

**Heaven Series 5 : New Heavens & New Earth**

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Introduction

When I was a teenager I grew up in a seaside town called Redcar – it has a racecourse and that's about it. It also had an independent cinema on the sea front which was a small, fairly grotty affair, and, because it was an independent, got its films several months after the big screens. In this unpretentious little local cinema, was one of my favourite adverts ever. In a very homemade cheap way, this advert would run with a big fanfare, a spinning globe would appear, and an important sounding voice would ask one of life's biggest questions: "Where in the world are you going?" We'd wait with bated breath, 'good question' I'd think, 'where in the world am I going? What is the purpose of life?'

- And then would come the instructions from on-high "to Redcar Glazing Company... just 50 yards from this cinema!"
- I have to say, that answer was a little disappointing! But I've always admired it for setting Redcar Glazing as the pinnacle of our aspirations
- There are several other options that voiceover could have suggested for 'where in the world are you going?'
  - Our bible lays out the picture and understanding of the future of our world, of how the cosmic battle in this universe will ultimately be resolved – in Jesus' favour, by the power of the cross.
  - The bible also lays out the ultimate future for this very world and our human existence – detailed the most in the book of Revelation.

Series recap

This sermon series on all-things-heaven is vitally important to our own understanding of God's world and his purposes in creation and beyond. Most Christians don't know or understand much of what the bible actually teaches on the afterlife – we're addressing that! The result is a renewal of hope in our lives and hearts. And it should also be really significant in other people's lives – as you and I grasp the wonder and the purpose of life in partnership with God, and the hope and healing that is ours beyond our physical death on earth – then we should also be spurred to tell as many other people as will listen all about the hope to which we hold.

- So far we've grappled with some major topics
  - What happens when I die?
    - That those who believe in Jesus at death will go into his presence, in what He called 'paradise' which is heaven, but not our ultimate destination – which is a new earth and heaven joined.
    - We also spoke about hell, and the clear mentions in the New Testament of a state excluded from God's presence.
  - We remembered together that there is no need for any of us to fear death
    - We looked at some of Jesus' teaching, about his return and a final judgement
    - Hew 9:27 says "...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement."
    - we began to think about how we can live in the light of it – sowing now to the eternal nature and eternal rewards in heaven – based on the price we're willing to pay now to follow Jesus

'Where in the world are you going' should be a question that you can answer. The writer to the Hebrews calls this topic 'elementary and foundational teaching'  
Hebrews 6:1-2

<sup>1</sup>Therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again **the foundation** of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, <sup>2</sup>instruction about baptisms, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

- These issues are elementary - The basics, the foundations of the Christian faith
  - the power of repentance, baptism, the anointing that comes from laying on hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement.
- So let's not shy away, let's get to grips with these basics – because they should fundamentally affect the way we live and the hope we have, both in life and death, and beyond.

### This week

I only have a short time today, so I'm not going to give you much detail. We're talking about the consummation of history, the future: the new heavens and new earth, and a restored relationship of God and all His creation.

– we'll look more at the 'how' (the power & effect of the cross of Christ) and the implications of what I lay out in future sermons.

The main text is Rev 21. There are several other references dotted throughout scripture pointing to this key event<sup>1</sup>, Isaiah 65 & 66, Hebrews 12, 2 Peter 3, Ephesians 1, and Revelation draws heavily on other scriptural references. Did you know that? There are 405 verses in the book of Revelation. It alludes to (echoes, hints – rather than straight quotes) the Old Testament 676 times!

I find that very reassuring. Many people struggle with the book of Revelation, and its never going to be easy to understand, because it is apocalyptic literature. But at the same time it's not a vision of some bloke on drugs on a Greek island! It's full of references to the bible and to the prevailing world view and spiritual situations in the first century AD, as well as being relevant to us now. It's far too involved, clear and complicated for it to have been pulled out of a hat.

Revelation 21 says this: one day, the old order of things will be ended and God will re-new all things. He'll restore all things, redeem all things.

### Headlines

Here are the headlines so far:

- One day, the Trinity is going to 'call time' on the present course of history, the turning of the earth, the set-up of the universe, which was all created by and through the Trinity in the first place.
- We don't know the 'when' or all the 'hows' – the bible suggests turmoil on earth and cosmic battles are part of it.
  - Jesus warned us not to try and predict the exact timing – none of our business
  - But He said to live like it could be this afternoon.
    - So bare that in mind! But also remember that our sense of urgency is not necessarily the same as God's sense of urgency – he's the Lord of space and time
  - But until that time, the kingdom of God is available in the present, in this world, in your life and mine, breaking in to bring the good things of heaven to earth in the now!
  - the kingdom is above, and beyond, and ever so close.
- SO - One day, the Trinity is going to 'call time'

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 65:17, 66:22

<sup>2</sup> Peter – echoing Isaiah, speaks of waiting for new heavens & new earth in which justice will dwell. 2 Peter 3:10-13 – helpfully backs up the Revelation of John

Eph 1:15-23 – one of the grandest statements on the theme

Eph 1:10 means – God's design is to sum everything up in Christ.

The idea in substance is also found in Isaiah 51:16; Matthew 19:28 ("the renewal of all things" – Jesus); 2 Corinthians 5:17; Hebrews 12:26-28 (glorious picture of the city to come, at present in heaven but destined for earth)

- Jesus – the human representation in the Trinity - will return to earth. In glory. Every human and all creation will recognise Him for who and what He really is, and every knee will bow to the King of all creation
- The living and the dead humans will be gathered from where they were – on earth, in paradise and in hell, and all resurrected – into some form of physical bodies, just like Jesus is depicted in Revelation with a physical body.
- There will be a final, totally just judgement.
  - Revelation uses the picture of a ‘book of life’ – those humans who believed in and followed Jesus will be counted as righteous – in right standing – and will be welcomed to a new existence in the presence of God. The extent of their inheritance will depend on their actions in service and love of God and others on earth
  - Others who rejected God on earth – in faith and in action – will have that choice of rejection confirmed for eternity, and suffer the same fate as hell, the devil and evil – which is eternal separation from God, away from all things good and love.
- A number of people in KC have asked me if there is a second-chance for people, after their death, if they apparently weren’t followers of Jesus before they died.
  - The bible does not give much information about this – and so neither can I
  - The bible says that the Trinity is merciful, and that God does not desire that any human ends up in hell, which is designed for Satan and his demons.
  - And I know that Jesus will judge each of as justly – so if there was a change of heart somewhere down the line, that will be picked up.
  - But I would say that we should live with a sense of urgency – not just for ourselves, but for the sake of others too.
- So through this final, totally just judgement, the Trinity deals with the problem of evil and idolatry (putting yourself, or things, ahead of God.)
- The blockages are dealt with, removed, defeated and judged – the end of evil, the end of death, the end of rebellion
- Because of this, the author of life, the King of Creation, the Alpha and Omega – is ready to bring creation – by which I mean ‘life, the universe and everything’ – to bring it back to its original intention.
  - God created everything good. God is the source of all love. The Trinity intended humans and creation to live in harmony and community with itself – without blockages
  - This is what the new heavens and the new earth is all about.

Reading: Rev 21:1-11, 22-27; 22:1-6

<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup>I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

<sup>5</sup>He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

<sup>6</sup>He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. <sup>7</sup>He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. <sup>8</sup>But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulphur. This is the second death."

<sup>9</sup>One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." <sup>10</sup>And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. <sup>11</sup>It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

<sup>22</sup>I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

<sup>23</sup>The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. <sup>24</sup>The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. <sup>25</sup>On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup>The glory and honour of the nations will be brought into it. <sup>27</sup>Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

<sup>22:1</sup>Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup>No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. <sup>4</sup>They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup>There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. <sup>6</sup>The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

### Unpack

Isn't that a beautiful picture, something to look forward to? God will restore and renew his good creation, and there will be no more blockages – nature will be perfected, evil and its effects will be non-existent, and "the dwelling of God is with men" (v3)

The picture is of restored relationship – God and humankind at last united without hindrance. God's good creation is restored and improved. The people of God live in community (the image used is a holy city) and all nations are healed by ever-present access to the source of life, the Trinity.

The earth (human's realm) and the heavens (God's realm) are now joined somehow. The dwelling place of God will also be the dwelling place of humanity, in a resurrected universe (Rev 21:1-3). Heaven and the New Earth will essentially be the same place.

- It's not so much that God gives up his dwelling place, kind of down-grades heaven.
  - Perhaps the subtlety is that heaven is both/and – "Glorified believers... will continue to be in heaven while they are inhabiting the new earth"<sup>2</sup>
  - Heaven and earth are joined now – both made new in some mysterious way

### All part of the plan

All this is part of God's plan for his creation, which includes you and me. His plan is to redeem what is imperfect now, to restore what is tainted, to renew what once was created good. Basically, to make everything even better!

God is outside of time, what happens in the ticking of a clock here doesn't limit God. Since the creation of the world, He has a plan for its salvation.

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<sup>2</sup> Anthony A Hoekema, Heaven: Not just an Eternal Day Off, in Christianity Today (June 6, 2003). Quoted in Heaven, Randy Alcorn, Tynedale House Publishers: Carol Stream, Illinois, 2004, p.45

- The bible paints it, from Genesis 3, through the Covenant, the people of God, the coming of Jesus, his death and resurrection, the new covenant people of the church... all the way to the end of the earth.
- A plan to save humanity, to rectify evil, to stop suffering, to save failed harvests and earthquakes, to restore relationship and over it all, to lavish love.
- The Trinity is in control and is active to bring it all back together, and make it *even better*.
  - “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Eph 1:10)

I can't answer all of the 'how' questions! All I have time to do today is to leave that picture and promise hanging in our minds. But I do want to debunk 2 potential areas of wrong, unbiblical thinking.

### Not annihilation but restoration

#### FIRST

I've said this a lot, but it's important to repeat it. Our eternal destiny and destination as Christians is not to float on clouds in some kind of spirit form, like incense in a temple. The plan is that we will once again exist on earth, in bodies of some form. The bodies will be holy - in a perfected glorified state – and the earth will be renewed and joined in some way to the heavens – the realm of God. But the basics are that your eternal destiny is not 'up in heaven', without a body, plucking a harp. It's on earth, reigning over the earth on Jesus' behalf, in community, in the glorious presence of God!

#### SECONDLY

This plan is not a mistake. God has not made an error, which he is going to scrub-out, delete, and then start again. New Heavens and a New Earth is not Plan B. It's still Plan A. It's 'Plan A Plus' with all the trimmings.

When we hear that Heaven and Earth are going to 'pass away' (Rev 21:1) or from 2 Peter 3:10 that “The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” – it might be tempting to imagine that this is God pulling the plug. Giving up and starting again.

- Actually, God isn't pulling the plug on earth – he's redeeming it. Giving it a fantastic face-lift. Restoring it to the glory of God, and improving it in the process.
- Salvation has always been on God's agenda.
- “Christ died not merely to make the best of a bad situation. He died so that mankind, Earth, and the universe itself would be renewed to forever proclaim his glory.” (Alcorn p88)

We need to watch out for the idea in us that God has messed up the universe and is going to destroy it all and start again. He isn't, he's going to restore it back to its former glory, and add some more glory! It's 'Plan A Plus'.

This isn't a perfect example, but imagine it's a PC computer. When the operating system crashes, as mine does from time to time, what God is doing here is not picking up the whole computer and flinging it in the dustbin lorry to be crushed

- It's a new operating system, a shiny new casing, new cables – but still essentially the same computer
- I'd like to be able to say it's like replacing Windows XP with new improved Windows Vista – only, that's where the example falls flat!
- Its like all those washing powder adverts – NEW IMPROVED DAZ, same product but even better
- SO – another example – who has ever watched 'Pimp my Ride'?

- TV programme – take an old banger and do it up into a spectacular looking vehicle



In a funny kind of way, the new heavens and new earth is a bit like ‘Pimp my Ride’!

Biblical vocab throughout OT & NT:

- Reconcile, redeem
- Restore, recover
- Return, renew
- Regenerate, resurrect

‘re’ means to go back to the original state – the perfect state. Jesus calls it “the renewal of all things” (Matt 19:28)

Creation – life, the universe and everything.

The church glorified and beautiful as a bride – experiencing love in its finest form

The sweep of salvation, the plan of God since the beginning, has been to pull a fallen world back from its path towards decay and to recreate it, back to its original perfect intention. Even better than before. Plan A Plus.

In many ways, our lives as Christians are a microcosm of this reality. My life has been turned around since I’ve followed Jesus wholeheartedly. It’s been restored, renewed, redeemed, I’ve know reconciliation – with God and others... and so on.

- No doubt that’s your experience too.
- And we’re called to be agents of the kingdom of God on earth now. Bringing in the same path to restoration, redemption, recovery, reconciliation.....
  - To other people, and to the world around us
- Furthering the intention of God – which in every circumstance is to put the ‘re’ into the situation!
- Because that is love in action

How should we live in response?

As I said, there’s a whole lot more to say on this topic. Like – if the earth matters to God, He’s not going to destroy it but renew it – shouldn’t we be out there fighting for the ecological future of His planet too, not letting it go to ruin?

For today – just concentrate on the future hope set before us.

- History is not a mistake, or an accident. The culmination of earth’s history is coming – His name is Jesus, and you’ve met him! If you haven’t, you can today.

- The promise of God is – if you hold on, if you persevere and overcome in this life by faithfully following God the Trinity – you will inherit a future far beyond all we can imagine or comprehend.
- Where all things are made new, where ‘the dwelling of God is with men’, where there are no more tears, no more pain, no more empty longing, the frustrating old order in which we live now is renewed into a glorious worshiping community with God at its head.

Today you should stand on the hope of Jesus. He said this:

- “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.” (John 5:24)

Let’s live in the hope of things to come.

- Let that expand your horizons, and increase your expectation.

And let’s live and pray in the expectation of seeing the kingdom come in the now, on earth as it is in heaven.

- Above and beyond and ever so close
- So ask yourself What am I doing to make all things ‘RE’?
  - Are we living within God’s mission to this world?
  - To restore, renew, recover, resurrect, return, redeem, reconcile
- Because hope should push us on to attempt all these things, in the power of the spirit

If you don’t feel that’s your experience today – respond to God in this time now and tell Him. And ask what He would have you do.