



HEAVEN

Week 4 - Paradise Regained (or What Address is Your Cloud?)

Opening prayer

Prayer for the persecuted church:

CAMEROON

Kadidja, a 12-year-old girl, comes from a Muslim background, but has come to faith in Jesus and shared with her family. Her mother has since come to faith too!

Prayer for a local church:

This morning we pray for our brother Bob Warning at 412 Church in Menifee.

Closing prayer

This past week, I was working in an environment that felt like it was created just for me, pondering thoughts of the God who created us and the heaven he created for us. My daughters met me there, so I could take them to lunch. They had just come from spending time with world famous individuals. Then we went together and ate at an interplanetary rest stop. If this sounds like life on the new earth, it should. It all happened somewhere known as “the happiest place on earth.”

In biblical theology there is something known as common grace. Common grace means that God gives gifts to every human being, whether they know Him or not, and the gifts He gives them, such as music composition or baking cupcakes or designing cities, all benefit humanity. Therefore they are known as common graces.

All these common graces tell us something about our Creator and His goodness. The good things we create on this earth give us a foretaste of heaven, the new earth we are destined to live upon.

If Disneyland is anything, it is a faint shadow of a perfect earth, at least in terms of

cleanliness. Imagine Disneyland where there are no crowds and where everything is real instead of imaginary. That will give you a glimpse as to what life on a new earth will be like, even with the limited imaginations that we have.

Today, we’re going to get some further details about what eternal life will be like by way of uncovering another myth about heaven.

This morning we’ll begin with this one:

MYTH #6 - God has always lived in heaven.

FACT: Heaven is created. Heaven is a place where God chooses to dwell. (Heaven appears to be a finite, specific place.)

NEW SAYING: Wherever God fully manifests His presence (dwells), that’s heaven. (God is omnipresent, but He chooses to dwell in heaven.)

1 Kings 8:27

27 “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built!

God is not limited to any place. He cannot be contained. He is what we call omnipresent. He is everywhere at once, but He chooses to dwell in heaven.

Hebrews 11:10

10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

Heaven has not always been. It was created by God.

“Heaven seems to be the place where God manifests his presence in the most intense way.” (John Frame)

Revelation 13:6

6 It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven.

Heaven is a dwelling, a place. So, if heaven is a place and Jesus is physically in heaven, then heaven is located somewhere. Even if it's in another dimension, that's somewhere.

Luke 23:43

43 And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Sounds like somewhere.

Even when the prophet Isaiah describes the ouster of Satan from heaven, it is clear that he is thrown out of a place. You can't be thrown out of nowhere.

Isaiah 14:12-15

12 “How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!

How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!

13 You said in your heart,
‘I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God

I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the far reaches of the north;

14 I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;
I will make myself like the Most High.’

15 But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the far reaches of the pit.

This presents heaven in spatial terms — brought down, cast out, fallen.

But this is also symbolic, because when Scripture speaks of God being Most High, it's not talking about location. It's talking about God being above all things, ruler, sovereign, Lord of all.

John 14:2

2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

Preparing a place sounds like a place to me. This is the New Jerusalem that Jesus Himself is working on for us. It will come down out of heaven and heaven and earth will unite, coming together to create a new earth.

Revelation 21:2

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

It's a place, but what kind of place is it?

MYTH #7 - Heaven will be like one long worship service.

FACT: Everything God had in mind for humans in Genesis chapter 1, we will fulfill in heaven (the new earth).

NEW SAYING: Heaven will be a perfected earth.

Hebrews 13:14

14 For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.

The city that is to come is the new heaven. On the new earth there will be more than one city, if the descriptions in Revelation are literal.

Revelation 21:22-24

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. 24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,

Bonus MYTH - There is no night in heaven.

Now, the Apostle John is describing one particular city here, but he also describes a new earth upon which there are nations and kings. Nations imply other cities. This becomes an important distinction when we think about how we should understand a city that has no need of the sun or moon. We'll cover more on this in just a few minutes.

Hebrews 11:16

16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Heaven is described as both a city and a country.

In an article in the Huffington Post titled *What Makes a City Great?* they listed 10 characteristics. Now, I want to look at 3 of those characteristics very briefly.

1. **Culture** - What's interesting about culture, specifically the arts, is that some cities don't cater to the arts, so it becomes very hard for artists to thrive in such cities economically. You'll notice that some cities around the country support the arts and some do not. The city God is preparing is a place where those He gifted with creative ability, as Exodus 31 tells us, will thrive. If heaven has cities, then heaven will have culture. The arts are not just for this old earth. They will also be in the new earth.
2. **Connectedness** - Now, in this article they meant this in the social sense, that people are connected socially. If we are all one in Christ here on earth, then we will be so much more in heaven because the factor of sinfulness will be removed. Not only will we have time to reminisce together about

our lives on earth, but we'll have time to create new memories with friends and relatives and people we've only dreamt of meeting one day. Imagine a barbecue with Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Jonathan Edwards and the Apostle Paul.

3. **The Outdoors** - Great cities have great parks. Great cities are near the great outdoors. Will heaven have spectacular views and architecture? How does the Bible describe it?

Revelation 21:10

10 And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God,

First, there are mountains. So, it's fair to say the scenery in heaven will far exceed anything we've seen on this earth. If you're outdoorsy, that should come as good news.

Second, it's an actual city.

Revelation 21:22-26

22 And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. 23 And the city has no need of

sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

Now, let's read this carefully and think through it. First, it doesn't say there is no sun or moon. It just says the New Jerusalem has no need for them. That's an important distinction, because of the next verse.

24 By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it,

There are two ways this is meant. One, the light of truth guides our path on this earth, though we are hindered from following it perfectly by our sinfulness. On the new earth, we will walk by the light of truth perfectly. That's the symbolic way of understanding it, but the symbolic and the literal are not always at odds.

The literal way of understanding this is that the glory of God will give light to the New Jerusalem. However, for the nations to walk by the light of the New Jerusalem there still has to be night. How do you walk by the light of something if there is no darkness?

Remember this distinction. The New Jerusalem is on the New Earth. And the

nations on the New Earth now walk by the light of the New Jerusalem. Darkness highlights the beauty of glimmering light. Again, as I mentioned in an earlier sermon, darkness is not evil in and of itself because there was darkness before the fall, before sin entered into this world and corrupted everything from human relationships to the animal kingdom to nature itself.

25 and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.

Where does it say there will be no night? In the New Jerusalem. The implication here is that there are other cities, because there are nations.

26 They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

This speaks of functioning kingdoms and governments. It speaks of productivity and purpose. It speaks of jobs and culture and libraries and arts and events and games all in the context of God's manifest glory and presence. It speaks of a perfect world where boredom is lifted because boredom is part of the curse. Restlessness and doubt are lifted because they are the result of our sinfulness.

There are three ways of understanding Isaiah 65. One way is that it is a description of Christ's 1,000 reign on earth. Another is that it's a description of the new earth God will remake. Third, that it is a description of both.

For the purposes of this message, we're going to focus on how Isaiah speaks of the new earth as in the final heaven.

Isaiah 65:17

17 "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind.

18 But be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create;

This new earth is something we're going to be able to rejoice in forever. Rejoicing forever implies that there will be eternal happiness. The things that cause the most sorrow in this life are the result of our sinfulness. There will be no more sin on the new earth. We will possess the righteousness gifted to us by Christ. If we were all like Christ we would no longer hurt one another.

for behold, I create Jerusalem to be a joy, and her people to be a gladness.

God has created this new earth for us and we're going to find it a great joy.

Maybe you don't like cities. Well, I hope you have the idea by now that they will be both country life and city life. God will have you in an environment that is perfect for you.

- **Visiting New York for the first time**

19 I will rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in my people;

You will never wonder again if God loves you. You will never again have a doubt that God is pleased with you.

no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress.

What are the things that cause distress in this life? What are the things that cause weeping in this life, on this earth? Well, he answers that in the next verses. These things that cause distress on this earth will not be part of the new earth.

20 No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,

Miscarriages.

or an old man who does not fill out his days,

A life cut short.

for the young man shall die a hundred years old,

Every life on the New Earth will be a fulfilled life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is your guarantee that you will miss nothing.

and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.

In other words, there will be no rebellious people who prosper on the new earth.

21 They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

Do you see how this is going back to Genesis chapter 1? On the new earth there is going to be productivity. Planting vineyards and eating their fruit is just an example. You're going to have a purpose and a task. You will have things to do on the new earth. Things that you've always wanted to do. It goes beyond our imaginations.

22 They shall not build and another inhabit;
they shall not plant and another eat;

And you'll never have to worry about your home being repossessed in heaven.

for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,
and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

I don't know what kind of tasks we'll be doing, but we'll be doing things. What kind of things do you enjoy doing on this fallen earth? If you enjoy gardening, you will have a green thumb. If you enjoy cooking, you will be a master chef. If you enjoy history, imagine having access to all the history that has been lost to humanity? You'll have it all.

23 They shall not labor in vain
or bear children for calamity,
for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord,
and their descendants with them.

All your family members who know Christ will be with you. My wife had two miscarriages before we had Eden. We'll get to know these children on the new earth. Maybe they're watching our lives right now and we'll be able to discuss our lives with them. Maybe they'll tell us how proud they were of us.

I know lots of people have the concern of being in heaven with lost loved ones in hell. Now, I don't know all the answers to that

question, but my inclination is that our views of this life will be turned around and made whole. In this life, when a loved one dies we often blame God. In the next life, we'll see how God worked out everything and we will give Him glory for everything. We will have a true perspective of the sinfulness of sin in a human heart and we will never condemn God for what He has chosen to do. The only reason we condemn God now is because we don't see, not only the sinfulness of sin, but we don't see the big picture.

24 Before they call I will answer;
while they are yet speaking I will hear.

Our relationship with the Lord will be just that — a relationship that astounds us forever. This God who can give each one of us His undivided attention simultaneously now and forevermore.

25 The wolf and the lamb shall graze together;
the lion shall eat straw like the ox,
and dust shall be the serpent's food.

They shall not hurt or destroy
in all my holy mountain,"
says the Lord.

If you wonder if there are going to be animals in heaven the answer is yes. If you love cats,

which I do (don't judge me) — you'll be able to roll around with a lion.

The passage describes a new heavens and a new earth (65:17), calling upon the faithful to rejoice forever (65:18) because it will be a condition where there is no weeping, or distress (65:19). There will be no death in heaven (65:20), or any kind of violence (65:25).

Heaven is the place God created to dwell with His people, because there are certain attributes God did not share with us, such as being omnipresent. God is everywhere at once. We are not, nor will we ever be like God in this respect. God is outside of time and place. We cannot be outside of time and place, because we are not God. Heaven is clearly a created place. And it will come down and be placed on the New Earth in time and space, which brings us to our next misconception.

Life happens in stages. It's a process. We begin as these helpless little babies, utterly dependent on our parents. Ideally, we'll learn to transfer dependence from our parents to God as our Father. But just as life happens as a process, so does heaven. First, there is the

present heaven where it is better by far to be with the Lord. Then there is the bodily resurrection where we will live on the new earth. Then there's the process of learning what life will be like on the new earth and what awaits next us.

If we walk by faith now and sense the presence of Christ with us, imagine walking with Him where He can be seen. Imagine walking with Christ face to face. When you look into the face of Jesus you will never again doubt His love for you. Maybe you'll remember how much you doubted His love on earth and it will cause you to weep. But He will wipe away every tear.

As we get a foretaste of heaven through the common graces God has provided for us on this earth, we can also get a taste of hell through every moment of negation on this earth.

What does this topic say about our lives and roles in the public sphere, both as Christians and non-Christians? That we will live in a world with perfect government because it will be ruled by the Lord. That there will still be a thing known as the public square. There will be civilization. Almost everything in this world

points to this longing that everyone has for the world as it should be. Stories about the vanquishing of evil express this desire. Reporting about injustices that we would all like to see erased express this longing. Most anything you find in the public square now expresses this longing. This desire to not leave anything undone in this life expresses this longing. It shows us that death is an enemy, but again in the Christian gospel it is a defeated enemy.

Jesus will truly be the center of all things. We will not have to be diligent and examine ourselves or watch ourselves or encourage one another to continue on in the faith, because He will be there as the reigning, ruling, visible image of the invisible God.

And we will all be in perfect unity because we will all obey Him perfectly. We will truly want the best for each other. We will truly rejoice when someone else advances beyond us. God will give us the desires of our hearts and our desires will be His. We will want what He wants with all sincerity.

There will be complete racial harmony and true diversity. We will see each other the way God meant for us to be seen. He created the

diversity of the races and we will finally see that black is beautiful (just as the 1960's proclaimed) and that red and yellow and brown and beige and tan and white won't just be precious in His sight. They will be precious in our sight.

But even now, on this earth we as Christians should be expressing and living out these sentiments.

In our workplaces, we should reflect the relationships we will one day have with our employers and employees in heaven. Wait! Work in heaven! Work was part of the original plan, so what God plans will be fulfilled. God's plans are never thwarted. If you are to have purpose, you will have to do something. You will have to express your love for God fully, not just by singing chorus for eternity. There will be people in different positions in heaven. That is why the language of those who are least in the kingdom of heaven is used. There cannot be the least in the kingdom if there are not the greater in the kingdom.

“One of the chief pleasures of this life, as of the next, is the mutual sharing of different excellences, the pleasure of looking up to

someone who is better than we are at something and learning from him or her. The resentment expressed in saying, "I'm just as good as you are" is hellish, not heavenly. (By the way, that is one sentence that always means the opposite of what it says. No one who says it believes it.)” (Peter Kreff)

This is why Jesus tells us to store up treasures in heaven, because that's what we're all building toward.

But first and foremost, it is not the things we do that we take pleasure in, but the One we do them for.

“God takes pleasure in the pleasure that we have in him.” (John Piper)