

New Heaven – New Earth
Pastor Joe Oakley
GFC – 3/17/19

We're in a sermon series called All Things New. It's based on what God said in Revelation 21:5 - *Behold, I make all things new.*

A few verses before that, in Revelation 21:1, John wrote this: *I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.*

My sermon today is called New Heaven – New Earth.

Did you know that heaven and earth as they currently exist will pass away and there will be a new heaven and a new earth? Many people don't know that because of a wrong concept of heaven. They believe it's a place where you float in the clouds strumming a harp. Or they believe it will be a church service that goes on and on forever. For that reason – some people think that heaven will be boring.

Let me begin today by saying this: heaven will never be boring. Heaven will be the most fascinating, exciting, fun, interesting, fulfilling place that ever existed!

Most of us don't know much about heaven. Would it surprise you that there are three heavens? At the risk of confusing you – let me tell you first about the three heavens I won't be preaching on today.

Those are the heavens that Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 12:2-4

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know — God knows. And I know that this man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows — was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

Paul was caught up to the third heaven – what does that mean? In the Bible – three heavens are mentioned.

The first heaven is our atmosphere where the clouds are.

The second heaven is space where the stars are.

The third heaven is where God dwells.

This is where Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. This is where believers go when they die.

I'm not preaching on that today – I'm not preaching on heaven in relationship to space. I'm preaching on heaven in relationship to time.

So, I'm preaching on these three heavens: the heaven that was – the heaven that is – and the heaven that will be.

The heaven that was is the place where Old Testament believers went.
The heaven that is now is the place where believers go after they die.

Believers who died in Old Testament times went one place.
Believers who die now go to another place – what we call heaven now.
And in the end, there will be a new heaven and a new earth.
That’s the three heavens we’re examining today.

First – let’s look at where Old Testament believers went after death.

1- The First Heaven was called Paradise, or Abraham’s Bosom

Have you ever wondered where Jesus went for the 3 days between His crucifixion and resurrection? His body was in the tomb – but where was His spirit? In Matthew 12:40-41 Jesus said -

As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

Does that just mean He was buried in the earth? Or does it mean something else?

Jesus told the thief on the cross who believed in Him - Luke 23:43 - *Today you will be with Me in Paradise.* But Ephesians 4:8-10 says:

When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men. (Now this, "He ascended" — what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things.)

Where did Jesus descend to and what did He do? Some teach that He went to hell and suffered for three days before He finally defeated Satan. I don’t believe that. When Jesus said “It is finished” on the cross – I believe it was finished. Nothing could be added to His shed blood on the cross. Jesus defeated Satan on the cross, not in hell. Colossians 2:15 says:

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

So, what happened between the cross and the resurrection? Wuest’s Commentary says that Jesus went to the place of the righteous dead. That place is called paradise, or Abraham’ bosom. 1 Peter 3:18-19 tells us what He did there:

For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison.

Jesus preached to those who were there.

This word for preach is not the word for evangelism – but the word for proclaim. Jesus was not giving people a second chance to get saved – but He proclaimed the truth of who He was to those who died before He was born. Some of these were unbelievers and some died in faith looking forward to the Messiah. He proclaimed to them that He was indeed the Messiah.

In the Old Testament, the place of the dead is called Sheol. Vine's Expository Dictionary says that Sheol is a place of conscious existence after death, one side of which is occupied by the suffering, unrighteous dead separated by a great chasm from the other side peopled by the righteous dead enjoying their reward.

Jesus taught this in Luke 16:22-23 when He told the story of a rich man and a beggar who both died.

So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

So, we see here that before Christ's resurrection – people who died physically still existed – and they went to one of two places: the righteous went to a place of rest and comfort called Paradise, or Abraham's Bosom – and the wicked went to a place of torment called Hades.

So, when Old Testament believers died – they did not go to heaven as we know it – but to Paradise. When Jesus died – He went to Paradise and proclaimed the truth of who He was to them. Then they resurrected and ascended into heaven. This is seen in Matthew 27:50-53

And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, He gave up His spirit. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people.

Out came the Old Testament believers – from Adam and Eve to Noah to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – to David – all the way to John the Baptist - who came out holding his head under his arm! Just kidding!

Ever since the ascension of Jesus into heaven – Paradise is now in heaven where God dwells. Remember we saw earlier – that Paul was caught up into the third heaven and he said he was caught up to paradise. When believers die now – they go straight to heaven where God dwells.

2- The Heaven that exists now is called the Intermediate Heaven

The word intermediate means in between and transitional. The place we call heaven now exists for the time between Paradise and the New Heaven.

God is there. His throne is there. Jesus is there. All believers who've died are there. For those of us who have our names in the Lamb's book of life – when we die, we will go there. 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 says:

We are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. In the Bible – life and death are looked at very differently from how most people look at them.

God sees all people who've ever lived alive – either in the body or out of the body. Those who are in the body are alive on earth now. Those who are out of the body are those we say are dead.

In reality – their bodies are dead and buried – but those people are very much alive. And those who are believers are present with the Lord – that's called heaven. And those who don't believe are absent from the Lord – that's called hell.

Here's the thing – the heaven that people go to now is not the heaven that we will be in forever. That's why it's called the intermediate heaven. This heaven is not a place where we float around on clouds. The book of Hebrews describes it as a city. Hebrews 13:14 says:

For here we have no permanent city, but we are looking for the one which is to come.

A city is a real place with buildings and streets and people involved in real activities, events and culture. Hebrews also describes heaven as a country. Hebrews 11:13-16 says:

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth... But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

A country has territories and rulers and citizens of all kinds. It includes people from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues. But as awesome as heaven is, the Bible teaches that –

3- There will be a New Heaven and a New Earth

In Isaiah 65:17 God said - *Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.* He also said in Isaiah 66:22

“For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the Lord, “So shall your descendants and your name remain.”

God promised to make a new heaven and a new earth and He promised they would remain forever – along with the believers who live there. New Testament believers looked forward to this. 2 Peter 3:13 says:

But in keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.

The Apostle John actually received a vision of it in Revelation 21:1

I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away.

Heaven and earth as they exist now will eventually be no more. And get this: ultimately – heaven will be on the new earth!

Right now, heaven is full of believers who are singing a new song to Jesus Christ – the Lamb of God. Revelation 5:9-10 says:

They sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth."

Make sure you understand this! Where are these people? In heaven! But where do they say they will reign in the future? In heaven? NO! On earth! These are people who are in heaven now speaking of a future time when there will be a new heaven and a new earth. And one day all believers will reign on the earth!

People in the time of Christ believed that the kingdom of God would come to the earth then and the Messiah would rule the earth and they would rule with Him. They had their facts right – they just had the timing wrong. That's why we read in the Parable of the Minas in Luke 19:11

He spoke another parable, because He was near Jerusalem and because they thought the kingdom of God would appear immediately.

They did not understand that Jesus came the first time as a suffering Servant – but He's coming back as a conquering King!

He came the first time as the Lamb that was slain – but He's coming back as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah!

He came the first time submitted to kings in earthly authority – but He's coming back as King of Kings and Lord of Lords! And we will reign with Him on the earth!

Jude 14-15 says: *See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of His holy ones to judge everyone.*

Back to the Parable of the Minas – the Lord will reward our faithfulness in this life by giving us cities to rule over on the New Earth. Luke 19:16-19 says:

Then came the first, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned ten minas.' And He said to him, 'Well done, good servant; because you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities.' And the second came, saying, 'Master, your mina has earned five minas.' Likewise He said to him, 'You also be over five cities.'

In the New Heaven on the New Earth we will be given positions of authority based on our faithfulness on this earth. 1 Corinthians 6:2-3 says:

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we will judge angels?

We will reign on Earth under the direction and leadership of Jesus Christ!

This makes sense when you realize that the first two chapters of the Bible and the last two chapters of the Bible are mirror images of each other. Human history began in paradise - the Garden of Eden. And it will all end in paradise - the New Jerusalem. Everything in between is about restoration!

What began in Genesis will be brought to completion in Revelation. In chapter 3 of Genesis, man fell and was kicked out of paradise. The whole rest of the Bible is about God restoring man to His original intent - which is found in Genesis 1:26

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth..."

We were created to reflect the image of God and to rule on the earth. Sin messed that up... but Jesus came to restore God's purposes. He will restore us to the image of God and to our place of ruling.

Yes, He is conforming us into His image now - but none of us will totally get there until we are in His presence. 1 John 3:2 says:

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

God originally created us to rule and reign on earth. Sin messed that up. But we will rule and reign with God on the new Earth!

Let me compare for you what happened at the beginning in Genesis and what happens in the end in Revelation.

IN FIRST PARADISE IN GENESIS

Heavens & earth created
 Sun created
 Night established
 Man was tempted and sinned
 The curse announced
 Death enters history
 Sorrow & pain began
 Man driven from paradise

IN NEW PARADISE IN REVELATION

New heavens & new earth
 No need for the sun
 No night there
 No temptation and no sin
 No more curse
 No more death
 No more tears or pain
 Man restored to paradise

The New Earth will be the earth made perfect again.
 Everything good about earth will exist – everything bad will pass away.
 There will be no sin, no temptation, no Devil.
 There will be no pain, no sickness, no death.
 There will be no problems, no accidents, no traffic jams.

There will be no jerks at work.
 No road rage or old age.
 No bad news or sad news.
 No recession or oppression.
 No getting provoked and no going broke.

There will be absolutely nothing to complain about! Instead – there will be joy and fulfillment and fun! You will miss nothing about life on earth because it will be infinitely better there!

The best day you've had on earth will be nothing compared to your life on the New Earth!

The most fulfilling job you've ever had will be boring compared to ruling and reigning with Christ!

The most beautiful scenery you've ever seen on earth will seem drab compared to the beauty of the New Earth!

The most fun you've ever had on earth will be dull compared to the excitement you will have on the New Earth!

The closest relationship you've had on earth will seem distant compared to the relationships you will have on the New Earth!

The best house you've ever lived in on earth will seem like a shack compared to your mansion in heaven!

The best meal you've ever eaten on earth will seem tasteless compared to the meal you will eat at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

The most beautiful music you've ever heard on earth will seem like noise compared to the music in heaven! On the New Earth we'll be able to make music with Bach and Mozart and sing Handel's Messiah with Handel directing the choir!

On the New Earth, we can talk about faith with Doubting Thomas or we can talk about football with Tom Landry.

We can talk about God with Father Abraham or we can talk about the Civil War with Abraham Lincoln.

We can talk doctrine with the Apostle Paul or hear the rest of the story from Paul Harvey.

We can talk reformation with Martin Luther and Civil Rights with Martin Luther King.

And best of all – we'll be able to spend time with Jesus!

My point is this – what you love here you will love there only it will be incomparably better! Heaven will never be boring! Are you looking forward to it? And are you sure you're going there?