

The Next Life, Part 2: *Living In Light of Heaven, Pt. 3*

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Revelation 21

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Good morning New Song!

I want to talk to you again today about heaven. What we started three weeks ago, we will conclude next weekend, in what may be the most important message of the series, because we'll be talking about *How to Prepare for Heaven*.

When I was a college swimmer, we started training for the National Championships the first week of school. Nationals are what swimmers train for. If we swept our dual meet season, that was great, if we won our league championships, that was even better, but the only swims that really mattered were the ones done at the National Championships. Those three days were the most important days on our calendars. Everything was geared for Nationals. Likewise, for someone who believes in heaven, it just makes sense that everything we do from now until then is only leading up to then. So that's what next weekend is about.

Like last weekend, we're going to be doing some learning. Last weekend, many of you were ready to do some learning. Are you ready today? If so, say, "I'm ready."

Last weekend the guarantee was, you'd leave knowing more than what you came in knowing. This weekend, I've got two guarantees:

1. You will leave here knowing more than you do now.
2. You will leave here wishing you knew even more.

I will not be able to answer all your questions today. If I could, heaven wouldn't be that important, relevant, or complicated. But it is. So this morning, I've picked 20 questions to *try* to tackle. The challenge of the day is, will we get through them all? Would you like to get through them all? Let's see if we can.

Are you ready to do some learning today?

Okay. That was our question last weekend. This weekend, I'm going to add to your assignment: are you ready to write fast? If so, say again, "I'm ready."

Men, if you think your wife is going to get all this by herself, if you're trusting her to take all the notes today, don't trust her. If you don't have your own copy of the notes, find a blank paper somewhere and get out a pen. She's going to need your help.

Last weekend we learned that God does not want us to be ignorant about death. Read this with me:

1 Thessalonians 4:13 -

Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of me, who have no hope.

Two weeks ago, we learned that it really is possible to know about heaven. Read this with me:

1 Corinthians 2:9-10 –

It is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” – but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.

So, there is no way we can understand heaven without a guide who’s already been there. Only our guide isn’t just a visitor to heaven, He’s the creator of heaven.

The Chronology of Planet Earth:

1. The Garden

2. The Fall

3. The War

4. The Millennium

5. The New Heaven and New Earth

The Garden period was enjoyed by Adam and Eve until they ate of the forbidden fruit and fell. These first parents of ours were appointed by God to rule over the Earth. Instead, they ceded sovereignty of our planet to Satan when they chose to follow his advice and eat the fruit that was forbidden. We live in the “Fall” time, awaiting the reclamation of the world by God’s Son, Jesus.

As we learned during our Future History series on the book of Daniel several months ago, that reclamation will begin with a war that takes place during a period of time in which the Anti-Christ establishes himself as the sole ruler of our world. The technical term for that period is “The Tribulation.”

That war period will last seven years. The conclusion of the 7 years’ war will culminate in a battle called, “Armageddon,” in which the armies of the world will gather in, I believe, the Megiddo Valley, and Christ will return at the height of the conflict to end all war and oppression and establish His rule on the earth. That rule, on this present earth, will last 1,000 years. At which time, Jesus will make a final judgment of Satan, cast him into the lake of fire, complete the final judgment of the world, and bring the New Jerusalem to earth, establishing a New Heaven and New Earth.

If you were here last weekend, that was all review for you. If you weren’t here, I recommend you get a CD to catch up on what you missed, or go to our website and listen via mp3:

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Are you ready to write fast?

The Bible has references to heaven in every one its books. The largest contiguous sections specifically devoted to the subject of heaven are found in Isaiah 65:17-66:24 and Revelation 21:1-22:11

Major Heaven passages:

Isaiah 65:17-66:24 and Revelation 21:1-22:11

Turn in a Bible to Revelation 21, p. 1230.

The Bible concludes its story of the Chronology of Planet Earth with a description of the new earth. The Apostle John, in his old age, was given a vision of heaven and commanded to record it so that we might know these things. These are his memoirs, faithfully written for us.

I'm going to read to you a much larger section of scripture than we normally read, so follow along carefully. Read Rev. 21:1-22:5

The learning begins.

This week I went through approximately 50 questions on heaven and boiled them down to an old game we used to play as kids: ***Twenty Questions***
Remember that game?

That's what we're going to play this morning. 20 Questions.

It's going to work like *Deal or No Deal* without the babes, *Who wants to be a Millionaire* without any lifelines, and *Jeopardy* without the money.

We'll put a question up on the wall. If you're interested in knowing the answer, you'll read the question out loud together, and I'll give you an answer.

Question #1 =

1. What is the New Jerusalem?

The New Jerusalem is the city that is currently in heaven, it may actually BE the temporary heaven we talked about last week. According to Rev. 21:1, at the end of the Millennium, the Lord will relocate it to the New Earth. As we read, it will be nothing short of amazing, opulent, built out of gems, fit for the King of Kings. It

makes sense that if royal cities of old were ornate, this city would surpass them all, because this will be city inhabited by God Himself.

NJ is a city, but there will be country around as well.

Which raises the second question =

2. *How big is the New Jerusalem?*

Rev. 21:15-16 says, *The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length and as wide and high as it was long. Revelation 21:15-16*

12,000 stadia = 1,400 miles.

Since it's as wide and high as it is long, that makes it a cube. Most theologians think it's actually more a pyramid, with the three sides representing the three persons of the Trinity.

At 1400x1400x1400, the city will cover a land mass that would stretch from Canada to Mexico and from the Appalachian Mountains to the border of California.

The ground level will be nearly 2,000,000 square miles, which is ten times as large as France or Germany, forty times the size of England, 15,000 times the size of London, and that's just the ground level.

If the city consists of different levels, and each story is a generous 12 feet high, its highest towers will span 600,000 stories. Billions of people can occupy this city, with a density of several square miles per person.

The 1400 mile figure, might be figurative, in which case, what it's saying is, "this is one massive city, where everyone will be close enough to find community, and have enough space to experience privacy."

Which leads to the next question: Anyone want to know this?

3. *What is the River of Life?*

Rev. 22:1-2 says this river will be as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God, occupied by the Lamb of God (Jesus) flowing down the middle of the great street. New Jerusalem is the center of human life, and water is essential to human life, so there is an abundance of it.

Likely the river has countless tributaries, with places for people to meet and walk. The fact that the water flows from the throne suggests that the city won't be flat, but that the throne will occupy high ground. If you ever want to find God's throne, you just need to follow the river upstream.

The other great feature of the city is the Tree of Life. Anyone want to know about that?

4. *What is the Tree of Life?*

The tree of life stands on each side of the river. And it is like no tree ever. It's been in existence since creation, and bears fruit every month, so it's a source of food, and it's a source of healing. The leaves of the trees are for the healing of the nations.

The tree of life is mentioned 3 times in Genesis, 4 times in Revelation, three times in the final chapter (Rev. 22) alone. According to Rev. 2:7, this tree is currently in the temporary Heaven, which is probably the New Jerusalem.

This is the tree that God intended for our original parents, Adam and Eve to eat from and live forever. All humanity will enjoy its fruit one day and live forever.

Ezekiel 47:12 gives a further description of it:

Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing. Ezekiel 47:12

Some scholars believe that the "tree of life" is a collective reference, so it may refer to many trees, or perhaps to a tree with common roots underground that surfaces all over the city. This may explain how the tree can grow on both sides of the river.

On an unrelated topic, we touched on this briefly last week:

5. *Will we live in time?*

I'll answer that one by giving you some Scriptures and asking what you think: Paul says, ***Ephesians 2:7 God has raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms... in order that in the coming AGES he might show us the incomparable riches of his grace...*** He uses the word, "ages," not "age."

Revelation 22:2 – the tree bears fruit, EVERY MONTH

Gen. 8:22 – “As long as the earth endures, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

Isaiah 66:23 – “From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,” says the Lord.

Do you think they'll be time?

Here's a question you might wonder about:

6. Will there be oceans?

Revelation 21:1 says, *...and there was no longer any sea.*

Two possible answers to this. (1) The oceans represents things that are dark and cold and dangerous and scary.

Steven Lawson writes: *“To the ancient peoples, the sea was frightful and fearsome, an awesome monster, a watery grave. They had no compass to guide them in the open sea. On a cloudy day, their ships were absolutely lost without the stars or the sun to guide them. Their frail ships were at the mercy of the tempestuous ocean's fearsome, angry storms. The loss of human life in the sea was beyond calculation. So the sea represented a vast barrier for the nations, continents, and people groups.”*

When God created the seas, He pronounced them good, but the Curse had a devastating effect on creation. Lawson suggests that there will no longer be any sea because the seas will all become fresh water, so, in that sense, they'll be lakes, and much calmer.

That's one understanding. A second is that what is being referred to is the Dead Sea, which is currently just east of Jerusalem. If Jerusalem becomes a huge city, there won't be room for the scrawny little lake beside it, and besides, it will be made fresh by the river of Life that will flow in and to and around it if it is still there.

Personally, I like the thought of the seas becoming lakes.

Here's one that I alluded to last weekend. Are you interested in this?

7. Will we be angels?

1 Corinthians 6:3 – Do you not know that we will judge angels?

Someday, we won't be angels, we'll be superior to angels. Angels are a separate species from humans. It's not like we're chrysalises right now that will one day become butterflies. In our next life we will be glorified humans with resurrected human

bodies. When Christ rose from the grave, He had a superior body that could walk through walls, but He didn't have wings and He didn't become an angel, and neither will we.

8. Will we be married?

Jesus said, ***At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage, they will be like the angels in heaven. – Matthew 22:30***

So, will there be marriage? Yes, in Rev. 19, we will all be married to the Lamb. We'll be the Bride, He'll be the groom. Marriage on earth is preparation for an intimate relationship with God one day.

We learned from Rev. 6 last week that in the temporary heaven, we still care about brothers and sisters, and we know from the leaves of the trees being for the healing of the nations that there were still be "nations" so our relationships will continue, but we will be close and intimate with many many people.

9. Will we eat and drink?

Consider this: After His resurrection, Jesus ate fish with the fellahs by the lake.

And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom... Luke 22:29-30

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God. – Revelation 2:7

Not only will we eat, our resurrected bodies will have resurrected taste buds. And the ground will be full of rich nutrients and minerals again. So we will eat more flavorful foods with more acute taste buds and more self-restraint.

We will not only eat and drink, we will FEAST! Several of Jesus' parables speak of future banquets, and the wedding supper of the Lamb will be a huge feast.

10. Will we eat meat?

This is a tougher question. Isaiah 25:6 says ***On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of meats and the finest of wines. Isaiah 25:6***

Some suggest that this is describing the Millennium period, not the New Earth. Others believe it's figurative. Others, that we'll eat meat-like substances. I don't know.

What I do know is, Isaiah 11 says, *The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord... Isaiah 11:6-9*

Personally, I'm going to stick my neck out here and say I believe we'll all be vegetarians, but not vegans. Bible scholars believe that the eating of meat didn't begin until after the Flood.

Between now and then, speaking specifically about meat, God says, *All food is clean... Romans 14:20*

The most important question for many of you:

11. Will we drink coffee?

You won't NEED coffee!

But, *1 Timothy 6:17* says God *...richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.*

Does "everything" include coffee? Certainly.

On a different subject:

12. Will we know everything?

When we die, we will see things far more clearly, and we'll know much more than we do now, but we will never know everything. Only God is omniscient.

Pay attention for a minute to this. Paul says *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. 1 Corinthians 13:12*

The first "know" = ginosko

The “fully known” = epiginosko, which actually means, “to know extensively” when applied to humans.

Okay, that’s a dozen answers. Should we continue?
Let me rapid-fire a couple, just to change the pace.

13. Will we sleep?

Yes. Those of you who work hard know that sleep is one of life’s great pleasures.

14. Will we work?

Adam worked the Garden in the original Paradise. Work isn’t a bad thing until you’re doing work you don’t like. Work is a good thing.

Jesus said, *My Father is always at work to this very day... John 5:17*

15. Will we own homes?

John 14, *In my Father’s house are many rooms... I am going to prepare a place for you. John 14:2* Rooms is plural, place is singular. So, as much as we can own anything, we’ll have our own condo in God’s larger estate. Remember, we don’t own anything on earth, we’re only stewards of it all. But in the sense that we own things on earth, we’ll own them in the New Earth as well.

Peter says, *In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade – kept in heaven for you... 1 Peter 1:3*

So what we possess will be permanent.

In your notes we have,

16. Will we own property?

and

17. Will we be equal to everyone else?

For the sake of time, and to hold you in suspense, I’m going to skip over these questions and answer them next week in the context of that message. Next week we’ll talk about How to Prepare for Heaven.

18. Will there be animals?

Animals must be there because the wolf and the lamb will lay down together, and children will play with vipers and not get hurt.

Gary Habermas and J.P. Moreland write, *It wasn’t until the advent of seventeenth-century Enlightenment... That the existence of animal souls was even questioned in*

Western civilization. Throughout the history of the church, the classic understanding of living things has included the doctrine that animals, as well as humans, have souls. – Habermas and Moreland, Exploring the Evidence of Immortality

Right now I'm writing a book on Jonah in preparation for a series will be doing in February. At the very end of the book of Jonah, God tells why He cares about the city of Nineveh. He says, "It's a great city. There are 120,000 there who don't yet know their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well." So apparently, cows matter to God.

19. Will our dreams be fulfilled?

Romans says, *...our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Romans 8:18*

There will be glory revealed in us, like an athlete who has achieved their best, or a scholar, or scientist, or artist who has done their best.

20. Will we ever reach our full potential?

No, only God is fully actualized. As long as we are finite, we will not reach our full potential. And we will always be finite. BUT when heaven begins, we'll be set, or reset, at a level based on some things that are judge important by God, and not necessarily important by our world. Which is why I'm eager to get to next week's message with you.

Turn in your Bibles one more time, to ***Hebrews 11, p. 1191.***

This chapter is classically known as the "hall of faith," because it describes the lives of heroes of the faith, like Noah and Abraham and Moses and Joseph and Jacob.

When you arrive there, look at Hebrews 11:13. *"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on the earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a better country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he had prepared a city for them."*

Friends, there is a better country out there. The Bible says it is "better, by far."

Sometimes, when you're alone and thinking lofty thoughts, you can almost sense it, can't you? Solomon knew this. After reflecting on humanity one day, Solomon wrote in his journal: *He has set eternity in the hearts of men... Ecclesiastes 3:11*

It's a place *like* this place in all the way you love this earth, and a place *unlike* this place in all the ways you long to get away from the earth.

Think of it like an airline ride. Right now, you're booked in economy. Things are a little cramped, the food is usually less than desirable, but most of your needs are taken care of. One day, you'll be bumped to first class, where everything will be upgraded and exceed your expectations.

Let's pray.

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