

# Week 1: Longing for Heaven (and the New Heaven and New Earth)

How excited do you get when you think about Heaven and the New Earth? (scale of 1-10)

## Do you understand what lies ahead? What comes to mind when you think about heaven?

- Do you think of a place where we float around as dis-embodied, ethereal spirits or fat cherubs floating on clouds playing harps?
- Do you think of the throne room as described in Revelation and believe that is all there is ... that heaven will be a 24/7 church service, worshipping God millennia after millennia?
- Do you think of it solely as a “better place”, with no understanding of what that means?
- Do you fear death? Most men do.

We have many misunderstandings about heaven, both what the current heaven is like and what it will be like when God recreates the New Heaven, the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem.

But the Bible has much to say. I believe you will be surprised how much of it is hidden in plain sight. In the next 5 weeks we will learn what the Word clearly says as well as what it implies.

My goals in this teaching are to help you gain a better understanding of heaven (now and future) which I believe will also give us greater understanding of what Jesus meant when he taught us to pray, *“May your kingdom come, may your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”*

## I am fascinated by heaven! Why does it matter?

This Life is Short. We all have a disease called mortality. We will all die ... and go to be with God, or to be separated from him forever.

David wrote, *“Show me, O Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is nothing before you. Each man’s life is but a breath.”* Psalm 39:4,5 (NIV)

The Apostle John wrote, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you may also be where I am.”* John 14:1-3

I want to help you see your life from a much broader view ... an eternal perspective. In light of eternity our days here on earth are a blip in time.

C.S. Lewis, *“I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death ... I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others do the same.”*

## Man’s Fear of Death:

Hebrews 2:14,15 says, *“So that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”*

Paul said, *“For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.”* I Corinthians 15:25-26 NKJV. He went on to say, *“O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?”* I Corinthians 15:54-55 NKJV

I’m reminded of Isaiah’s prophesy that Jesus was coming, *“to proclaim freedom to the captives.”* Jesus came to deliver us from the fear of death. He came to give us a tangible hope to hold on to.

One reason many fear death is uncertainty of where their eternal home will be. Even many Christians, those prone to “earning their way into heaven” are uncertain if they are good enough.

The alternative is scary. But you can be certain beyond all doubt if you accept the gift of eternal life purchased by the blood of the Lamb.

Life can be hard ... discouraging, traumatic. Dreams crumble. Hope can be fleeting. **But hope is as essential as the air we breathe.** If I did not have the hope of heaven, I’m not sure I’d have any hope at all!

Anticipating heaven does not eliminate pain, but it lessens it and puts it in perspective, reminding us that suffering and death are temporary conditions. Understanding heaven helps us to see the distant shore.

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, *“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”* II Corinthians 4:17-18 NKJV

I desire to live long and healthy on this earth to do the things God has for me to do. Yet I am not afraid of death. I look forward to it. I rejoice, because my *“name is written I heaven.”* Luke 10:20

I know a great adventure awaits me after I die!

### **Three Parallel Tracks to our Study:**

- The Present Heaven
- The New Heaven, New Earth, and New Jerusalem.
- God’s desire to bring Heaven to Earth ... *“Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”* This is something I am just beginning to truly understand.

### **My primary resources are...**

- The Bible
- Book titled *Heaven*, by Randy Alcorn
- Book titled *When Heaven Invades Earth, Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles*, by Bill Johnson

I will be taking the Word of God at it’s word (as opposed to metaphorically) unless it is very clear otherwise. If I err, I’d prefer to err on side of taking the Word literally.

I will also be utilizing my holy imagination. At times I will give you my conjecture or opinion. I will try to be clear when that is and why I have formed my views. I believe I will be accurate with some things, wrong on others. If you feel that anything I say contradicts the Word, feel free to challenge me. But please hold your questions until the end of the teaching session when I will have Q&A time.

I will have little to say about end time theology. We will touch briefly on the millennium but our focus will be the eternity that lies beyond.

### **Dealing with Misconceptions:**

There are many inaccurate beliefs about heaven shaped by other religions or world beliefs, or taking Bible verses out of context. This is one danger of not understanding the Biblical theology of heaven.

One view that has led to many false beliefs is referred to as Christo-Platonism. It is the belief that the spirit realm is good and the material world is inherently bad. Plato, the Greek philosopher, believed that material things, including our human body and the earth are evil, while immaterial things such as the soul and heaven are good. This influenced many early Christian writings.

**One of Satan's favorite lies** ... Revelation 13:6 tells us the satanic beast “*opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.*” Satan need not convince us that heaven doesn't exist. He only needs to convince us it is a place of boring, unearthly existence which robs us of anticipation, joy, and hope.

### **Is Heaven Something You Are Looking Forward To?**

Think about a young bride, how much she anticipates her wedding day and her new life beyond. So it should be for us. We are betrothed to Jesus, awaiting the day of our wedding to him while he has gone to prepare a place for us.

If I told you I was going to send you to Hawaii soon, put you up in a suite in the nicest resort, for as long as you wanted to stay, invite whomever you wanted, all expenses paid ... would you be excited?

Paul writes, “*To me, to live is Christ and to die is gain ... I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far.*” Phil. 1:21

He also wrote, “*As long as we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord ... we would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.*” 2 Cor. 5:6,8.

Yet many of us see no joy in heaven. An English vicar once told a friend who asked what he expected after death, “*Well, if it comes to that, I shall enter into eternal bliss, but I really wish you wouldn't bring up such depressing subjects.*”

If that's how we feel—and many Christians do—heaven has no power to keep us on track in our faith.

John Eldredge wrote, “*Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service ... We have settled on an image of the never-ending sing-along in the sky, one hymn after another forever and ever, amen. And our heart sinks. Forever and ever? That's it? That's the good news? Then we sigh and feel guilty that we are not more spiritual.*”

**God made us to desire heaven.** Solomon, “*He has planted eternity in the human heart.*” Ecl. 3:11

Jesus promises to those who follow him a resurrected life in a glorious, resurrected body, living with a resurrected Christ on a resurrected earth.

### **The Great Theological Neglect:**

Most great tomes on theology have almost nothing about heaven. In his 900-page, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, Martin Lloyd Jones devotes less than two pages to the eternal state and the New Earth.

Most seminaries teach little or nothing. Few sermons are taught on the subject.

Imagine if you were planning to move to another land. Wouldn't you want to know what it was like?

But the Bible has a great deal to say! Yet is like a thousand-piece puzzle with the pieces scattered.

### **Is Heaven Beyond Imagining?**

Many do not think of heaven as a tangible, physical realm (Story of Marco Polo and China).

Scripture gives us reference points to help us understand. A garden, a city, a kingdom, buildings, a wedding, banquets, bodies. These are all things we are familiar with.

We are invited to use our sanctified imaginations fueled by scripture. Francis Schaeffer said, “*The Christian is the one whose imagination should fly beyond the stars.*”

If we cannot envision it, we cannot look forward to it.

## **To understand our future we must first go back to the Beginning:**

When God created the earth it says, *“Then God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good.”* Gen. 1:31. Seven times in chapter one God says, *“It was good,”* or *“very good.”*

He then went on to create man in his image and placed him on earth, in the garden, and gave him dominion over the earth. In other words, he put us in charge of his *“very good”* creation, saying, *“Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue (subjugate, govern) it.”* Gen. 1:28.

He went on to say, *“And let them have complete authority (reign, dominion) over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, and over the entire earth, and over everything that creeps and crawls on the earth.”* Gen. 1:26 AMP

Though the earth was corrupted by our sin, remnants of that goodness remain.

The New Earth will feel a lot more familiar to you than you probably think. Look around you. Imagine what all this would be like without sin and death, suffering and corruption. Recall what is most beautiful and amazing about God’s creation which you can see, then go beyond.

Imagine walking through the most beautiful place you’ve ever seen with loved ones who have gone before you. Then imagine Jesus coming toward you with a huge smile, delighted to see you.

1 Cor. 2:9 *“No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him”*—many people stop there but the verse goes on ... *“But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.* Deut. 29:29 says, *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God,”* but again, the verse goes on to say, *“But the things revealed belong to us and our children forever.”*

In Colossians 3:1 Paul says, *“Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”* This is a command. We are to be *“longing for a better country.”* (Heb. 11:16), seeking that which was lost to us when Adam sinned.

Do not worry that if you become too *heavenly minded* you will be *no earthly good*? Forget it.

C.S Lewis observed that, *“If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.”*

Every thought I have of Heaven has been fueled by scripture, then fueled my imagination.

### **From the Garden, Forward to the New Earth – Three Eras of Mankind and Earth:**

- Genesis 1 and 2 (past) ... a perfect beginning
- Revelation 21 and 22 (future) ... an even better new beginning that never ends
- Everything in between (present) ... God’s redemption of all that was lost

There are remarkable parallels between the first two chapters of the Bible, how we began (Gen. 1 & 2), and how we will spend eternity (Revelation 21 & 22).

**Your homework assignment:** Is to read those four chapters and see how God’s future plan is very similar to his original plan, only better. We’ll talk about those as we study the Present Heaven (in two weeks), and when we study the New Earth, and the New Jerusalem.

**A Parting Question:** What did Jesus mean when he prayed, *“May your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven?”*

- Why does Jesus want us to pray this?
- What is taking place in heaven that God would like to see happening on earth today?