Heaven, Part 2

Preached April 21, 2024, by Pastor Phil Layton (www.gcb.church)

This morning our message will be on heaven, part 2.

- Our last message from Exodus was on the promises for Canaan as a preview of heaven.
- Ex 23 offers a land with no sickness or enemy; it wasn't fulfilled then but will in the end. Perfect health and peace aren't guaranteed in this life, but they are to believers in the next
- Our next text, Ex 24, is a vision of what looks like heaven in the very presence of God.
- Most of the rest of Exodus is the tabernacle modeled after what Moses saw in heaven.
- I ran out of time for that the last part of the last message, today will be part 2 on heaven.
- It's good to take more time to see and set our mind on things above, not below So turn to Rev 21 again, a good passage to wean us from this world to the next

I'll deep dive Ex 24 and following future weeks but I want to look up at what it points to.

- Today I want to continue what I didn't finish last time: how the NT develops this theme.
- Isaiah has a lot to say about a future perfect land even better than the promised land.¹
- But Rev 21 is where I want to start in part 2 of heaven (Exodus is part 1 & a preview of)

21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth [new=renewed and improved, better than the first], for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Derek Thomas preached on all the 'no mores' and a cellphone went off, 'no more phones!'

Some of you are in pain today. We've all known days of tears, crying and mourning and death.

- But there's a day and place where God will wipe that all away and it will be no more!
- v. 5 says God on His throne will make all things new (renewed).²
- God transforms by renewing our minds

I think Rev 21-22 in particular is intended to renew how we think about the renewed world

As a young person I thought little of heaven, till a young person I knew passed.

- A boy named Jason was the first my age I knew who entered eternity suddenly.
- I've done many funerals for older ones, but it hits different when a guy my age dies (Ty).
- May 12th last year a pastor friend I often met with went to heaven (Paul).
- May 11 a young wife, mom, daughter, and sister of family here went tragically (Grace).
- May 20 is the birthday of my son who died at 3 months old, 13 years ago (baby Mark).³
- Last July, Faith Alterton's sister, a mom of little ones passed into God's presence.
- Last month our founding pastor Dale went to glory (he often spoke of & studied heaven).
- This month Jesse and Shelise Francis are expecting baby Zion to come and go to Jesus.
- As family and friends grieve, as you miss departed loved ones, look up to heaven's love.

 Thinking of the world above is what can keep us going in this one

We need to see what John sees in Revelation after his friends and family passed away.

- John cared for Mary in his home till her death, and saw the other 11 disciples all die.
- Near the end of the 1st century and his life, God gave a comforting vision of the next life.
- If 'we shall always be with the Lord [Paul says] comfort one another with these words. '4
- If you feel alone, Revelation was for someone physically fully alone on an island literally.
 - John sees where his loved ones are, what it's like and sees his loving Lord in heaven.

- He needed and we need this hope of glory
 - **3 Questions:**
- 1. What will heaven be like in time and space?
- 2. Where does scripture give hope for dying infants in heaven?
- 3. How should heaven give us hope and help today?

(#1-2 I was asked Tuesday by those not knowing my sermon topic)

These real-world questions not all Christians are sure on or agree on the future.

- Good believers and songs speak of heaven as outside time and space,
 - o or a state not a place.
- Some imagine it on clouds, disembodied spirits, harps, a never-ending church service?⁵ But Rev 21 is down to earth literally, heaven on a new earth enjoyed by new eternal bodies.
 - Real resurrected physical flesh just like Jesus (Easter message, Rev 20 is resurrection).
 - A spirit doesn't have flesh and bone and can't eat, but the resurrected do, as Jesus taught.
- We'll have eyes, v. 4 says, but not tears, and bodies without pain or possibility of death! Don't think boring experiences in a building, think the most beautiful things of this world.

#1. What will heaven be like in time and space?

22:1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ² through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him [other translations have 'serve' – covers a lot more than singing]. ⁴ They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever... ¹⁴ Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

- That's a real time and space place, as real as the garden of Eden, restored and renewed.
- Adam and Eve weren't allegories, we shouldn't allegorize the start or end of the Bible.
- They walked and talked with the Lord in the cool of the day, and so will the redeemed.
- Fellowship face to face and rivers of delight, water and fruit better than any in this world! We'll serve and work the garden like Gen 2, no sin to reign, saints will reign with Christ Sounds like a garden city or a city with a park in the middle, past hurts healed (no hospital).
 - Sounds like the literal best of both worlds, the best of the first but better in many ways!
- No nakedness or night of darkness, we'll wear robes and always be in light of the Lord. No forbidden tree in the middle, no possibility of trouble in paradise, God is in the middle!
 - His throne is the main attraction down main street, and most of all, the curse is gone!
 - Sinless pleasures of earth and Eden are there but better!

 Don't think in glory it's less real, all spiritual think it's more real for glorified physical bodies

C.S. Lewis in the end of <u>Chronicles of Narnia</u> describes it as 'a deeper country: every rock and flower and blade of grass looked as if it meant more. I can't describe it any better than that: if ever you get there you will know what I mean. [One] summed up what everyone was feeling..."I have come home at last! This is my real country! I belong here. This is the land I have been looking for all my life..." [Another] "The further up and the further in you go, the bigger everything gets..." [the garden was really] a whole world, with its own rivers and woods...still Narnia, and more real and more beautiful..." And then she forgot everything else, because Aslan himself was coming...[He told them they were in the Shadowlands and now] "The dream is ended: this is the morning." And as He spoke...things that

began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them... for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures...had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning chapter 1 of the Great Story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before...'6

This is what's coming in time and space after the 2nd coming of Jesus in the end

- Jesus fulfills what human stories long for, but this is no fantasy novel or fairytale,
 - o this is the reality of the Prince who beat the dragon in chapter 20
 - o and in chapter 21 brings His bride to His castle city.

In <u>The Hobbit</u> book a repentant Thorin says to Bilbo before he dies 'I go now to the halls of waiting to sit beside my fathers, until the world is renewed.'

- That's language like the Lord used in Mt 19:28 where He spoke of the "renewal of all things" (ESV "new world") but before then we wait with forefathers.
- In Rev 6 souls that die are beside others waiting and asking how long till He makes it all right.
- They wait for their renewed resurrected bodies in heaven now before the new heaven and earth.
- Some call it the intermediate state before the eternal state,
 - o or as Jesus said 'Today you will be with me in paradise.'

Rev 2:7 promises before the end 'I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.' So that tree and paradise in Rev 22 is a reality today in glory before glorified bodies in the end

Paul also talked about being caught up to paradise, and absent from the body is present with the Lord.⁸

- When a believer's body goes in the grave his soul goes to Jesus in paradise that day.
- But there's a day Jesus will leave heaven to return and resurrected bodies and souls will reunite.
- In Rev 19 Jesus comes down to earth and in Rev 21 His paradise garden city comes down, too!
- He'll renew the earth and will remove the curse and it sounds to me like it's heaven on earth.
- His kingdom come on earth as in heaven
- But before the end you must trust Him as King, repent of your sin or hell will be your reality Time is short. Rev 22 says from heaven the time is soon, the time is near (v. 6-7, 10, 12, 20)

Some think heaven has no time or is timeless, but Rev 22 v. 2 says there's still months.

- There's 12 kinds of fruit that apparently change over 12 months, it'll always be in season. Isa 66:22-23: 'the new heavens and the new earth Which I make will endure before Me...from new moon to new moon And from sabbath to sabbath...' [another translation 'week to week and month to month'9]. Isa 65 says in the future heaven and earth, there's still years and days (repeated 4x, v. 20-22). ¹⁰
 - Go back to Rev 8 to see if that's just true of a final eternal state or heaven before then.
 - Rev 8:1When the Lamb opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

Heaven has time and ch 9:15 talks about it waiting for an exact hour, day, month and year.

- In ch 11 loud voices in heaven, elders there, use the word *time* to celebrate reward-time.
- Ch 12 commands heaven to rejoice since the time is short.
- Jesus said those in heaven rejoice every time one repents, Lk 15.

In some way saints above are aware of what's happening down here in real time

Look at Rev 6:9: When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne [so this is heaven now in a time before resurrection bodies].

They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" If Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until [time element] the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete... So heaven is a real place of real time and space for souls in glory now and bodies in Rev 21-22.

- But no curse with it, a new quality of time like Eden, more but not less, days without end. Isa 65 "behold, I create new heavens and a new earth…there will no longer be heard…The voice of weeping and the sound of crying. No longer will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days…" (v. 17-20 NASB95).

The prophets give hints and hope that infants we wept for will live again

Which takes me to question #2. Where does scripture give hope for dying infants in heaven?

Isaiah's new heaven and earth text ends with 'They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.' Isa 11 says the exact same word-for-word, but the verse right before says: 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...¹¹ (same words in the 'new heaven and earth' passage in Isa 65).

- Isa 11 says infants and little children will be safe there,
- after v. 4 when the Lord strikes the earth with a rod and slays the wicked by a word.

That's 2nd coming language in scripture, the wicked are slain but infants are safe and young ones in Isaiah 11. Scholars debate if Isa 11 is talking about Rev 21-22 or Rev 20 (or both) but either way it's after the resurrection.

That raises more questions than I can answer but it raises expectations of little ones being raised

Isa 11:6 talks about wolf and lamb and lion lying together in peace, it says 'a little child will lead them.' Isa 40:

'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God...He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart...' Or 'in the fold of his garment...those that are nursing' (HCSB).

Same word carries is used in the womb before birth, 'I will carry and will save' (46:3-4)

- A shepherd doesn't leave behind the dying lamb, will he not gather, carry and save?
- God has a special place for little ones in His arms and heart (even if a little heart stops). Even little sinners need to be saved, our big God's nature is to save, trust His character

Jonah 4:11 is a key verse: God didn't judge Nineveh in part as mercy on their little ones.

- It said He had compassion on 120,000 'who do not know their right hand from their left...' Sovereign grace withheld wrath for ignorant innocents in pagan families, unsaved parents
- Prophet Jeremiah quotes God calling child sacrifice 'the blood of the innocents' (Jer 19:4-5).
 - Not sinless, but a special category to be spared.
- God calls them 'my children' when they're sacrificed to pagan gods (Ezek 16:21).
- That's biblical language for those God saves and makes His family by adopting grace.
- Idol-worshipping dads killed babies for false gods, the true God says they're 'my children.'
- Kids don't face judgment for parent's sin, souls perish for their personal sin (Ezek 18:20).

 On the flip side, none are saved by a believing parent, baptism, etc.

I don't see in scripture an accountability age, we're sinners in the womb (Ps 58:3, 51:5).

- David knew that and wrote of God's special grace to the unborn (139:13-16, 22:10).
- His baby boy died and David said 'I shall go to him, but he will not return to me. Then David comforted his wife...' (2 Sam 12).
- He heard his infant died, David rose and went to the house of God and worshipped.
- His comfort was in knowing he would go to be with his son, and this is for our hope. 14

In inspired scripture this is recorded by a man who knew and wrote about resurrection (Ps 16).

- David wrote as much or more than any in the Bible on heaven and hell after this life.
- Contrast after his grown wicked son died, David had no comfort when Absalom died.
 - o But he knew he'd see his infant son again.
 - 2 Sam 12:23 isn't about just going to the grave, it's hope beyond the grave for a dying babe

Eccl. 6:3-5 says about a sinful man 'a stillborn child is better of than he...finds rest rather than he...' Job ch 3: 'Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb?...I would be lying down in peace...and at rest ...like an infant who never saw the light of day? There the wicked cease...and the weary are at rest. Captives also enjoy their ease...The small and the great are there, and the slave is freed from his master' (v. 11-19 NIV).

Solomon and Job speak of dying infants going to a better place than the wicked, enjoying rest, ease, peace, free. This same Job knew his Redeemer lived and after death he'd rise in the flesh to see him on the earth (19:25-27).

Job ch 3 said in the place where the wicked cease, great men and small ones rest in peace

That's all OT but the NT gospel of Romans helps see how sinful little ones can be saved.

- Rom 1 says God's wrath is on men who know the truth but suppress it in willful rebellion
- It lists out sins that infants and toddlers don't commit as what makes men without excuse.
- Rom 2 says judgment falls on judgmental stubbornly unrepentant rejecters of kindness.
- Rom 3 says none are righteous or good, not one, all are accountable (doesn't give an age)
- It says we all sin but can be justified as a gift by grace through Christ's redemptive work.
- Rom 5 says part of sin's curse is all die, in a cursed world even babies in the womb die. Babies aren't godly, they're helpless but 'while we were still helpless... Christ died for the ungodly. '16

- Rom 5:8, He dies for the 'still powerless' NIV

God can and does save those with no ability to do anything for their salvation

11:6 '...chosen by grace. Now if it is by grace, then it is not by works; otherwise grace ceases to be grace... '17 NKJV 'the election of grace.' Grace by definition is undeserved and freely given not by what we do.

- Sovereign grace is how we or any are saved, God gives life to those incapable without it.
- By grace alone God unilaterally regenerated us who were lifeless, helpless, powerless.

In the 1600s many died in infancy, so they had to address this in Reformed confessions: 'Elect infants dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit...So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word' (WCF 10.3, also in 2LBCF of 1689 and Philadelphia Baptist Confession of 1742).

200+ years later Spurgeon knew no Reformed Christian doubting all infant death is under grace¹⁸ I think that's right for those mentally like infants, and it's right to see all dying infants as elect.

- I read 10.3 at a memorial here for Victoria, a teen whose brain never developed.
- We need sound theology with sensitivity, not sentimental wishes, but a scriptural word.
- The Reformed truth of sovereign grace is solid hope
 - o vs. Arminian theology that makes regeneration a free will choice.

Charles Hodge: 'All who die in infancy are doubtless saved, but they are saved by grace' 19

And by Jesus' blood. Rev 5:9: And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language... Stop there: we know of tribes and language groups that died out before adults heard the gospel.

- But Christ's blood saves from every tribe if their dying babies are part of His redeemed.
- It brings God praise from now extinct languages and those too young to learn language.
- I expect to see little people there of every people group that perished without the gospel.

Praise like Ps 8: From the mouths of...nursing babies you have ordained praise...that you might put an end to the enemy (NET).

How majestic will His name be in all the new earth when the last enemy of death is overcome! Jesus said it's from infants that He's prepared praise in a special way (Mt 21). 2 chapters earlier 'Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 19:14).

- Luke says they brought babies, Mark adds Jesus blessed them and took them in His arms.
- Jesus was indignant when His disciples wanted to keep people's toddlers at arms length.
- His arms gather the lambs and holds them near and dear to His heart and blesses them.
- He's close to and carries gently the nursing babes and comforts His people who grieve.
- In heaven's kingdom, babes aren't forbidden to come, and adults need childlike faith.
 - o Being an infant is no hindrance.

Spurgeon: 'I believe that the Lord Jesus, who said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven," doth daily and constantly receive into his loving arms those tender ones [who die]...to heaven.'20

And His arms are open to you to come as a child lowly humbly crying out in faith to Him

- 3. How should heaven give us hope and help today? First, for loved ones now with the Lord.
 - We use the phrase 'lost loved ones,' but in Christ we've only lost *contact* temporarily!
 - We say he/she 'passed away,' but in the Lord they actually 'pass into His presence.'

Rev 7:15 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. ¹⁶ They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes

Isaac Watts: His own soft hand shall wipe the tears From every weeping eye, And pains, and groans, and griefs, and fears, And death itself, shall die.²¹

There's also the hope of the new earth and our new bodies. John Street told me last weekend he felt so good getting a new kidney and can only imagine how good our final new bodies will be!

An old classmate Chris Anderson wrote: Creation groans beneath the curse—Rebellion's just reward.

We long to see the fall reversed And Eden's joys restored...

We joy to fix our gaze on Christ, Though now our view is dim.

We long for heaven's grandest prize: To see and be like Him!

Come quickly, Lord! Make all things new! Redeem the church, Your bride.

With longing eyes we look for You, For home is at Your side!²²

It's fitting as we long for the final new creation that we live as new creations now. 2 Cor 5:17: 'if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.'

- In heaven a river of living water flows, Jesus said rivers of living water flow in believers (Jn 7:38).
- He spoke of His Spirit, and we're to always bear the fruit of the Spirit like fruit is always in the kingdom
- Heaven is healing for nations, but on earth we can bring healing by how we speak.

Prov 12:18 *There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.* 15:4 *A gentle* [or soothing] *tongue is a tree of life ...*

2 Pet 3: what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ...as you look forward to the day...we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace...

A spoken word poem by an artist named Braille: 'We live and do ministry in the era of the old heaven and the old earth

All our efforts and our relationships are plagued, constrained and cursed ... creation [is] the bondage of corruption, waiting for reconstruction

Affecting everyone and everything and everywhere we go ... reminded of the fall, we feel the tug and the pull

From the pain in our joints to the fingers that point, to...disappoint...

Constant conflict, weak and sick, discouraged and distressed, the fog is so thick ...

Nation against nation ... hurricanes strike and earthquakes rumble, towers tumble ...

but the old will pass away, sin won't have the last say, God has spoke His rebuttal

These sufferings and trials could never compare to the glory being prepared

For all the redeemed whom Christ has made heirs!

If you are in Christ, your best life isn't ... now, The best moments of this life are but a glimpse, we are homeward bound! This world is not our home, what awaits beyond the gates?

An oasis! The best moments of this life are only but a taste.

He is making all things new ... He has eradicated the sea Eliminated the wicked and triumphed over His enemies Delivered us to our destiny so we can be who we were destined to be:

Children of God in the presence of our Father, The Lamb will be our shepherd and guide us to springs of living water Never discontent, every need is met, The blessings never cease, total joy, total peace

In regards to our future, we need not be frightened, If we are in Christ we will be right beside Him...

O how we long to be with the One to whom we belong

When the faith will be sight and the tears will be wiped, the infection of sin has been healed by His stripes

And we feel His embrace, gaze face to face, with the Lord who is raised

and join with the saints and the angels singing His praise for days upon days \dots^{23}

 $\underline{\underline{\underline{https://lifeatthelaytons.blogspot.com/2011/09/wednesday.html}} \ (this\ 2nd\ one\ was\ reflections\ I\ wrote\ after\ our\ time\ at\ the\ graveside).}$

¹ Isaiah 65-66, 11-12, 25, 35, 60-62, etc.

² For scriptural reasons why I think it will be the old renewed vs. a brand-new re-creation out of nothing, see my study notes on this at https://media-cloud.sermonaudio.com/text/716151450334.pdf

³ If you don't know the story, he was our first adopted son and I posted this tribute to him back when I buried him in that little casket: https://lifeatthelaytons.blogspot.com/2011/08/dads-memorial-of-son-he-never-knew.html

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:17-18 NKJV, NASB95.

⁵ For more on this, I recommend Randy Alcorn's book *Heaven* and Michael Vlach's academic work *The New Creation Model* (which he contrasts helpfully with what he calls the "Spiritual Vision Model" (heaven without time or space physically, mostly spiritualized). ⁶ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*.

⁷ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 300.

⁸ Compare Luke 23:43 to Corinthians 12:3, 5:8.

⁹ NLT.

¹⁰ Even if Isaiah is speaking of the first stage of the kingdom to come after the resurrection (Revelation 20 instead of Revelation 21-22) it's clear after the resurrection there will still be a measurement of days and years starting with the 1,000 year reign.

¹¹ NIV84.

¹² Isaiah 40:1, 11 NIV84.

¹³ Compare Isaiah 7:16 about a time before a boy knows enough to choose good and refuse evil, and Deuteronomy 1:35 and 1:39 (the sinful men of Israel are judged but not the younger ones "who have no knowledge of good and evil" and are spared the punishment.

¹⁴ Romans 15:4. This paragraph is indebted to https://thecripplegate.com/what-happens-to-infants-who-die-the-ot-answers/

¹⁵ Romans 5:12-14.

¹⁶ NASB95.

¹⁷ HCSB.

¹⁸ "Among the gross falsehoods which have been uttered against the Calvinists proper, is the wicked calumny that we hold the damnation of little infants. A baser lie was never uttered. There may have existed somewhere, in some corner of the earth, a miscreant who would dare to say that there were infants in hell, but I have never met with him, nor have I met with a man who ever saw such a person. We say, with regard to infants, Scripture saith but little, and, therefore, where Scripture is confessedly scant, it is for no man to determine dogmatically. But I think I speak for the entire body, or certainly with exceedingly few exceptions, and those unknown to me, when I say, we hold that all infants are elect of God and are therefore saved..." (Spurgeon, "Misrepresentations of Calvinism" as cited by https://thecripplegate.com/theologians-on-infant-salvation/)

¹⁹ Systematic Theology, 2:11.

²⁰ Charles Spurgeon, "Misrepresentations of Calvinism Cleared Away." LINK?

²¹ The Psalms and Hymns of Isaac Watts.

²² Chris Anderson, "Come Quickly Lord!" (www.churchworksmedia.com).

²³ Spoken Word by Braille of Beautiful Eulogy music group (Humble Beast records).