



## **REVELATION UNIVERSITY EXTRA**

### ***Revelation 21:4***

*<sup>4</sup> ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’*

This Sunday, time did not permit us to talk about two important questions that have been posed to me by people at Trinity. These questions are discussed in a wonderful resource that I used as I prepared for my sermon entitled *Four Views on Heaven*.<sup>1</sup> My answer below is shaped by the great scholars in that work.

### **Will we remember traumatic events of this life?**

One of the most difficult questions to consider is whether hard and even tragic events in our lives now will still be remembered in eternity and tarnish our joy.

Isaiah 65:17-18 tells us, in a parallel to Revelation 21:4, “<sup>17</sup>See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. <sup>18</sup> But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.”

The context of this passage is that God’s people have experienced wars, judgment, death, lots of sorrow. Isaiah says that the new world will be of such quality that the sadness, sorrow, and pain of this life pales in comparison – it is forgotten.

Presumably, we will remember all the good things and blessings that happened. We don’t just have **happy dementia**! And if our memories are that strong, it is hard to believe that we will not also remember the traumatic events of our lives. But theologians suggest that in eternity, we will see these tragic events as God sees them, not as we saw them at the time. We will see how even these evils were worked out for good by God’s perfect providence. Romans 8:28 (“God works all things together for

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<sup>1</sup> *Four Views on Heaven*, ed. Michael Wittmer. Zondervan, 2022.

good for those who love Him”) won’t be just a slogan but an experienced reality. This correction and reinterpretation will bring out their deeper meaning. The fear and anguish that come with such events will be gone. Moreover, we will see how God used those events ultimately for our benefit, and we will praise him. We will see our imperfect stories as part of his perfect story. We will see history as His-story. We will see even these dark parts in the light of God’s perfect plan.

In Jesus, we see a prime example. He experienced incredible trauma, not least at the time when he was beaten and crucified. After Jesus is resurrected, he still has the physical wounds of his crucifixion, and invites Thomas to reach out and touch them (Luke 24:39-40). These wounds are trauma. And yet they are not *known* traumatically – i.e., Jesus doesn’t seem to be triggered by mentioning them. In psychological terms, he is able to regulate his emotions. He recalls trauma, but is not traumatized.

### **Will we grieve over loved ones who are not with us?**

More difficult, though, is the matter of loved ones who are not there and the knowledge that they are experiencing a Christless eternity that will never end. Especially troubling is the thought that had we witnessed to them (at all or more), they might have turned to Christ and spent eternity with him and with us.

Because of the “great gulf” between the final states of the lost and the redeemed, it is unlikely that we will know by firsthand observation or even by secondhand reports from God exactly what they are feeling and experiencing at any one time or another.

But Scripture also says that God will wipe away all tears, and so it is reasonable to say that these facts will not spoil our joy and cause us to live with regret for eternity. *How* God will do this is not clear. But remember, God is omniscient, and so he is aware of every detail of every life that ends in the lake of fire. Christ died for them, and they could have had eternal life, but they chose not to establish a relationship with God. This realization could result in God being endlessly sorrowful and sad, but it does not. That does not mean God does not care about the lost but only that their fate does not ruin his joy.

So whatever God does to maintain his joy despite his desire for all to be saved suggests that he can do whatever it takes to ensure that we do not lose our joy over these things. That, however, does not mean we will not care about the lost but only that their lost state will not put us in a perennially sad and grieving mood.