



Rethinking Life Here & After

## February 1, 2026

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**BIG IDEA** – Jesus talked about heaven as a real physical place, so it is 100% real. But Jesus did not speak of heaven as a destination as much as he did a journey that starts here and continues on in eternity.

**Scripture Focus** – One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!” But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” Then he said, “**Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.** And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.” **Luke 23:39–43b**

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**In our new series “Heaven’s Here?” we’ll talk about the reality of heaven for sure, but we’ll also talk about what we are doing with our life until we get there!**

Most people’s vision of Heaven is unbiblical...and honestly, pretty uninspiring. Cultural ideas of the afterlife are often thin, flimsy, and just plain wrong. Jesus doesn’t leave us guessing. **He tells us what’s real, what’s coming, and why that future can fill our present life with purpose and a steady hope.** Let’s trade out wishful thinking for truth found in the words of Christ—and rediscover a Heaven that’s vibrant, physical, and worth longing for. **Spread the word, heaven is not clouds, harps, and eternal naps!**



**The good news - Belief in HEAVEN is up!**

**Pew Research says 70% of U.S. adults say they believe in an afterlife. Ryan Burge, a Christian statistician says it's more like 82%.**



**The not-so-good-news is what is currently believed about heaven and the afterlife. It is pretty wonky.**

**Pearly gates? Do we get angel wings? Are we all wearing white robes? And what about PETS? – dogs maybe, cats, not a chance in H – E – double hockey sticks.**

**Here's some of the things people wish for or believe about heaven:**

- Pets in heaven.
- Exact activities, like sports, hobbies, separate culture food spots.
- Everyone becomes an angel!
- **All our loved ones** are there waiting for us.

- Folks that have “gone on” are watching over us and even can help guide us to making good decisions.

**It's like we are stuck in this fantasy cycle of wishes and warm fuzzies when it comes to heaven.**



It's a Wonderful Life w/ Clarence Oddbody, George Bailey | Twilight Zone: The Hunt, where Hyder and Rip are almost tricked into entering hell.

Entertainment & media has not helped much. They keep crankin' out “good thoughts” type nonsense about heaven.



### **SLIDE 8 DIG DEEPER: Heavenly Movies and Shows**

- **It's a Wonderful Life** – [Do angels really have wings? Yes, some do!](#)
- **Heaven Can Wait** – Can a Los Angeles Rams quarterback be mistakenly taken to heaven and returned to Earth in the body of a corporate giant?
- **The Shack** – Would God really invite someone to a shack where their daughter was murdered, to meet with God the Father, Jesus, the Son and the Holy Spirit?
- **Eternity** – Can one really be granted a special opportunity to explore Eternities with one or the other former husband?
- The Good Place – Can we really lie or cheat our way into heaven even when confronted by the truth that we were not a good person?
- Upload – Is heaven really just a virtual reality we can be uploaded to?
- Touched by an Angel – Are angels really sent to Earth to help individuals in need?

And since we really love these feel-good moments, we don't really challenge them even when we talk about them with friends and family.

What does God want us to know about the reality of heaven, but keep in mind that it's not a destination - It's a continuation of a journey.

This series isn't so much about us getting into heaven as it is getting heaven into us here.

Heaven isn't the end goal and Earth isn't just the waiting room.

Let's spend today talking about re-thinking life here!

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### **First of all, let's get this straight!**

Jesus believed, taught and lived out this as fact:

#### **HEAVEN IS A REAL PLACE.**

Heaven is not just an ethereal fantasy, nor a myth we just tell people to make them feel better.

Jesus had a conversation with two criminals while torturously dying by hanging on cross. The soldiers started it by saying "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" This is when one criminal joins in with the soldiers. He is crass and mocking as well. The other criminal is different. He is reflecting on his life, taking the last few moments to realize that he was staring down death and what he would surely be facing in the afterlife.



One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!” But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

**Luke 23:39–43 NLT**

The man, who was not only facing just judgement for his crimes, but he was also facing the ultimate fear of every human being – the end of life itself.

He requested of Jesus to remember him when he entered into his own kingdom. Somewhere, somehow this man heard about the Messiah and believed that Jesus was the real deal. He also believed that Jesus had his own kingdom!

Jesus spoke back the man a solemn promise that has rattled our beliefs of God, and of heaven ever since.

“Truly, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Jesus promised the thief that he would be welcomed into God's presence, secured by Jesus himself, not earned by the thief.

The man believed that the kingdom Jesus spoke of was real.

Even though “paradise” isn’t the completed, promised eternal heaven with the newly resurrected earth, it was a place of fully conscious comfort while waiting.

The reality of heaven is this: Heaven is very physical realm where resurrected believers will live on a renewed Earth.

**Randy Alcorn, in his book, Heaven, says this:**

“God’s plan is a **resurrected life, in resurrected bodies, with the resurrected Christ, on a resurrected Earth.**”



## **SLIDE 12 DIG DEEPER: Randy Alcorn’s Book: HEAVEN**

**He writes about:**

- **Present Heaven vs. Eternal Heaven**
    - Present Heaven: where believers go when they die now.
    - Eternal Heaven: the **New Earth** after resurrection and final judgment.
  - **Physical New Earth**
    - Real place, real bodies, real culture: work, eating, art, music, nations, nature, exploration.
  - **Continuity, not replacement**
    - Our current world is renewed, not scrapped.
    - Our present lives, choices, and faithfulness echo into the age to come.
  - **Resurrection and rewards**
    - Bodily resurrection is central.
    - Believers are rewarded with real responsibilities and joy in God’s kingdom.
  - **Living now in light of then**
    - A clear view of Heaven **should make us more earthly good**, not less: sacrificial love, holiness, evangelism, and hope in suffering.
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When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. **But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.**” Jesus told her, “**Your brother will rise again.**” “Yes,” Martha said, “**he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.**” Jesus told her, “**I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die.** Do you believe this, Martha?” “Yes, Lord,” she told him. “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.” **John 11:20-27 NLT**

**But Martha did NOT really believe what Jesus said...**

Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. “**Roll the stone aside,**” Jesus told them. But **Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested,** “**Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.**” Jesus responded, “**Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?**” **John 11:38-40 NLT**

Most of us, even as followers of Jesus, believe like Martha believed – we’ll believe it AFTER we have experienced it!

Yeah-yeah, sure-sure – one day everyone goes somewhere, it could be heaven?

One more reality and promise from Jesus:

Jesus, talking with his disciples in the upper room, the last supper, before leaving for the garden where he was arrested.



“Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. **John 14:1-3 NLT**

**For this series Heaven's Here? I want to setup where we are going with all this.**

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Consider this: We can be living like Kingdom occupants now, not just someday.

Jesus' conversations about heaven sets up where all of life in its finality for humans, heaven and earth will be resurrected to something new.

It's a renewed reset of Eden, everything will be brand new.

But then is not now, not yet!

God didn't create us to escape earth, but to live our lives in the middle of the conflict, the war, the sin, the brokenness.

For those before Jesus, to experience the longing and ache of the coming messiah. For us, after Jesus, is to experience the miracles of

mercy in forgiveness and the beautiful restoration of a life as it should be.

It is for us to do the impossible even in pain and through suffering.

To live as heaven's agents here – where others can see the mercy, love and glory of God through our lives.

It's not living in fear and avoiding culture until we get outta here.

It's living these critical, wonder-filled moments with purpose while we are here.

We are here as witnesses and ambassadors.

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## REFLECTIONS

Think of us as “an embodied preview” of the Kingdom of God, living billboards of His grace.

IF we want people to believe in Jesus and believe in what really happens in heaven, let's give folks the experience of having heaven touch their life every time they see us, talk with us, hang out with us or eat with us.

Because, where we go, Jesus shows up to shine through us – even in the darkest, miserable experiences of what life has dished out.

Heaven's Here is simply this: as Jesus said to his disciples after he was brought back from death, hell and the grave –

Again he said, “Peace be with you. **As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.**” **John 20:21 NLT**

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## APPLICATION

“Heaven's Here?” Rethinking Life Here

- **Believe Jesus before you see the proof.**

- Identify one place where you've been saying, *"I'll believe it when I see it."*
- Pray and act in obedience **before** circumstances change—trusting Jesus' word, not your senses.
- **Stop treating heaven as an escape plan—start living like a Kingdom occupant now!**
  - Heaven is real and coming, but **Jesus never taught us to disengage from life** while we wait.
  - If heaven is physical, resurrected, and purposeful, then how we live here actually matters.
  - Am I living like Earth is disposable—or like it's being redeemed?
- **Let your life become an “embodied preview” of the Kingdom.**
  - **Since heaven is real**, people should get a *taste* of it when they encounter us.
  - What do people experience about Jesus, or even heaven, when they experience me?

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- Prayer for those who need Heaven to touch their earth – their life, family, friends, neighborhood.
  - Prayer for boldness, not for confrontation but of obedience.
  - Prayer for faith because of weariness and non-stop issues that just keep coming.
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## SCRIPTURES

### Luke 23:39–43 NLT

One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!” But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

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brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask." Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again." "Yes," Martha said, "he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day." Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?" "Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God."

### **John 11:38-40 NLT**

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### **John 14:1-3 NLT**

"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am.

### **John 20:21 NLT**

Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you."



## **DIG DEEPER NOTES**



### **Movies and shows about the afterlife**

- **It's a Wonderful Life** — Guardian-angel framework (Clarence is sent from heaven to intervene).
- **What Dreams May Come** — Highly visual heaven/hell journey tied to love, grief, and rescue.
- **Heaven Can Wait** — Comedy-drama built around a "mistakenly taken to heaven" premise and a second chance on earth.
- **Defending Your Life** — Afterlife courtroom where your life is reviewed (fear vs. courage) to determine what comes next.

- **Miracles from Heaven** — Faith-based drama centered on a near-death experience and claims of heaven.
- **Heaven Is for Real** — Faith-based film built around a child's claimed visit to heaven (near-death experience).
- **Eternity** — Afterlife romantic comedy: a woman must choose where (and with whom) to spend eternity.
- **City of Angels** — Angel/human romance (more “angelic/heavenly beings” than a heaven tour, but it's a staple in the genre).
- **The Shack** — Grief narrative with an extended spiritual encounter that includes a glimpse of heaven.

### TV shows

- **The Good Place** — Satire about who “belongs” in a heaven-like afterlife and what goodness actually is.
- **Highway to Heaven** — “Angel sent to Earth” episodic missions (classic network-era take).
- **Touched by an Angel** — Angels delivering guidance/messages from God to people at crossroads.
- **Upload** — A corporate, virtual “digital heaven” after death; plays like a modern parable about commodifying eternity.
- **Dead Like Me** — Afterlife-adjacent: grim reapers collecting souls before death (not “heaven,” but very afterlife-focused).



### Belief in the afterlife – [Pew Research](#).

#### Global snapshot

- **35-country median: 64%** say there is **definitely or probably “life after death.”**
- In that same dataset, belief ranges from **85% (Indonesia)** to **38% (Sweden)**.
- **U.S.: 70%** say there is definitely/probably life after death (in this global comparison).

#### United States

From Pew Research Center's **2023–24 Religious Landscape Study**:

- **70%** of U.S. adults say they believe in **an afterlife (heaven, hell, or both)**.
- Related specifics in the same Pew reporting: **67%** say they believe in **heaven** and **55%** in **hell**.

- Among **religiously unaffiliated** Americans (“nones”), **42%** still say there is definitely/probably life after death.

### Another global benchmark

- A **Gallup International** global survey report (2023 release) summarized: **57%** believe there is **life after death**, **23%** say **nothing happens**, and **15%** are **unsure**.
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### What people believe happens in heaven?

1. People are **free from suffering** — ~94.5% of heaven-believers
  2. People are **reunited with loved ones** who died previously — ~89.0%
  3. People can **meet God** — ~84.9%
  4. People have **perfectly healthy bodies** — ~82.2%
  5. People are **reunited with pets/animals they knew on Earth** — ~65.8%
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### So, what do people believe hell is like?

Pew asked **only people who said they believe in hell** (62% of U.S. adults in that survey) whether hell is “definitely/probably” like each of **five** traits, and reported the results as a % of *all* U.S. adults.

1. **Experience psychological suffering** — ~85.5%
  2. **Become aware of the suffering they created in the world** — ~85.5%
  3. **Experience physical suffering** — ~82.3%
  4. **Cannot have a relationship with God** — ~79.0%
  5. **Can meet Satan** — ~71.0%
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### What the Bible actually says about heaven.

The Bible gives real descriptions, but it’s more precise about **who/what will be there** and **what life will be like** than it is about speculative details. The Bible speaks about **two related realities**:

1. **The present heaven** (God's presence now; where believers are with Christ after death, awaiting resurrection).
2. **The final state** (resurrection + **new heavens and new earth**; God dwelling with His people in a renewed creation).

Below are the clearest “direct” texts and what they actually say.

## What the Bible most clearly describes

### 1) God's presence with His people, unhindered

- God “dwells” with His people; they see Him; worship is direct, not distant.
  - **Revelation 21:3–4; 22:3–4**
  - **Matthew 5:8**
  - **1 John 3:2**

### 2) No death, grief, crying, or pain

- This is one of the most explicit promises in Scripture about the final state.
  - **Revelation 21:4**
  - (Echoed in the OT hope) **Isaiah 25:8**

### 3) Resurrection bodies and embodied life

- The Christian hope is not floating forever; it's **bodily resurrection** and an embodied future.
  - **1 Corinthians 15:42–55** (imperishable, glorious, powerful; “raised” body)
  - **Philippians 3:20–21** (our bodies transformed like Christ's)
  - **Romans 8:18–25** (creation renewed; “redemption of our bodies”)

### 4) A renewed creation: “new heavens and new earth”

- The final picture is not an escape from creation but creation restored, with God's city descending.
  - **Revelation 21:1–2** (new heaven/new earth; New Jerusalem comes down)
  - **2 Peter 3:13**
  - **Isaiah 65:17; 66:22**

### 5) Life characterized by righteousness, joy, service, and reigning with Christ

- Righteousness “dwells” there; God's people serve and reign.
  - **2 Peter 3:13**
  - **Revelation 22:3, 5**

- **2 Timothy 2:12**
- **Matthew 25:21, 23** (faithfulness leading to greater stewardship/joy)

### What Scripture says about the “present heaven” (before resurrection)

When believers die, they are with Christ—conscious, comforted, awaiting the resurrection.

- **Luke 23:43** (“Today you will be with me in paradise”)
- **Philippians 1:21–23** (“depart and be with Christ...”)
- **2 Corinthians 5:6–8** (“away from the body... at home with the Lord”)
- **Revelation 6:9–11** (souls awaiting final vindication)

### “What will it be like?” details Scripture actually gives

These are the most direct descriptive elements:

- **A city / dwelling place prepared by God: John 14:2–3; Hebrews 11:10, 16; Revelation 21:2**
- **No temple needed because God’s presence fills all: Revelation 21:22**
- **No need of sun/moon for light in the city because of God’s glory: Revelation 21:23; 22:5**
- **The river of life and tree of life (healing/restoration imagery): Revelation 22:1–2; Genesis 2:9 (background)**
- **Nations/peoples, redeemed culture brought in, and peace** (careful: symbolic language, but still “real”): **Revelation 21:24–26**

### Things people often claim that the Bible is less explicit about

- **Pets in heaven:** Scripture is not explicit (people infer from creation renewal, but it's not directly stated).
- **Exact activities (sports, hobbies, etc.):** not specified; what is clear is worship, service, joy, reigning, and embodied life.
- **“We become angels”:** the Bible does not teach this; humans are resurrected humans. (Angels are distinct beings.) **1 Corinthians 15; Hebrews 2:5–8.**

### If you want the most direct discussion about heaven:

- **Revelation 21–22**
- **1 Corinthians 15**
- **Romans 8:18–25**
- **John 14:1–3**
- **2 Corinthians 5:1–10**
- **Philippians 3:20–21**

- Isaiah 25; Isaiah 65:17–25
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## Common misconceptions vs. what the text actually says

### 1) “Heaven is the end goal; Earth is just the waiting room.”

**Text actually says:** The end goal is **resurrection** and a **renewed creation**—“new heavens and new earth”—with God dwelling with His people.

**Key texts:** Revelation 21:1–5; Romans 8:18–25; 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, 42–55; 2 Peter 3:13.

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### 2) “The Christian hope is escape from the world.”

**Text actually says:** Jesus prays **not** that we’d be taken out of the world, but kept faithful **in** it, on mission.

**Key texts:** John 17:15–18; Matthew 5:13–16; Philippians 2:14–16.

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### 3) “If this world is evil, it doesn’t matter what we do here.”

**Text actually says:** Faithfulness here matters because we will give account; our work is not pointless; we store treasure; and our “occupy” is stewardship.

**Key texts:** 2 Corinthians 5:9–10; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Matthew 6:19–21; Luke 19:11–27; Colossians 3:23–24.

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### 4) “God is done with creation; He’s scrapping it.”

**Text actually says:** God **renews** creation; redemption is restoration, not disposal.

**Key texts:** Romans 8:19–22; Acts 3:21 (“restoration of all things”); Revelation 21:5.

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### 5) “Heaven is mostly clouds, harps, and floating.”

**Text actually says:** The Bible’s imagery is a **city, nations, reigning, serving, feasting**, and embodied life—worship and meaningful vocation.

**Key texts:** Revelation 21–22; Isaiah 25:6–9; Revelation 22:3–5; Luke 14:15; Matthew 8:11.

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#### 6) “We become angels.”

**Text actually says:** Humans remain human—**raised** and transformed; angels are distinct.

**Key texts:** 1 Corinthians 15; Philippians 3:20–21; Hebrews 2:5–8.

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#### 7) “The real spiritual life is private; mission is optional.”

**Text actually says:** The church is sent—“as the Father sent Me, I send you.” Mission is identity, not an add-on.

**Key texts:** John 20:21; Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:8; 1 Peter 2:9–12.

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#### 8) “Only ‘spiritual stuff’ matters; ordinary work doesn’t.”

**Text actually says:** Ordinary work can be worship; faithfulness in the “little” is training for greater stewardship.

**Key texts:** Colossians 3:23–24; 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12; Luke 16:10; Matthew 25:14–23.

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#### 9) “If I’m suffering, God wants me out of here ASAP.”

**Text actually says:** Suffering is not good, but God uses it—produces endurance, forms Christlikeness, and becomes witness; we groan with hope, not denial.

**Key texts:** Romans 5:3–5; James 1:2–4; 2 Corinthians 4:16–18; Romans 8:23–25; 1 Peter 1:6–7.

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#### 10) “End-times hope means disengage from culture.”

**Text actually says:** Future hope fuels present faithfulness—light, salt, good works, and patient endurance.

**Key texts:** Matthew 5:13–16; Titus 2:11–14; 2 Peter 3:11–13; Revelation 14:12.

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**11) “Heaven talk should make me less invested in people now.”**

**Text actually says:** Eternal destiny raises the stakes of love, justice, evangelism, mercy, and discipleship in the present.

**Key texts:** 2 Corinthians 5:18–20; Jude 22–23; Matthew 9:36–38; Micah 6:8; James 1:27.

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**12) “The Bible promises detailed ‘four guide’ information about heaven.”**

**Text actually says:** Scripture gives enough to anchor hope (God's presence, no death, resurrection, new creation) and leaves many curiosities unanswered.

**Key texts:** 1 Corinthians 2:9; 1 John 3:2; Deuteronomy 29:29 (principle); Revelation 21–22 (core picture).