterious way that we cannot fully understand, has some sort of a linkage to the New Heaven and the New Earth to come? And the reward is that it remains. Something remains. That's what he clearly says. And I would suggest to you that on the other side, in the New Heaven and the New Earth, it is very possible that you may look at something that you are a part of, something that you gave your money to, something that you did in the name and power of Jesus, was a part of building the New Heaven and Earth today, will remain in the New Heaven and the New Earth. At that moment, the reward will not be self-glory. I'm absolutely convinced none of the rewards will ever be self-glory. But the reward will be a very humble realization that in the power of Jesus, He allowed me to be a part of something that will last forever in the New Heaven and the New Earth to reflect His glory, what He did in me.

Now when you start thinking about that, the ramifications to what we do on a daily basis are huge. Martin Luther said after he finally understood his theology of the New Heaven, and New Earth, it made him want to go out and plant a tree. Do you understand what he's saying by that? When we get away from this idea that it's all lost, it's all going to hell -Who Cares? - we get this escapism, annihilation view, and we're just out of here. But when we realize that we have a calling, based on the hope that is to come, to begin through the power of Jesus building for the Kingdom today, it changes the way we treat everything on this Earth. In some mysterious way, there is a linkage from today till then in such a way that we will know we have been a part of something that lasts forever.

I invite you to turn one more time to Matthew Chapter 28, a text that's often referred to as the Great Commission, and so it is. Familiar words, but I'm wondering if there aren't a few words that often are passed by when we read this text.

Pick it up in verse 16:

**But the eleven disciples proceeded to Galilee, to the mountain which Jesus had designated. When they saw Him, they worshiped *Him*; but some were doubtful. And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Mat. 28:16-20)**

Have you ever asked yourself the question, what does he mean by *All authority has been given to me on Heaven and on Earth*? We've been talking about the reality of the New Heaven and the New Earth. As it goes all the way back to Genesis One and Two, what God has always wanted is

to bring Heaven and Earth together. That's the point of His Creation. Jesus embodied that, being God in the flesh. And now having conquered sin, which was the dividing point, Jesus, now as the God man, had authority on Heaven and Earth to tell his disciples to go now and what? Go into the world, not escape from the world, but go into the world, roll up your sleeves and begin building for the Kingdom now.

I have authority on Heaven and Earth. I have authority to bring it together. And now as citizens of Heaven living out on Earth, let's begin building for the Kingdom now, in hope of what is to come. He even says, "*And Lo, I will be with you until the end of the age.*" Jesus is saying, I'm going to be right there with you until Revelation 21. It is done. Mission accomplished.

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I'm convinced that the people in that intermediate Heaven have a significant awareness of what's going on, because we know that the Spirit's focus is on Earth. Romans Eight says, the Spirit groans with us. We know that that's a focus of Jesus' attention. He says it here and in lots of passages, *I'm going to be with you*, head of the church, building. And we know it's the focus of the angels as they come and go, and come and go, as messengers of God. It's hard for me to imagine that we're somewhere else sitting on a cloud, totally oblivious to everything that's the attention of Jesus in the Heavens. There's a reason why all of the saints of the New Testament long for the return of Jesus; it's not until that point where the battle is over, and the suffering ends, and God wins.

Now, if you begin to think about this calling, as citizens of Heaven into the world, on the basis of Jesus' authority on Heaven and Earth, it has significant ramifications to everything you do, every day. Let's think about the concept of work. If this is really true, will there be vocations and callings and work in the New Heaven and the New Earth? Yes. There will be. There's no reason to think there won't still be scientists. We have to be careful that our view of Heaven, when we talk about it being perfect, we're not talking that we become God. We don't suddenly become omniscient. Ephesians Two, Seven says, we'll always be learning and growing. Why wouldn't there be scientists that continue to discover the wonder of God's Creation, and help us see the glory of what God has made?

That's a part of what it means to be made in the image of God and tending the Garden. Why won't there be architects and why won't there be builders and why won't there be teachers and professors and all these different vocations that we would understand, that continue to live according to a certain vocation and calling? If that's true, then the assignment today, for you as a believer, is to bring the value system of the New Heaven and the New Earth to your vocation today. Ask yourself the question, what would that look like today? **Rather than playing down to the curse, aren't we called to play up to the promise?**

And so you start thinking about what would that be like then, and **what would that be like for me in my vocation, my calling today, to live out a Heavenly eternal value system.**

Think about the ramifications to social issues. Just go through the list. Do you think there will be homeless people in the New Heaven and Earth? If the answer is no, then let's go to work on that today. Do you think there will be poverty in the New Heaven and Earth? If not, then let's go to work on that today. Do you think there will be hungry children in the New Heaven and the New Earth? If not, let's get to work on that today. Do you think there will be addictions in the New Heaven and the New Earth? If not, let's get to work on that today. Do you think there will be

despair in the New Heaven and the New Earth? If not, let's get to work on that today. Do you think there will be abortion in the New Heaven and the New Earth? If not, then let's get to work on that today.

You can just think through all of the different issues, and understand that our calling as citizens of Heaven is to bring a glimpse of that world that lies in the future, into the present in such a way that that is our witness, and then we invite people, on the basis of the death, burial, and Resurrection of Jesus, to be a part of what God is doing for eternity.

Will there be governments in the New Heaven and the New Earth? Yes, there will be. Revelation 22 talks about kings and nations. If that's true, then aren't we called to make a difference in the government today? I have often warned us of the danger of arguing politics, to the degree that people hate one another in the marketplace, but I have never said we as Christians should not be involved in the government. Some of you are called to that to make a significant difference in a very difficult place, but again, rather than playing down to the curse, the calling is to play up to the promise, to bring a whole different value system to this Earth than what this Earth has known before. It's a picture of the promise to come.

Think about the world of the arts. Do you think it's possible that some of you could paint a painting, in the name and power of Jesus, that would actually be present in the New Heaven and the New Earth? I would suggest to you the answer is yes. Is it possible that some of you may write a piece of music, in the power and name of Jesus today, that will actually be sung around the throne of Jesus in the New Heaven and the New Earth? I would suggest to you the answer is yes. It remains.

You think about the ramifications to a landscaper. Is it just mulch and dirt, or is the calling to capture a little bit of the wonder and the beauty of the New Earth to come? Is your calling to give us just a glimpse of the wonder and beauty and the majesty to come? Would you give us just a glimpse of that as a reminder of the hope that is to come?

Think of the ramifications of this on the environment. If we buy into an escapism mindset, then we rape the Earth and we exit, because who cares? But if we believe that this Earth will be redeemed, then we have a responsibility today to tend to the Garden, to care for the environment, to treat it today as we will treat it then. The environment's always a difficult thing to talk about these days, because it's so politically charged, but if we could just get rid of all that and just act in a way that is responsible today, that would reflect the reality of the hope to come.

It is an amazing thing to process this concept of the hope that is to come, and the reality that we are to be busy about that work today, giving people in our community, in our world, just a glimpse, just a glimpse of the promise of what is to come. We in ourselves as the church are the *first fruit*, a pledge, a glimpse of what is to come, bringing the future into the present, and then inviting people in despair and pain and suffering in this world to come to know that Savior who died for their sins, in order that they too might be part of this magnificent world to come. It is this magnificent promise that changes everything.

As of that first Easter morning when Jesus stood in the Garden as the resurrected Savior, everything changed. That was the first day of the new Creation. It is the basis by which there is light in the midst of the darkness, the basis by which there is hope in the midst of the despair, the basis by which there is courage in the midst of the fear, the basis by which there is joy in the

midst of the sorrow. It is the basis by which no matter what life throws at us, there is a hope and a future more glorious than we can even begin to describe today.

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Arnie: So Bryan, if we see ourselves as citizens of Heaven, not only do we have a lot to accomplish, but we also have the ultimate authority to make things happen. Is that true?

Bryan: Yeah, that's true. I mean, we can't ever forget there's a supernatural dimension to all of this. We've been commissioned by Jesus, we're empowered by the very Spirit of God. It's not just us doing our best to grind it out here on Earth. There is a supernatural dimension. God's up to something and amazing things can happen.

Cara: Can you tell us a little more about what it means to either *play down to the curse* or to *play up to the promise*?

Bryan: Yeah, so *playing down to the curse*, is the world is cursed. God's going to destroy it. Everything's falling apart. So, then we start to become poor stewards of the environment. We start to see everything through a negative lens. It's kind of the world's going to hell. What difference does it make? And so then everything just kind of becomes negative. It's us against them. And that just doesn't make the Gospel very appealing.

Bryan: So the idea of *playing up to the promise*, is actually the future is glorious, and there's coming a redemption and a restoration and the world is full of promise and we get these glimpses and these pockets of flourishing. And we know at the end of the story, God wins. You know, the other night we had a typical Midwestern storm that ended with this magnificent rainbow. And it's like this picture of the beauty, maybe just a glimpse of the New Jerusalem and what's to come.

Bryan: And so it just changes how we view everything. So a couple of ways to illustrate that. So, I used to have a '72 Volkswagen Super Beetle. I know you have a classic Mustang. When I found the Beetle, it was in a pasture with a box on it that said 600 bucks. And it's like, I can either see that as a piece of junk, or I can see that that has the potential of something that can be beautiful. You know, it's the whole restoration story. It's how you choose to view it, so you can see the world around you as negative and everything about it's bad. Or you can start to see the beauty and be part of the story that God's writing even now.

Cara: I think sometimes too, we look at those projects as too big for us, so maybe a broken person, but to be reminded that we just need to love on them and give them the Gospel, and let God do His work.

Bryan: I think it's sobering too, to look at everyone through the lens of, this is a person made in the image of God, that will spend forever somewhere, and I'm a steward of the message of the Gospel, and I have a responsibility there. They're not the enemy. They're victims of the enemy, [Right] and it's our job to reach them.