

What Will Eternity Be Like? - Part I

Series: AfterLife
Brad Bailey – May 4 2014

INTRO:

Opening Question: How big is your world?

We've had our share of laughs when we think what our dog must be thinking about the world... or when our children were really little.

I can't help but think of us trying to imagine the glories of heaven...the reality of eternity. Have you ever tried to think of eternity?

We're like children... tell a child that it's a big world out there...and they may think about the small neighborhood outside the front door. Then we learn we live in a city...then we are introduced to maps...then a globe...and finally solar system. And we think now we know all that exists.

The more we look into what God tells us about eternity...the more I think we may think we've grown up and grasp it all... but may still be far more like children.

The smaller our sense of the world is...the more enclosed it is...the less hope we will grasp.

The bigger the world...the more open it is...the greater hope lies within us.

We began on Easter Sunday...talking about hope. The resurrection of Christ is our "living hope"...it creates a new world within us.

So we are continuing to engage this hope in a series entitled "afterlife."

Prayer: God...here we gather...to let our earthly minds consider the glory of your heavens...how you must be smiling here with us. Our minds ...worlds feel closed in...let the walls of time and temporary struggle fall down.

Our ideas of heaven can become confusing for two primary reasons...

1. Infinite God ... speaking to finite beings...and so while some statements are literal...some descriptions are filled with imagery...symbolic metaphorical.
2. Present heaven...and a future heaven. Last week... **analogy...trip with a layover.**

Last week...present heaven...that which awaits all who die before the culmination of history...or what the Bible calls "this age."

Today... "the age to come"... or what we could refer to as the...FUTURE HEAVEN.****

In the Book of Revelation...which is a revelation or vision given to the disciple of Jesus named John...the word "Heaven" occurs more than fifty times.

It is visionary in nature...and very similar to Ezekiel's long before.

In each...we find a **human given a revelation by God** and their use of human language to **describe divine glory.**

Though wild in nature...the essence of John's Revelation...is simply an unfolding of that which was revealed through the prophets (especially Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel) and Christ...a glimpse into the future which culminates in a glorious new world. [1]

Revelation 21:1-7 (NLT)

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. ² And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.” ⁵ And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” ⁶ And he also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. ⁷ All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children.

What a marvelous sight...what a stirring revelation of what lies ahead.

What I hope you will feel...is the walls that enclose your world expanding...a lot.

Here we are told how in an ultimate sense...**the walls that enclose** our lives will come down...and our lives expanded by the reality of eternity.

What is God telling us about our future?

1. The future of eternity will be the fulfillment of a climatic restoration.

Verse 1 describes the climatic point at which history as we know it comes to a close...a final judgment comes followed by the emergence of a new heaven and a new earth, for the first earth and the first heaven pass away.

Some reading this for the first time might wonder if such a vision is really a part of God’s Word as a whole. For the Bible has stood the test of time...and proven prophetically profound.

God spoke long before such rational perceptions... listen to the words written between the 8th and 6th century BC...in Isaiah:

Isaiah 65:17; 66:22 (NIV)

“Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.” As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,” declares the LORD, “so will your name and descendants endure.” - Isaiah 65:17 and Isaiah 66:22

The new heaven and earth will endure before him but the former will not even be remembered or come to mind.

> This **reflects how “new” this recreation will be**. The Greek word translated “new” (Kainos) reflects **more than just “new” as opposed to “old”**; it **reflects it will be different**...a change in quality...free from fallen ness and “curse”, it will be glorified and eternal.

Jesus himself stated,

Matthew 24:35 (NIV)

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

> His word is eternal, but what God created by His Word would change. It was in a temporary state... a state not aligned and in sync with the full nature of God.

The apostle Paul spoke of such change coming in **what we refer to** as the **Biblical Book of Romans**.

Romans 8:18-23 (NLT)

¹⁸ Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. ¹⁹ For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. ²⁰ Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, ²¹ the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. ²² For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us.

Paul understood that the **entire created realm was suffering** from the Fall...from separation from God. All creation is in tension... the heavens and the earth...groaning as in the pains of childbirth waiting to be reborn into a new and eternal existence united with God.

For a while many modern minds began to conceive of the world as without change...no need for God and no signs of disruption or change. Yet today it is **the most rational of minds** that are **declaring the impossibility of the earth continuing as it is**.

Old order that is set on destruction...in more ways than one. And it must give way to a new order... alignment outside of it's own condition.

The Scriptures tell us that this is not a change of merely some physical nature... it is about dimension rooted far deeper. It is about powers beyond is. It is about what Christ defeated in his death powers reflected in his resurrection. It is about aligning with Christ who now rules...and will bring forth this new age to come.

The biblical picture points us toward the reunification of God's sphere and our sphere — a new heavens and a new earth — as a single created reality, made whole and functioning for our flourishing as God always intended.

It isn't the intent of our focus in this series to look at the **how and when** the final days will unfold...but rather the nature of what will unfold. [2] **What is helpful** though is to realize **this unfolds with the culmination of Christ's return** which is all about bringing a final defeat of

the powers of evil and rebellion that have ruled over this world. The whole sweep is that Christ defeated our separation...defeated death ...and began a period of time in which God has moved in redemption and mercy... and that God will bring this to completion upon his return.

Creation was meant to be ruled by those who reflect God's image and nature...and one day the one who came to redeem humanity will lead that rule...with a restored humanity. He will lead a humanity in our true identity. That is why Paul says that *"all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are."* (vs. 19)

And Paul speaks of it as the **pains of childbirth**...preparing for a new birth. This **may help to understand** that as with the birth of a child from a mother... there is **continuity and discontinuity**. One life gives birth to another...something that **shares a nature** with the first but is **also distinct**.

And the clearest reference we have is the resurrection of Christ.

In the resurrection of Christ... death gave way to life.

Christ' resurrection body was **similar and different**...**continuity and discontinuity**.

(Next week we will look at what God makes known about new bodies...and carrying on relationship...and the roles and activity implied. But for now...)

The Scriptures do not speak of eternity as ultimately escaping a physical world and going to a spiritual one...but rather they speak of the resurrection of the dead, the renewal of all things, the time for God to restore everything, the liberation of creation, the new heavens and the new earth, and the life of the age to come.

We need to realize that Jesus rose from the dead and had breakfast on the beach with his friends...and that our destiny is not a disembodied eternity in another realm....but rather the merging of realms.

2. The future of eternity does not reject the material world but restores it.

There has been a **tendency in the western imagination** to think of eternity as heaven and heaven as a world that is **only spiritual**...a world **that transcends the material** world as we know it.

As many are now pointing out...this tendency **comes from Greek thoughts influenced by Plato** rather than the Scriptures. Plato looked upon this world as but a shadow cast by a real world.

But God created this world...and called it GOOD.

It is true he **speaks of it's end** but **ONLY** in also speaking of it's **being re-created..or restored**.

I don't presume to know if the language used is intended to speak of something literally destroyed and re-created...or something fully renewed. **But what is affirmed** is that **God values the material world**.

The earth is the place God created for us...those who bear His image...where he would dwell with us.

Now corrupted and now **flowing from brokenness and operating with injustice**...God does **not speak of simply giving up**...but of **setting it right**.

The very fact that a new earth is renewed or re-created should lead us to **neither dismiss creation** as meaningless to God...**nor to worship it as our ultimate source of hope...**(Relate to human bodies...).

The very fact that a new earth is renewed or re-created should lead us to **neither dismiss creation** as meaningless to God...**nor to worship it** as our ultimate source of hope.

It is not the new earth that is central...it is that this new creation will be united with God again...

3. The future of eternity will bring the JOY of being united with God...as a bride finally presented to her bridegroom.

Revelation 21:2-3 (NLT)

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them.

Central to this vision of a recreated heaven and earth is that of a holy city...the New Jerusalem...the dwelling of God."

Must understand what Jerusalem had represented in the old covenant...holiness...a people set apart...dedicated to God...a place of encounter...as close as any could come to his presence.

I don't believe John is describing a literal remake of the ancient city but rather the greater reality of the arch type of all such uniting of God's glory coming down in the midst of his creation. Word for dwelling (skene) carries sound of a similar word (shekinah) = the glory of God.

How will God's presence and glory come to us?

Like a bride prepared for her husband.

Just when we might be intimidated, the first image God gives us is the most relational and intimate of all. "There is a tenderness and joyousness in the marriage image. This symbolic description is to be our first impression of God's new order!

The first image is not the splendor of wealth. (Although that is given later in this chapter), but rather that of a bride beautifully prepared...the beauty that captures and culminates the longing of ones soul.

It's the grand moment of every wedding...when all rise...the doors open...there she is... (I'll never forget that moment when I looked up and saw Leah my bride.)

Rev. 19:7

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready." Let us rejoice and be glad!!

...**When we come together and worship** God and honor his presence in our lives by His Spirit...it is merely and engagement party...the wedding awaits us!

4. The future of eternity will usher an ultimate and eternal PEACE...for all the pain and fear of life apart from God will be gone.

Revelation 21:4 (NLT)

He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

Those are words that fill my soul with life (One of the most meaningful verses to my soul)

For one of the most captivating truths about eternity is WHAT’S NOT THERE...

No more death...sorrow...crying...pain

We all know the pain that’s a part of this temporal life. Jesus a man of sorrows...acquainted with grief. Perhaps that is why God wrote this into John’s heart.

For Jesus we are told, bore the cross for the joy set before him.

That’s not all... go back to v. 1 **no more “sea.”**

Might at first seem a depressing thought...clearly symbolic...and refers only to the end of the original sea...just as it did the heavens and earth. The ancient hearer clearly understood the meaning of the old sea being seen no more...for not only was the old earth a source of toil, but the sea was a source of danger...fear. Common to ancient myths...the depths of the sea...also no compasses.

Lets look at what else is not there...

Revelation 21:22-27 (NIV)

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. ²³ The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵ On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there.

There is **no more darkness**.

Darkness is far more than the absence of light...it’s loneliness...fear.

And notice what else is told to us... it’s “gates are always open”...There’s **no security system**.

The future of eternity is ultimate peace...safeness.

Isaiah 11:6-9 “The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my

holly mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”

Could anything capture the peace of eternity more!!

The glorious new world to come is a world of peace. And peace, not power, will reign because all power struggles are settled by the ultimate source of all power...God himself.

Conclusion:

If we believe the Scriptures...if we believe **Jesus**...we believe that the **eternal will of God will prevail.**

We believe that **His glory will fill the earth**...not the glory of some mere physical force...but the **power of love**..... the power that **seeks relationship.**

What is truly good and of God...in us...will prevail.

The eternal heavenly realm will merge with a new earth.

Our world will not be enclosed by a barrier between us and God.

Our world will not be enclosed by **time...and aging...and death.**

Our world will not be enclosed by **suffering and separation.**

That is how big our ultimate eternal world really is.

In discovering that our world is that big...

Our suffering as Paul says become “short and momentary afflictions that cannot be compared to what is to come.” (Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17)

Our addictions to pleasures that consume us and never satisfy... can be loosened and let go of.

There is the ultimate satisfaction of being eternally united with the ultimate source of our desires. The voice declares that He who is from the beginning and the end...will “give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.” (v. 7)

Possible final quote...

"There was a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are - as you used to call it in the Shadow-Lands - dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things 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. -"The Last Battle," p. 183-184+

Resources: N.T. Wright Surprised by Joy; Glenn Paauw “You May Be Going to Heaven, But You Won’t Be Staying There” at <http://www.faithstreet.com/onfaith/2014/04/30/you-may-be-going-to-heaven-but-you-wont-be-staying-there/31897>

Notes:

1. Regarding the expectations of a new Heaven and New Earth, one can also consider Isaiah 34:4; 51:6; Daniel 2:44; 7:14; 7:22-26; 2 Peter 3:10-13; Gal. 4:26; Gal. 4:21-31; Heb; 12:22.

2 Peter 3:10-13 (NIV)

“...the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.”

A good presentation of how this prophetic word related to the future...particularly a “new heaven and earth” has unfolded over time in the various contexts...can be found at:

<http://christianity.stackexchange.com/questions/8094/where-in-the-bible-does-it-say-that-god-is-creating-a-new-earth>