



HEAVEN

Week 1

Praise to God for today:

Ephesians 1:8-10

Our Father in heaven, we thank you today for the wonder of Your Son, that in him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins, according to the riches of Your grace. Thank You that You are a God who lavished with Your love in Christ, in all wisdom and insight. We pray this morning make known to us the mystery of Your will, according to Your purpose, which You set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. The scope of

Your salvation in Christ truly astounds us, Father.

Prayer for the service:

Psalm 105

As we seek You this morning, Father, let our hearts rejoice. We seek You and Your strength that Your Word may go out with power. May You be present with us this morning in an undeniable way. We seek Your presence continually.

Prayer for the persecuted church:

We pray for the refugees in the Philippines and the believers in evacuation centers who have requested prayer for Your peace, so we ask You, Lord, to give them Your peace that surpasses understanding. Bring an end to this conflict. We also pray for the leaders there who are stepping out boldly to distribute Bibles and practical aid. We pray these shepherds will have Your hearts for the people. May these pastors feed the people with knowledge and understanding.

Prayer for a local church:

This morning we want to pray for Aldo, who is planting a church in Los Angeles. We pray for the Bible studies he has in homes right now.

We thank You that He is teaching the truth of the gospel and pray that You continue to give Him wisdom and grace to advance the gospel through his gift of evangelism. May You give grace to those in these Bible studies to see the truth that whoever follows You must deny self and take up their cross.

Closing:

Colossians 1

Give us ears to hear this morning, Holy Spirit, that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, God manifested in human flesh. creator of all things, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible — all things were created through him and for him. Thank You, that in Christ all things will be reconciled, whether on earth or in heaven, Jesus Christ our Lord will make all things new. May we leave this morning seeing Him in a new way.

INTRO.

As I was studying heaven yesterday, I had this moment where I wanted to do a backflip, just something to express the joy I felt. But this mortal body of mine gets motion-sick when I spin around, so you'll be spared such an embarrassing moment as a backflipping pastor.

But earlier in the week, the more I thought of the things I've heard about heaven from Christians and Christian teachers throughout my life, the more upset I became. Let me list a few of those things I've heard about heaven:

- There will be no more night.
- There will be no more oceans.
- There will be no memories of this life.
- This world is going to burn up.
- We will be disembodied spirits.
- Heaven will be like one long worship service.
- There will be no more crying.

Kiss tears of joy goodbye, I guess.

The charge that heaven sounds boring falls at our feet, because if heaven were like these caricatures, it would be more than boring. It would be frightening. As frightening as a scheduled lobotomy. Shame on us for making heaven sound worse than earth.

We seem to have some discontinuity in our thinking about God, heaven and this life.

Think of the things you like about life. Do you like adventure? Maybe you love skiing and

boating and fishing! And I bet you've heard teaching on heaven that makes it sound like there's none of that in the next life.

Do you love family get togethers? Maybe you rent a large house on a beach and gather there for a week with all your brothers and sisters and their children where you all laugh and reminisce about growing up together. Oh, but I bet you've heard preaching that told you you'll have no memory in heaven of the former things.

How many of you love nature? Have you been to the Grand Canyon lately? Have you ever traveled throughout Europe? I haven't and I don't know if I'll ever get that chance before I die. That's a shame. Oh, but I've bet you've heard a preacher or a Christian say, "Everything's gonna burn." So much for Michelangelo. "We know you worked hard on the Sistine Chapel, but we're gonna have to burn it."

How many of you love your work? Maybe you begin the year with a set of goals that you look forward to accomplishing. And at the end of the year you look over your list and find this great satisfaction in what you accomplished. Many of us find great purpose

in our work. But how many times have we heard heaven called eternal rest or that we'll cease from all work?

After someone dies, we often say, "They're in a better place," but it doesn't sound like a better place. Now you tell me. Doesn't life here on earth sound better than the way we often describe heaven?

The one true and good and beautiful thing Christians do say about heaven is that we get to see Jesus face to face. I've said it before, but the thing that makes heaven heaven is God's manifest presence. Yes, and amen. But other than that, is there anything in how we generally describe heaven that would make you want to go there?

No night, no oceans, no memory, no body? No thanks.

If you think darkness is evil in and of itself, go back to Genesis. There was nighttime before the fall. But let me get this straight. We're selling people on a heaven with no twinkling stars or radiant moon above?

I am convinced that so many Christians have such unbiblical ideas about heaven that this series will almost seem blasphemous to them.

Some of you are probably already struggling because you know that somewhere in the Bible it says that we won't need the sun because the Lord will be our light. No moon, no darkness, no stars, right?

Revelation 7:15

15 "Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.

Don't base your views of heaven on a single verse. Don't base your view of anything on a single verse. That's why it's called systematic theology. It looks at all the verses on a given subject before it draws conclusions.

When it comes to heaven, most of us are just past the stage of knowing we aren't going to be playing harps or earning our wings to become angels. I hope. Just in case, let me state it plainly, we won't be playing harps. How can we? We'll be disembodied spirits. Our fingers will slip right through the strings.

Also, humans don't become angels after they die. Every time you hear a bell ring it means someone is summoning room service... in a period piece, most likely Downton Abby.

But a lot of us have this idea that heaven is going to look like a Progressive Insurance commercial, all white and we save money, which will do us absolutely no good.

Since heaven is such a broad topic, we're going to cover it by way of answering 10 of the greatest misconceptions about it and eventually we'll cover every misconception mentioned at the outset of this sermon.

Let's start with this one.

MYTH #1 - Some people are so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.

FACT: Paul commands us to set our minds on heavenly things, not earthly things.

THE NEW SAYING: Those who are the most heavenly minded do the most earthly good.

Colossians 3:2

2 Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

EXPLANATION

If we're commanded to set our minds on things that are above, specifically heaven, then we had better dig into this book that tells us everything we want to know about heaven, but never dreamed of asking (as one author put it).

The first time you were born, you entered this world through the womb. The womb was your entry point. When you die, you enter the next world. Death is just an entry point.

APPLICATION

We should not only think about heaven often, but we should look forward to heaven as we think about it with great anticipation.

- "Since the resurrection is clearly manifested to us in Christ, it is not right that death should be so greatly dreaded." (John Calvin)

At the end of this series, not only should you never fear death again, but you should look forward to heaven and think about it more

accurately, more biblically and more joyfully, I hope. That's why the Apostle Paul said:

Philippians 1:21

21 For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Christ colors and motivates everything we do and how we do it. To die is gain, because then we get to see Him. That is the theme of this entire series: Heaven is always better than earth by far and right away. (Heaven is always better than earth, but heaven will one day be earth.)

The Second Chapter of Acts have a song and it begins, "If this were the very last day of my life I would not cry, because I've been waitin' for it. Instead I'm sure I'd jump for joy and reach the sky because I've been dying for it."

We can't feel that way with misconceptions about heaven running through our minds.

Colossians 3:4

4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

This is where all Christians are headed — heaven. This place we are supposed to think about, to set on minds upon. This is our ultimate destination.

ILLUSTRATION

If you were going on a trip somewhere wouldn't you want to know something about the place you were going?

- Grand Canyon vacation | We searched out hotels online. We looked at pictures of the Canyon and figured out which side we were visiting. We planned our route and booked a train. And when we arrived it was more breathtaking than we had even imagined. Now, we live in a fallen world, so the hotels can often be disappointing. But most of us, if we're honest, have no clear ideas about heaven. It is vague. It is clouds. It is white. Without moon and stars and oceans and work.

We need a better understanding of heaven. So that we can, as Paul wrote:

APPLICATION

2 Corinthians 5:6

6 So we are always of good courage.

The problems of this earth will grow strangely dim in light of heaven. Your fears will subside. Your problems won't seem insurmountable. Your courage will grow stronger. You will do more good the more you think about heaven.

Those who are the most heavenly minded do the most earthly good.

But it's kind of a shame. All the good things you do. Anything you created or built. It's all gonna burn.

MYTH #2 - It's all going to burn.

FACT: Everything will be made new. And everything means EVERYTHING.

THE NEW SAYING: It's all going to be made new. (I can't wait to visit Europe on the new earth.)

What was God's original plan for humanity?

Genesis 1:26

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea

and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

God's original plan for humanity was for us to rule the earth.

Genesis 1:28-31

28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." 29 And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. 30 And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

EXPLANATION

This description of the earth is actually a good description of what our final state will be like. In other words, this is a better description of heaven than what we normally hear.

After you receive your resurrected body and God makes everything new, what God had planned for humanity will come to pass.

Too many Christians have this sad and unbiblical idea that God's original plan didn't succeed. God's will is always accomplished. "God never fails to accomplish what he sets out to do. Creatures may oppose him, to be sure, but they cannot prevail." (John Frame)

Isaiah 14:24

24 The Lord of hosts has sworn:
"As I have planned,
so shall it be,
and as I have purposed,
so shall it stand,

Isaiah 46:10

10 declaring the end from the beginning
and from ancient times things not yet done,
saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
and I will accomplish all my purpose,'

Psalms 33:11

11 The counsel of the Lord stands forever,
the plans of his heart to all generations.

Now, let's look at some Scriptures that show why Genesis chapter 1 is a better description of heaven than most of the bestselling books by eight-year olds who claim to have visited there.

Ephesians 1:9-10

9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

In Jesus Christ, heaven, where all dead saints currently dwell, and earth will one day be united. They will be made one.

Colossians 1:16-20

16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

As the Creator of all things, Jesus Christ is going to redeem all things. Not just souls, but all things including souls. The scope of the cross of Jesus Christ is cosmic. It reaches across the universe. It reaches to the far realms of heaven. Christ died for you is a

stunning reality. But we have such a narrow view of the cross.

2 Peter 3:13

13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Notice what he says we're waiting for — new heavens and a new earth. Not clouds and whiteness.

Is that what you're waiting for? Or are you just waiting for it all to burn? Peter says he's waiting for the return of Genesis 1? Or do you think God is going to scrape everything and start over? But how can that be if the Bible teaches Jesus Christ is going to redeem everything?

And heavens in this verse refers to the universe. The earth in the verse refers to the earth we are presently on, which will be made new.

Revelation 21:1

21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

Let's ask some questions to help clarify this. My dad passed away when I was eleven. If my dad is saved, when he is resurrected, will he be a completely different dad or will he be my same dad made new? Well, based on the resurrected Christ, he will be the same dad made new, even though he passed away and is no more.

The word for new in both Peter's letter and John's Revelation is kainos, which means new in nature or quality. It's not the word neos which means new in time or origin. The point is that though there will be a new heavens and a new earth, there will be continuity between the old and the new. The same way there is continuity between your old body and your new resurrected body. Does that make sense? Kainos means it's the same earth made new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

It's the same idea here. When you became a Christian you became a brand new person, but there is still continuity with your old self. The same way that your resurrected self will

be new, but there will continuity with your old self. It's the same thing with the new earth.

Let's look at some further biblical evidence that there is continuity between the old earth and the new earth. And just to make this clear, the new earth will be the final heaven.

I'm not sure we think this through. The earth you're standing on right now is going to be made new. It's going to be redeemed. This very earth made new is going to be your final home. It's going to be heaven on earth. And the amazing thing is that we know from all the biblical evidence about our resurrected bodies that there will be continuity between our mortal selves and our immortal selves. It will be the same with the new earth. The implications of that are amazing and encouraging, especially if you never get to visit Europe before you die.

Daniel 7:15-18

15 "As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious, and the visions of my head alarmed me. 16 I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. 17 'These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth.

Now, what Daniel's vision is referring to here are earthly kings and earthly kingdoms.

18 But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever.'

In other words, these four earthly kingdoms are going to be replaced by God's kingdom on earth. And he's not just talking about a 1,000 reign in this case, because how long are the saints to possess this new kingdom on earth? Forever, forever and ever.

Matthew 5:5

5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

So, the next time you hear some well-meaning Christian say, "Oh, well, it's all gonna burn." Ask them, "Do the meek know?"

2 Peter 3:10

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

This is why people glibly says, "It's all gonna burn." But how are the earth and the works on

the earth going to be exposed? By judgment. Judgment is always represented by fire.

1 Corinthians 3:13

13 each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done.

But let's take Peter literally, that everything is going to burn. Why doesn't he sound as pessimistic as so many Christians who utter this thoughtless phrase, "It's all gonna burn."

2 Peter 3:13

13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

This old earth will burn, but it will also be resurrected. It will be made new, but just like a resurrected person, it will be the same but far better — as heaven is always far better than earth!

And if you still have any doubts about the continuity between the old earth and the new earth, let's go to Romans.

Romans 8:19-23

19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

Why does Paul write of creation longing?

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope

Creation itself was cursed when Adam and Eve disobeyed God.

21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

This verse right here says that creation (this earth) will be set free from its bondage just like a born again Christian. In other words, Paul is teaching the resurrection of this earth, not a replacement of this earth.

22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.

What do you have in the pains of childbirth? The anticipation of new life?

23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

How can you be redeemed when there's nothing left of you? Bodies that have

decayed and disintegrated into dust? We know that every particle of your DNA will be brought back together and you will not only be restored and resurrected, but your body will now be glorified just like the body of Jesus. You will be better than before, but you will still be you.

The same way that you're a new creation in Christ, the heaven's and the earth will be made new. They will be brought back to life. They will still be the same heavens and earth, but better than before. All the impurities of the earth will be burned away.

“According to Scripture the present world... will be cleansed of sin and re-created, reborn, renewed, made whole. While the kingdom of God is first planted spiritually in human hearts, the future blessedness is not to be spiritualized. Biblical hope, rooted in incarnation and resurrection, is creational, this-worldly, visible, physical, bodily hope. The rebirth of human beings is completed in the glorious rebirth of all creation, the New Jerusalem whose architect and builder is God himself.” (Herman Bavinck)

Revelation 21:5

5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

APPLICATION

Randy Alcorn, who wrote one of the best books on heaven published in recent years, asks, “Are mountains, rivers, oceans, stars, planets, animals, culture — arts, music, literature, sports — part of all things?”

He suggests you burn your bucket list. You don't need one.

When it comes to activities, I have a personal motto. I don't participate in anything where I might die. Sky diving, racing cars, bull riding, essential oils. No thank you. I'm saving all my extreme sports for heaven. He's going to make all things new.

If you thought sunsets were beautiful on this earth, wait until you see them on the new earth. If you loved work and purpose on this earth, wait until Jesus gives you your job description on the new earth. If you loved snorkeling on this earth, wait until you see the underwater world in the next life. You might not even need a mask or a snorkel. Who knows? Because this life is only a shadow of

what heaven on the new earth will be like — earth made glorious as it was in Genesis 1.

And earth made glorious is simply heaven.

Colossians 2:17

17 These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.

Heaven is always better than earth by far and right away.

You will one day live in a resurrected body on a new earth, because God is a restorer of all things. He restores the years the locusts have eaten and He will restore and heal the entire universe through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

How wonderful and how glorious is the Lord Jesus Christ, who not only saves your soul, but He saves your memories and your work and your projects and anything in this life that you have done for Him. You think you've painted landscapes that will be burned away never to be seen again? What parent burns the artwork of their children? What unchristian thoughts we have about God.

How does this subject speak to the unbeliever? On this earth, on our most glorious days, we get glimpses of life in heaven. They are but shadows, but God will only show us shadows because we wouldn't be able to get our minds around the wonder of it all. Also, because He has work for us to do here, so we can't be given the full picture heaven or we wouldn't want to stick around at all.

The invitation for that glory is found in what Christ has done for you by dying in your place, paying for your sins and rising again from the dead as your guarantee that all this will happen. Respond to Christ. Pray to Christ. Run to Christ. Confess your sins to Christ and He will have mercy on your soul.

Because your worst experience on this earth cannot compare to the physical misery of an eternal hell.

What does this topic say about our lives and roles in the public sphere, in this life now, both as Christians and non-Christians? Nothing in this life will be wasted. Your sorrows, your pains, your triumphs, your joys. Nothing will be wasted. Those moments in life when you have said to yourself, "I want to remember

this moment for the rest of my life,” you will have that memory more vividly in heaven than you did here. For here, your mind gives way. Your memories fade. Moments you’ve wanted to remember, you’ve forgotten. God will redeem all things in Christ.

He is the Creator of all things who will fulfill His plan for men and women to have dominion on this earth, both the men and women and this earth made new. Resurrected, glorified, imperishable beings reigning, ruling, working, eating and drinking all to the glory of God.

People from every tongue and tribe and nation. People of every shape and size. I don’t believe you will be made beautiful in the way of fashion models in heaven, but we will all see the beauty in each other as it is finally meant to be seen — Christ in you, the hope of glory.

A right view of heaven will foster greater courage and boldness to stand for Christ and His kingdom in this world. We will lend a hand to everyone Christ would lend a hand to. We will sacrifice in this short life for the sake of others as Christ would, because of His promise that nothing we do will be lost.

Heaven is always better than earth, but heaven will one day be earth.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.