

## What Will Eternity Be Like? (Part 2)

Series: AfterLife

Brad Bailey – May 11, 2014

### Intro

Today we are continuing our series entitled “AfterLife”...looking at what God wants us to realize about our ultimate existence...about eternal life.

I want to begin sharing a gravestone epitaph. Epitaphs usually say something about the person who chose them. This one is on a grave in London, England...and I am confident was written by overworked mother. It reads:

*“Weep not for me, friend  
Though death do us sever  
I am going to do nothing  
Forever and ever.”*

The idea of rest certainly sounds good to a lot of us ...but if you are an activist the idea of being idle forever sounds horribly boring...a little nap yes...but eternal rest or sing-alongs...doesn't sound like something so satisfying.

If we are honest, many of us may imagine heaven **without the challenges** that make us feel **alive**... without the attachments that make life **meaningful**... without the **tastes of sin** that make it **flavorful**... and without the earthly **vices** that offer us **comfort**.

I believe that says a lot more about how deprived our nature is than what eternity holds for us.

We are so attached to our little activity and vices...and comforts...that we can't imagine anything a whole new level of satisfaction.

**Similarly many people** today have become quite **cavalier** in regards to **their eternal destiny**. As they look at religious people...often uptight or self-righteous...they find consolation in their friends who try hard to have a good time and determine, “If my friends are going to be in hell...I'd rather party in hell with my friends.”

Such a cavalier approach **neither understands hell, nor heaven.**

**There is indeed a party that awaits us, but it's not in hell, it's in heaven.**

Jesus began one of his stories about heaven saying,

### Matthew 22:2 (NIV)

"The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son.

When God's reign is revealed in it's fullness... it is like a wedding feast. A wedding feast was the **event a father showed all his love and blessing into.**

It is the **party of a lifetime... days of celebration.**

Unlike modern cultures in which the son or daughter now left home...the bride would be moving in and **all would live in the father's household**...in this case...**the king's household.**

**We shouldn't be surprised that Jesus loved a party**...got in trouble for having **too much fun with sinners**...sinners who found joy of forgiveness and were willing to follow him.

> The point is that **something wonderful is at hand.**

**Jesus spoke of “this age” and “the age to come.”** In “this age” Jesus said, people marry, are given in marriage and die.” he said. In ‘that age’...the age to come... there is a whole new freedom of life. The age to come is not governed by the boundaries of this age. **The possibilities for human life are not contained in the assumption of “this age.**  
“

> Eternity could best be described by Freedom... a freedom we have never known before

**Last week we caught a glimpse** of the freedom that awaits us - **a new heaven and earth** (Rev.21:4). Let’s look further into what eternity will be like.

### **1 John 3:1-2 (NLT)**

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are! ...Dear friends, we are already God’s children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is.

**In these words** we are told that **what we can understand is limited.** It’s what **gives me caution** when we become too drawn into **speculation** and **sentimental thinking.** It’s what gives me caution about presuming that **every story of someone nearly dying** and **visiting heaven** is necessarily such an experience. **But these words also remind us that we are God’s children...**and that **we will be like Christ...**the risen Christ. And in truth God has given us some clear truth about eternity to realize.

**What will eternity be like?**

### **Romans 8:22-23 (NIV)**

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

Anybody groaning?...I may still have a lot of years on earth...but every year...I find myself more **ready for a trade in.**

**The first thing to realize is that...**

### **1. Our future eternity is one of UNRESTRICTED BODIES!**

Paul says every groan is a reminder we are not home. Listen to what he tells us...

### **2 Corinthians 5:1-5 (GW)**

We know that if the life we live here on earth is ever taken down like a tent, we still have a building from God. It is an eternal house in heaven that isn’t made by human hands. <sup>2</sup> In our present tent-like existence we sigh, since we long to put on the house we will have in heaven. <sup>3</sup> After we have put it on, we won’t be naked. <sup>4</sup> While we are in this tent, we sigh. We feel distressed because we don’t want to take off the tent, but we do want to put on the eternal house. Then {eternal} life will put an end to our mortal existence. <sup>5</sup> God has prepared us for this and has given us his Spirit to guarantee it.

I love camping... but I love coming home. That is a picture of our existence.

The tent is fine...but we can always feel it's limits...it's vulnerability...it is meant for the temporary nature of camping. But I long to return to that where I feel settled...where I can rest in a way I never can when camping.

Paul says *"We feel distressed because we don't want to take off the tent, but we do want to put on the eternal house."* In other words he **acknowledges our fear** of coming to the **end of this bodily life...of losing the tent...**yet we actually long something more.

**He goes on to help us grasp** that what lies ahead is that of **unrestricted bodies.**

### **1 Cor. 15:35-40, 42-44, 49, 54-55**

Someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" <sup>36</sup> How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. <sup>37</sup> When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. <sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body. <sup>39</sup> All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. <sup>40</sup> There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another... <sup>42</sup> So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body....<sup>49</sup> And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. ....<sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." <sup>55</sup> "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

### **What is revealed of our future bodies??**

1. **These bodies are but seeds** of what is to come. **An acorn** doesn't simply produce an acorn but an oak tree...**something of vastly greater proportion.**
2. Nature itself reveals there are different kinds of bodies...so it shouldn't surprise us at all that there will be a great distinction between our earthly bodies and our eternal bodies.
3. **Just as we have born the likeness of the earthly man ....so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven JESUS.** Our future bodies in the new heaven and earth will be like his. And what do we know of the resurrected Christ?
  - Thomas could place his hand in his side. (John 20:27)
  - He ate bread. (Luke 24:42-43)...yet he entered rooms without going through a doorway.
  - He will return as he left. (Acts 1:11)

Our bodies will be unrestricted...but not unrelated to bodies as we now perceive them. They will be the completion of all we were meant to be.

**Our bodies will be free from all that is fallen...fragile...and frustrating!**

**C.S. Lewis** - "These small and perishable bodies we now have were given to us as ponies are given to schoolboys. We must learn to manage: not that we may some day be free of horses altogether but that some day we may ride bareback, confident and rejoicing, those greater mounts, those winged, shining and world-shaking horses which perhaps even now expect us with impatience, pawing and snorting in the Kings stables." [1]

These words **don't make me decry the body** ...far from it...**they affirm that boldly life is good. But they give me joy** when I think of unrestricted bodies for some of those that have passed from these. I think of those who have left their ponies behind... Colin Braun, Hugh McMillan, Tom Taylor, Alison Hammond... little Christian Dederich....my mother...my father....children already gone... parents and grand parents we have loved...even now enjoying a new form in the present heaven, and then of such resurrection bodies.

**Joni Eareckson Tada**...who has been a **paraplegic since her teenage years**... was speaking to a **classroom of mentally handicapped children** one day...and she concluded with an intense excitement as she said..."One day we are going to get new bodies...and new minds"...and **they stood up and began cheering. And so should we.**

Our eternal future will enjoy the freedom of unrestricted bodies.

## **2. Our Future Eternity is one of UNBROKEN RELATIONSHIP.**

Another fundamental reality that is clear... is that **eternity is personal**.

A future in Christ ...with Christ...is **not absorption into some impersonal cosmic energy**...not a **drop of water returning to the ocean**.

> **It is not the end of our personhood...it is just the beginning.**

And it is not the end of relating as persons...

### **Matthew 8:11**

Jesus said "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven."

Our unlimited fellowship will also be marked by **REUNION and RECOGNITION with those we've known.**

### **Matt. 26:29**

"I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

Jesus alludes to a time of reunion

I love times when I can sit down with family or old friends for long periods of time !

> God's Word points to the same in heaven...

- At transfiguration...we see this with Moses and Elijah.
- After the resurrection, Jesus is addressed...recognized by his disciples...a temporary reunion.
- Paul describes the future of seeing him "face to face."

Fellowship marked by...**unity ACROSS SPACE AND TIME**

Do you realize who you'll be dining with? Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...all who have turned their lives towards God through out the ages...but also from every corner.

Beautiful drawing together across time and space...

### **Revelation 7:9**

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.

Article on front page of the Times, (March 9, 97) that helped capture my sense of the heritage we will ultimately share. Scientists found the remains of a Body in a limestone cave in S.W. England believed to be those of a 23 year old hunter...9,000 years old! Using DNA testing they wanted to see if anyone of longstanding families in the area might be a match. And astonishingly discovered a 42 year old school teacher living a half a mile from the burial site was the direct descendent! As the man went on to describe the amazing sense of heritage...connection...I couldn't help but think what awaits you and me!

WE ARE GOING TO DISCOVER A HERITAGE...A CONNECTION THAT SPANS BOTH SPACE AND TIME from every corner of this earth...and from every age! We are going to discover that everyone is a decendent... the human race is one race....one family.

**Joni Eareckson Tada** once explained: “My assurance of heaven is so alive that **I’ve been making dates with friends** to do all sorts of fun things once we get our new bodies. **I don’t take these appointments lightly!** [2]

And we won't be lacking true deep **joy and laughter**. If you ever get the idea that heaven may be a bit too serious...remember that the weight of the world as we know it will be gone.

- You may recall that last week we heard how **when the new heaven and earth emerge and unite**, “**He will wipe away all tears**...there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain...for the old order will be gone.” The **weight of the world will be gone**.
- Jesus tells us **parables or stories about heaven**...several describing the joy and laughter that comes .... Declaring that there is joy and laughter in heaven. (Luke 15) [3]
- **Sermon on the Mount**...his ultimate description about the Kingdom of God....Jesus teaches us about how blessing comes in paradoxical ways. He says:

### **Luke 6:21 (NIV)**

Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh.

As we have already seen...our eternal life will one day usher forth a new heaven and new earth...eternally united as one with God...it will be a completed existence in which we will have **unrestricted bodies...unbroken relationship**.

Which only leaves the question of what we will do?...In what will be a part of...what type of significance and activity we will have.

...and the final freedom to consider...

### **3. Our future eternity is one of UNQUESTIONABLE SIGNIFICANCE.**

Again...we speak of heaven as rest.... We naturally think of doing nothing...of inactivity. Rest assured, that's not the type of rest being referred to.

**Israelites were a nomadic people**... the very word “Hebrew” alludes to their **wandering without home**.

> **That's the kind of rest we have ahead... the type that comes home.**

Our eternal future indeed be one of rest...**rest from our restless wanderings**...it's a moment when our ultimate significance and purpose will be set free.

The Israelites ...were wandering on a journey to a promised land...a land described as “flowing with milk and honey.” This captures the bigger journey we are all on. The nature of rest was not that of inactivity but of finally being at how where things flowed.

You may recall that in the first Book of the Bible, Genesis, we are told how we tried to venture off on our own...and ended up facing the consequences of life separated from God...one of which was that work would become oppressive...that rather than rule over nature we would find nature ruling over us...and work would come with an oppressive nature.

So our journey is one in which we are headed to a land flowing with milk and honey.

> It is never work that is overcome...it is the flow of work rather than the futility of work.

Concluding all that is said of our eternal future...

### **Revelation 22:3-5 (NIV)**

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

So significant is our role that it is said here that “WE WILL REIGN FOREVER AND EVER.”

**Not simply rest forever, but reign forever.** Living in the light of God...as described, we will both serve his glory and share in it as we share in reigning over all that is newly created.

There is a glimpse of our eternal significance. **We will serve God, see God, and reign forever.**

That is, our lives will share in his glory. What is pictured is how our very existence will naturally honor God. We will participate in the process.

A fellow pastor shared about a sobering day when he came to visit a man during his final hours before passing. The man named Carl, was a highly respected lighting director at CBS. The man said, "This morning I woke up and in the quiet of my heart, Jesus spoke to me and he said, 'Carl, how would you like to direct a sunset?'" [4]

**And I believe there's a special part of that honor that you will bring.**

Rev. 21: The Kings of this earth will each bring their splendor to the glory and honor of heaven...that is, they will bring what they uniquely represent. **Just as it is significant that every tongue, tribe, and nation are part because the diversity reveals the fullness of God's glory who made all people...**so is their significance in your unique presence. If we were to all honor someone here today, we might say figuratively that we were “singing her praises” but in fact those praises would each be different and distinct...united in their diversity.

**At the center is God. Eternal life is life with God. The connection is not to set of ideas...but to God.**

### IN DEATH - OUR MASTER IS ON THE OTHER SIDE

A story is conveyed of a sick man turned to his doctor, as he was preparing to leave the examination room and said, "Doctor, I am afraid to die. Tell me what lies on the other side."

The doctor was holding the handle of the door; on the other side of which came a sound of scratching and whining, and as he opened the door, a dog sprang into the room and leaped on him with an eager show of gladness.

Turning to the patient, the doctor said, "Did you notice my dog? He's never been in this room before. He didn't know what was inside. He knew nothing except that his master was here, and when the door opened, he sprang in without fear. I know little of what is on the other side of death, but I do know one thing....I know my Master is there and that is enough."  
Closing invitation [5]

**Notes:**

1. From - Miracles: A Preliminary Study. Copyright 1947 C. S. Lewis

2. From John MacArthur, p 53 (title now uncertain)

3. Regarding the presence of joy in heaven, we can consider Psalm 16:11, "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." (cf. Parables revealing the joy in heaven Luke 15:7, 10, 32) likely the laughter of joyous reunions.

Consider also, Mark Buchanan regarding heaven not being boring...

Our desire for pleasure and the experience of joy come directly from God's hand. He made our taste buds, adrenaline, sex drives, and the nerve endings that convey pleasure to our brains. Likewise, our imaginations and our capacity for joy and exhilaration were made by the very God we accuse of being boring. Are we so arrogant as to imagine that human beings came up with the idea of having fun?"

From - Alcorn, Randy (2011-12-08). Heaven (Alcorn, Randy) (Kindle Locations 7210-7223). Tyndale House Publishers. Kindle Edition.

4. Pastor Jack Hayford tells this story: Gaither Gospel Series CD (track 14)

5. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." (John)... "he is the exact representation of God." (Hebrews)